



Project  
**MUSE**<sup>®</sup>

*Today's Research. Tomorrow's Inspiration.*

Andrew D. Devenney



## “A Unique and Unparalleled Surrender of Sovereignty”: Early Opposition to European Integration in Ireland, 1961–72

Ireland’s economic situation in the 1950s had grown dire at the very moment when much of Western Europe was experiencing remarkable economic growth. Suffering from an unstable agricultural economy, high emigration, declining wages, and high unemployment, the Irish state’s protectionist economic policy and its unequal economic relationship with neighboring Great Britain left the Republic without the flexibility necessary to fix its economic deficiencies.<sup>1</sup>

In response, the Fianna Fáil party, under the leadership of Seán Lemass and, later, Jack Lynch—the dominant political force in Ireland at the time, though one that had been out of office twice during the 1950s—boldly connected Ireland’s national interests with those of the European Economic Community (EEC). They argued that Ireland’s economic fortunes could no longer remain static behind a tariff wall while the rest of Europe moved toward further integration. Such a path, Lemass warned in 1962, would leave Ireland “a beggar amongst the nations, seeking to maintain a dying economy on the crumbs of charity from our wealthier neighbors.”<sup>2</sup> Instead, aligning with the EEC and embracing liberalization would allow Ireland to rebuild its economy and control its own economic destiny. This was a stunning reversal of nearly thirty years of protectionist economic policy, made more remarkable in that it was Lemass who had crafted the earlier policy in the first place. To allay concerns over EEC membership’s impact on Ireland’s political sovereignty, Lemass and Lynch skillfully connected Ireland’s future political independence with a nar-

1. Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland* (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 2004), pp. 465–66. For more information on Irish emigration in the twentieth century, see: Enda Delaney, *Irish Emigration Since 1921* (Dublin: Economic and Social History Society of Ireland, 2002); Mary E. Daly, *The Slow Failure: Population Decline and Independent Ireland, 1922–1973* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

2. Fianna Fáil, “Ireland in the New Europe: The Case for Irish Membership of the European Economic Community,” no date [presumably late 1962], University College Dublin Archives Department (UCDAD), Fianna Fáil Papers (FF), P176/945.

rative of economic prosperity under the aegis of Europe—a shift in interpretation that in effect redefined the goals of Irish nationalism.<sup>3</sup> Their reappraisal of the principles of Irish economic autonomy bluntly acknowledged that the “unfettered control of Irish destinies” inherent in the Irish Constitution was largely a false sovereignty for a republic hobbled with a weak and declining economy.<sup>4</sup> With a few notable exceptions, the Irish political establishment and the Irish public accepted Fianna Fáil’s arguments and overwhelmingly supported Irish membership in the EEC.

Coexisting alongside the mainstream Irish debate over membership in the EEC was an argument that relied more heavily on overt appeals to cultural nationalism and a more “pure,” and ultimately inflexible, understanding of sovereignty. Coalescing around the guidance, inspiration, and eventual leadership of a cadre of eccentric academics and leftist members of Sinn Féin, this early opposition to Irish membership in the EEC occupied a marginalized public space where, unconstrained by the burden of mass appeal, the primacy of sovereignty overwhelmed all rhetorics. It was from this eclectic collection of individuals, which included the maritime historian and socialist John de Courcy Ireland and the radical academic Anthony Coughlan, that the contemporary Irish opposition to European integration developed. One can see this in the several connections between the original Common Market Defence Campaign (CMDC) that unsuccessfully fought the 1972 Irish Referendum on EEC membership and the Irish Sovereignty Movement and the National Platform (both fronted by Coughlan himself) that, three decades later, helped to defeat the first Nice Referendum in 2001.<sup>5</sup>

This early Irish opposition to European integration was, and remains, a marginal force within Irish politics, but there has been little attention paid as to why this is the case. In examining the period prior to membership (1961–72) when the debate was most prominent in Irish political life, there are several key questions that appear. How and in what manner did this early opposition develop? What social and political forms did it take? How important were academic intellectuals in framing the opposition argument? What was its relationship to

3. On the question of Lemass redefining Irish nationalism, see John Horgan, *Seán Lemass: The Enigmatic Patriot* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1997), pp. 213–16. For a wider examination, see also Brian Girvin, *From Union to Union: Nationalism, Democracy, and Religion in Ireland—Act of Union to EU* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2002), pp. 201–07.

4. For an interpretation of the phrase “economic autonomy” as it relates to the concept of sovereignty, see Robert Jackson, “Sovereignty in World Politics: A Glance at the Conceptual and Historical Landscape,” *Political Studies*, 47,3 (1999), 432.

5. For more information regarding the failed Nice Referendum in 2001 and the subsequently successful re-vote in 2002, see Katy Howard, “‘If at first you don’t succeed . . .’: The Second Referendum on the Treaty of Nice, 2002,” *Irish Political Studies*, 18, 1 (2003), 120–32.

the Irish political system and other marginal political factions? Finally, why did early opponents fail to galvanize the Irish public against the EEC?

---

It is helpful to understand what it was that Irish opponents of European integration were offering during the debate. Where pro-Europeans described Ireland's European future in laudatory and forward-thinking terms, promising full employment, economic growth, and unheralded prosperity, anti-Europeans articulated a traditionalist argument that forewarned of economic dislocation, loss of political freedom and sovereignty, and the repudiation of Ireland's heritage—all for what Joseph Lee has pithily described as a “mess of common agricultural potage [and] the flesh pots of Brussels.”<sup>6</sup> In essence, opponents were selling a narrative of Ireland and its future that the Irish public simply was not buying. Microcausal factors—for instance, a lack of money or institutional support—only compounded this problem.

Irish historians recently have given more attention to Ireland's growing engagement with the process of European integration.<sup>7</sup> Often, this scholarship has explored the issue primarily as a national-elite driven affair, wherein the internal logic of intergovernmental and diplomatic relations, national political party gyrations, and the debate between national government leaders and the civil service dominated. Such a focus has produced several excellent and important works in the areas of Irish national politics and foreign policy.<sup>8</sup> But there have been only a few attempts to explore the issue beyond the mandarins, so to speak, and to historicize those groups, campaigners, and actors that did not participate in the dominant national-elite frameworks. Notable exceptions include the past work of Miriam Hederman O'Brien and Dermot Keogh, which have

6. Joseph Lee, *Ireland, 1912–1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 463.

7. For an early appraisal, see Denis J. Maher, *The Tortuous Path: The Course of Ireland's Entry into the EEC, 1948–73* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1986). For recent scholarship on Ireland's immediate postwar moves toward further connections with Europe, see *Ireland and the Marshall Plan*, ed. Mary Browne, Til Geiger, and Michael Kennedy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).

8. See: Dermot Keogh, “The Diplomacy of ‘Dignified Calm’—An Analysis of Ireland's application for membership of the EEC 1961–1963,” *Journal of European Integration History*, 3, 1 (1997), 81–101; *A Vital National Interest: Ireland in Europe, 1973–1998*, ed. Jim Dooge and Ruth Barrington (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1999); Maurice Fitzgerald, *Protectionism to Liberalisation: Ireland and the EEC, 1957–1966* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); *From Independence to Internationalism: Irish Foreign Policy, 1919–66*, ed. Michael Kennedy and Joseph Morrison Skelly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000); *Europe: The Irish Experience*, ed. Rory O'Donnell (Dublin: Institute of European Affairs, 2000); and Maurice Fitzgerald, “The ‘Mainstreaming’ of Irish Foreign Policy,” in *The Lemass Era: Politics and Society in the Ireland of Seán Lemass*, ed. Brian Girvin and Gary Murphy (Dublin: UCD Press, 2005), pp. 82–98.

attempted to engage these non-elite perspectives with studies that explored, among other concerns, media attitudes, business perspectives, and the activities of anti-EEC campaigners.<sup>9</sup> Recent scholarship by Gary Murphy analyzing government involvement with economic interest groups—such as the National Farmers Association, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), and industrial groupings like the Federated Union of Employers or the Federation of Irish Manufacturers—over the EEC issue has gone some distance toward redressing this imbalance, with an approach that explores both policy formation and policy change over time, but also the economic and political ideologies that underpinned the efforts.<sup>10</sup>

One major difficulty in examining early opposition to European integration is its disparate and unorganized character. Before 1969, early EEC opponents had no focused point of origin or titular body to organize, proselytize, and maximize their message. Instead, most efforts were individual in nature. This deficiency weakened their effectiveness in distributing their ideas and arguments in the face of a concerted government effort to promote Ireland's membership potential. Opponents of the EEC never mounted effective organizational or pressure group campaigning; their cases were stated in the uneasy, lukewarm reservations expressed by members of the Labour Party, and in the piecemeal campaigns waged in the Irish media by individuals like the television presenter and historian David Thornley, the industrialist and former chairman of Bord na Móna Aodogan O'Rahilly, and John de Courcy Ireland. As such, one cannot describe the early opposition to European integration in Ireland as a social movement using the criteria established by the Italian sociologist Mario Diani, which focuses on the mechanisms of conflicted collective action, dense informal networks, and collective identity.<sup>11</sup> For the most part, these early opponents arose out of other social movements and organizations—namely, socialist, republican, and labor bodies—and were united, not by any kind of shared social identity, but by their common political opinions on the EEC. While one could suggest that the CMDC was an attempt to craft a social movement against

9. See: Miriam Hederman O'Brien, *The Road to Europe: Irish Attitudes 1948–61* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1983); Dermot Keogh, *Ireland and Europe 1919–1989* (Cork and Dublin: Hibernian University Press, 1989).

10. Gary Murphy, *Economic Realignment and the Politics of EEC Entry: Ireland, 1948–1972* (Dublin: Maunsel and Company, 2003).

11. See: Mario Diani, "Analysing Social Movement Networks," in *Studying Collective Action*, ed. Mario Diani and Ron Eyerman (London: Sage Publications, 1992), pp. 107–35; Mario Diani, "Networks and Social Movements: A Research Programme," in *Social Movements and Networks: Regional Approaches to Collective Action*, ed. Mario Diani and Doug McAdam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 299–318; and Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2006), pp. 20–29.

the EEC—and this is highly tenable—any potential for this movement to take hold came to nothing.

The lack of cohesion among those opposed to Irish membership in the EEC bemused some pro-EEC politicians at the time. Fine Gael TD and former taoiseach Garret FitzGerald reminisced in a 1970 Dáil debate on Irish membership that

One of our difficulties in 1961 and, to a lesser extent, in 1967 was the absence of any adequate statement of the case against. . . . It is not easy to make a case for something unless there are people putting up counter-arguments. . . . In 1961 and 1962, in discussing this issue in public myself, I recall the difficulty of getting people to controvert with. In fact, I remember the first time I heard Deputy [David] Thornley was when he spoke against the Common Market in Trinity College. I was so delighted to find somebody to controvert with that I persuaded the Irish Times and RTE to lay on controversies between the pair of us on the subject to get some kind of discussion going.<sup>12</sup>

In many ways, as the former Labour Party chairman Brendan Halligan has argued, this reflected the high levels of ambivalence the Irish public held toward the EEC issue and Europe in general during the 1960s.<sup>13</sup> It also suggested that the generally broad support for EEC membership exhibited by both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael occupied a considerable hold on the public debate, giving the opposition arguments less political space within which to gain traction or public support. FitzGerald has subsequently argued that this monopolization of the public sphere debate by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael—and later, during the 1972 referendum campaign when Labour, the ICTU, and both Official and Provisional Sinn Féin filled the anti-position—led to specific anti-EEC pressure groups like the CMDC being squeezed for space in the debate, which in turn led at least partly to their marginalization. According to FitzGerald, “Once you had a Labour and Sinn Féin person against and Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael in favor, you had a balanced ticket, which you wouldn’t have had more recently, you see. So there wasn’t as much room for [the CMDC], but [it] played a role of some kind, I suppose.”<sup>14</sup>

That the combined total vote percentages for both parties during Dáil elections hovered between 70 and 80 percent clearly demonstrated the parties’ dominant hold on political discourse. The numbers of the first Irish Gallup poll

12. *Dáil Debates*, 25 June 1970, vol. 247, col. 1948.

13. Brendan Halligan, “What Difference Did It Make?—Setting the Scene,” in O’Donnell, *Europe*, p. 19.

14. Garret FitzGerald, interview with author, Rathmines, Dublin, Ireland, 20 June 2005. Original recordings of this and other interviews cited in this article are in the possession of the author. One can then also easily surmise that the other main reason for their marginalization, as far as FitzGerald is concerned, was that their arguments were ultimately wrong.

on the EEC in July, 1961, which indicated that more than 75 percent of those polled approved of Irish membership in the EEC (with only 7 percent opposed and 17 percent undecided) also showed that the political environment was not conducive for opponents of integration with Europe.<sup>15</sup> Anthony Coughlan, one of the founders of the CMDC, evidently has accepted this notion. After arguing that opponents of integration won more people over on a personal level at public debates and engagements, Coughlan observed, “But when it came to the crunch . . . my own judgment is that the people said this is an issue on which the two big parties who have dominated Irish politics for three/two generations—the Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael—agree, and if they agree, then all the squabbling and fighting . . . then [the EEC] must be okay.”<sup>16</sup>

This is not to suggest that opposition efforts before 1969 were a study in futility. In fact, such efforts did have an internal coherence to them that ultimately had an important influence on the EEC debate in Ireland. It was their work—along with others, such as the archaeologist and historian Liam de Paor and the scientist and Marxist intellectual Roy Johnston—that laid the foundations for a more sustained and organized anti-EEC response in the future. In many ways, their activism arose out of longstanding, but fringe, socialist and republican political traditions that viewed the EEC as a “narrow ‘rich man’s club’ of the six countries of the EEC, constructed and dominated by the monopolies and cartels of West European capitalism.”<sup>17</sup> Democracy, sovereignty, and political liberty proved to be the dominant strands of thought within this active but limited dissent. Concerns for social justice and equality between the rich and poor of the world also found expression in the rhetoric of these early dissenters. In early 1962, David Thornley charged that the EEC implied

the creation of an enclave of prosperity in a world largely dominated by poverty. If this was our answer to the Afro-Asian countries, we could [scarcely] be surprised if they turned to Communism. . . . Ireland was being carried into the Common Market on the Swiftian principle of fleas upon fleas.<sup>18</sup>

Early anti-EEC arguments also reflected the conflicted responses to Ireland’s rapid modernization in the 1960s. Opponents of European integration provided dissenting voices in the ongoing debate over modernization and its disruptive effects on traditional Ireland.<sup>19</sup> The work of one particular anti-EEC intellectu-

15. Horgan, p. 199.

16. Anthony Coughlan, interview with author, Dublin, 20 July 2005.

17. Letter from Dublin Wolfe Tone Society, 1 December 1967. UCDDAD, de Courcy Ireland Papers (JdCI), P29/C/7d.

18. *Irish Times*, 1 February 1962.

19. One should note that this does not mean these early EEC opponents were traditionalists; in fact, they generally viewed the changes in Ireland as positive. On the economic transformation of Ireland

al, John de Courcy Ireland, makes this emphasis particularly clear. De Courcy Ireland was by no means the main driving force of early anti-EEC argument; there was no driving force before 1969. But, in his eloquence and productivity, he was an important voice of the early Irish opposition to EEC membership. Considered as a case study, his thinking helps to illuminate this period of disparate and individualistic expressions of Irish resistance to European integration.

---

A maritime historian, linguist, and teacher, John de Courcy Ireland's eclectic interests were partly a reflection of an early life spent abroad experiencing the world. Born in 1911 in India, where his father served as a major in the British army, de Courcy Ireland also spent part of his youth living in Ireland, Italy, and attending Marlborough College in England.<sup>20</sup> After a fight with his Dutch stepfather (his biological father died in 1914), at age seventeen he ran away to sea on a Dutch cargo ship, where the poverty he encountered on his journeys affected him greatly. He eventually returned to England to study at New College, Oxford, before settling back in Ireland in 1939. With an abiding interest in the sea, de Courcy Ireland joined the Maritime Institute in 1943 and graduated from Trinity College Dublin in 1951 with a Ph.D. in Irish maritime history.<sup>21</sup> Politically, de Courcy Ireland was a socialist, Irish nationalist, and peace activist; he was active at various times throughout his early life in the Communist Party, the British Labour Party, and the Irish Labour Party. He was also a founding member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in Ireland.<sup>22</sup> During the 1960s, de Courcy Ireland turned his attention to the issue of Irish participation in European integration, which he believed was a dangerous development.

Historical knowledge was an important component of de Courcy Ireland's opposition to Ireland's EEC membership. He spent the 1960s attempting to ground the wider integration process in a populist historical context. Specifically, he sought to draw historical parallels between the EEC and other attempts at political and economic domination of Europe, most notably Nazi Germany, to buttress the more contemporary, economic arguments against EEC membership. He argued that the EEC represented a political tradition wholly at odds with the European revolutionary tradition with which he believed Ireland had more affinity—namely, a tradition of the common people for the common

in the 1960s and its effects upon Irish society and culture, see Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922–2002* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), pp. 229–311.

20. *Daily Telegraph*, "John de Courcy Ireland," 2 May 2006.

21. "John de Courcy Ireland," *Modern Irish Lives: Dictionary of 20th-century Irish Biography*, ed. Louis McRedmond (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1996), p. 74.

22. *Irish Times*, 7 April 2006.

good. In October, 1961, de Courcy Ireland dismissed the idea of the EEC as “the natural outcome for Europe.” He branded it an economic system that was “dominated by the German mark and German monopolies [where] power will inevitably be concentrated in the hands of an executive bureaucracy as the general representatives meet so seldom, and over the decisions of this small group of people there is no final control.”<sup>23</sup> In part, he was expressing concern over the types of economic control inherent in EEC membership, but also concern over the democratic character of the EEC itself.

De Courcy Ireland believed that the EEC was the next attempt at a German-dominated European empire. In early 1962, he questioned whether the EEC’s political goals were the domination of Europe “with or without the consent of those dwelling between the Oder and the Urals.”<sup>24</sup> He pushed this exclusivity argument further in late 1962, arguing, in somewhat inflated language:

The fact is that economic reality has caught up with Seán Lemass, as political reality will one day also do, albeit with halfling feet. The Market is just an association of European big business, designed . . . to keep the rich countries—or anyhow their bosses—in affluence at the expense of the unemployed, illiterate, diseased, underfed, conscripted, bamboozled emigrant—millions even in Europe, outside of, hundreds of millions [*sic*].<sup>25</sup>

Such a characterization was wholly at odds with the benevolent and positive descriptions pushed by the Irish government and its pro-EEC allies. It reflected both the socialist and nationalist strains in de Courcy Ireland’s thinking, a combination evident in leftist and republican circles during this period.

In the late 1960s, de Courcy Ireland returned to his emphasis on Ireland’s European heritage. He expanded upon it in a lecture delivered to the Dublin Wolfe Tone Society in December, 1967, and in a subsequent pamphlet published by Vanguard Publications in 1970.<sup>26</sup> Titled *Ireland’s European Tradition: The Historical Case Against the Common Market*, de Courcy Ireland explicitly labeled the EEC as a dangerous political idea, stating that

Ireland has a European, indeed an international tradition; but this tradition has nothing in common with the nightmare vision of Irish participation in a new

23 *Irish Times*, 11 October 1961.

24 *Irish Times*, 23 January 1962.

25 John de Courcy Ireland, “The Common Market: An Assessment,” draft article, UCDDAD, JdCI, P29/A/129b. There is some indication that this article was published at some point in the Irish media, but the author has not been able to verify that conclusively.

26 The Dublin Wolfe Tone Society was an autonomous “think-tank” associated with the republican movement, a linkage that becomes more obvious when one notes that Derry Kelleher, a member of Sinn Féin’s *Ard Chomhairle* and later vice-president, established Vanguard Publications in December, 1970.

version of Hitler's Festung (Fortress) Europa, a Little Europe directed by 15 all-powerful bureaucrats at Brussels.<sup>27</sup>

He linked Ireland's own republican traditions with Europe's revolutionary heritage and placed both firmly in opposition to what he described as "the arrogant, exclusive Common Market of the Jean Reys and Sicco Mansholts, of Fiat and Siemens-Schuckert, Unilever and the Société Générale."<sup>28</sup> To locate an Irish historical legacy within the European revolutionary tradition, he described the importance of Irish participation in the American and French Revolutions, the United Irishmen radicalism of the 1790s, and the international revolutionary turmoil of the nineteenth century, as well as the events of the 1916 Easter Rebellion and beyond.

Ireland's colonial experiences also colored de Courcy Ireland's thinking on EEC membership. The desire to reawaken Ireland's European revolutionary heritage was necessary because the colonial dominance of Britain had suppressed Irish awareness of that heritage. In his view, the EEC appeared another domineering, colonial entity seeking to replace Britain as Ireland's political and economic master; Ireland, he argued, needed to reject the EEC's capitalist club and to rejoin the populist struggle for social justice and equality throughout the world. This was a struggle that in part placed Ireland's potential EEC future in direct opposition with that of its United Nations efforts in support of Third World decolonialism. The 1970 pamphlet insisted that "Ireland's destiny must be to associate in a common struggle for peace and social progress with the underdeveloped countries of the world, Boumediène's Algeria, Castro's Cuba, Kaunda's Zambia, Kenyatta's Kenya, and with all nations not tied to the bankers of Wall Street and Zurich, London and Bonn."<sup>29</sup> It was with its fellow postcolonial peoples, he believed—united in a push for social justice, democracy, and equality—that Ireland's true prosperity and influence would reside.

Thus, his populist rhetoric, while of a distinctly nationalist bent, offered a positive counter-approach to Ireland's relationship with Europe and the world. De Courcy Ireland, despite some intemperate language, was no demagogue; his motivation for attacking the EEC was the conviction that there was a better European heritage to choose, a heritage built upon a union in diversity and not beholden to an exclusive capitalist club.<sup>30</sup> To de Courcy Ireland, diversity was a strength of European society that was explicitly under threat from Common

27. *Irish Independent*, 3 December 1967.

28. John de Courcy Ireland, *Ireland's European Traditions: The Historical Case Against the Common Market* (Dublin: Vanguard Publications, 1970), p. 43.

29. de Courcy Ireland, *Ireland's European Traditions*, p. 41.

30. One may note the irony that this notion expressed as the dictum "United in Diversity" is the present-day motto of the European Union, as enshrined in its aborted constitution.

Market exclusivity. Influenced by the idea that process-driven political and cultural unification was an unnatural act of violence, de Courcy Ireland argued that to force unity artificially would destroy the very goal the integrationists were seeking, by smothering Europe beneath layers of capitalist bureaucracy that would drive out all cultural uniqueness.<sup>31</sup> In a 1965 speech, he asserted that

Unity . . . can only grow, and not be forced, but it will only grow if we protect its natural tendency to do so; this we can only do, each European nation and each European individual of us, by developing our own best diverse but inevitably European qualities. The moment we accept standardization we assassinate Europe.<sup>32</sup>

To de Courcy Ireland, the path to “a great European community inheriting a splendid and diverse civilization” was not through the agency of the EEC, but through expanded civic education, open democracy, and cooperative economic relations that celebrated the differences as well as the commonalities.<sup>33</sup>

De Courcy Ireland differed from other Irish opponents of the EEC in the absence of an overt anti-British rhetoric in his arguments. Instead, he framed his overall opposition in a socialist, anti-capitalist lens, taking great pains to emphasize his opposition to British business interests and not to the British people. In the 1970 pamphlet, he discussed several examples of Irishmen supporting British workers or Royal Navy sailors against the “tyrannical rule” that yoked both Britain and Ireland.<sup>34</sup> As he also wrote in an undated manuscript on the topic of Ireland and Europe

that the best in the Irish political tradition is *not* anti-English, only opposed to the economic exploitation of Irish people by a minority of ruthless English landlords and business tycoons. The best of the English tradition is as European as our own.<sup>35</sup>

Even in his thoughts on Irish civic education, he argued for a movement away from virulent anti-British rhetoric in favor of an emphasis on Ireland’s positive historic connections to Europe. According to de Courcy Ireland,

31. The idea that forced unification was an act of violence came from a study that de Courcy Ireland specifically referenced in his address: Louis Gueuning, *Europe de la Synthèse* (Charleroi, Belgium: Institut de Documentation et d’Éducation Nationales, 1963).

32. John de Courcy Ireland, “Civic Education: From the National to the European,” Address to the Ninth Conference of the Campaign for European Civic Education (Malahide, 15–18 November 1965), UCDDAD, JdCI, P29/B/61a.

33. De Courcy Ireland, “Civic Education.”

34. De Courcy Ireland, *Ireland’s European Traditions*, pp. 17–18.

35. De Courcy Ireland, “Ireland and Europe,” [no date], UCDDAD, JdCI, P29/D/23.

Our young people need history and social science lessons that say less about the many centuries of struggle against Britain (though we cannot neglect it as it is so much the reason why we are what we are), and much more about what Irish men and women have done for Europe, and Europe for them.<sup>36</sup>

Anti-British rhetoric was a staple, in fact almost a foundational, part of the early Irish anti-EEC argument; yet one of its most outspoken, longterm proponents categorically rejected such rhetoric. In some ways, this reflects how the anti-EEC argument developed beyond its early origins as Ireland moved ever closer to 1972. But it also reflects how political events—specifically, the renewed violence in the Northern Ireland—shifted the tenor of debate among Irish anti-EEC activists throughout the 1960s and early 1970s.

---

Other circumstances in the late 1960s altered the political dynamic of the EEC debate, and stimulated the development of more organized extra-party factions. With the resignation of President Charles de Gaulle in April, 1969, French intransigence toward the British application muted, and with it the unofficial blocks on Irish membership as well.<sup>37</sup> After roughly a year, during which both the EEC and the four applicant countries of the United Kingdom, Ireland, Denmark, and Norway put their positions in order, negotiations began at the end of June, 1970. With this increased activity, both pro- and anti-EEC proponents also began to prepare for the coming struggle. For proponents, the preparations were relatively easy. The chief organization promoting European integration in Ireland was the Irish Council of the European Movement (ICEM), which had been re-established after a period of inactivity in 1959.<sup>38</sup> With members and

36. De Courcy Ireland, "Civic Education," UCDDAD, JdCI, P29/B/61a.

37. For recent scholarship on Britain's difficult relationship with the EEC, see: *Harold Wilson and European Integration: Britain's Second Application to Join the EEC*, ed. Oliver J. Daddow (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003); *Britain, the Commonwealth, and Europe: the Commonwealth and Britain's Applications to Join the European Communities*, ed. Alex May (New York: Palgrave, 2001); James Ellison, *Threatening Europe: Britain and the Creation of the European Community, 1955–1958* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Alan Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy 1945–1963: The UK and the European Community*, vol. 1 (London: Whitehall History Publications, 2002); N. Piers Ludlow, *Dealing with Britain: The Six and the First UK Membership Application* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and John W. Young, *Britain and European Unity, 1945–1999* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000). For an analysis of the obstructionist role of de Gaulle in the 1960s, see N. Piers Ludlow, *The European Community and the Crises of the 1960s: Negotiating the Gaullist Challenge* (London: Routledge, 2006).

38. A brief but more detailed account of the activities of the ICEM before 1973 can be found in Miriam Hederman O'Brien, "The Role of the European Movement in Referenda," in Dooge and Barrington, *Vital National Interest*, pp. 3–17. On its activities before 1961, see Hederman O'Brien, *Road to Europe*, pp. 103–11.

patrons drawn from the elite of Irish political society, and well-funded by business interests in Ireland and Britain, the ICEM worked in the 1960s to buttress the Irish Government's arguments in favor of EEC membership. They organized seminars, published pamphlets, and sponsored fact-finding trips to the Continent for members of Irish industry, government, and the media. In addition, they sponsored reciprocal junkets for continental journalists and EEC officials to come to Ireland to witness the country's vital European heritage and burgeoning economic development. Therefore, it was well prepared, and even eager, for the imminent debate. Its opposite number was much less prepared.

The first organization devoted specifically to campaigning against EEC membership was the Common Market Study Group. It made its first appearance in mid 1970 when it published a pamphlet titled *The Common Market: Why Ireland Should Not Join*.<sup>39</sup> This was a defiant and trenchant piece of work by Anthony Coughlan, a young lecturer in Social Administration and Policy at Trinity College Dublin. Coughlan was a protégé of C. Desmond Greaves in the Connolly Association; a Labour Party member when he was at university in the 1950s; and the leading theorist in the Dublin Wolfe Tone Society.<sup>40</sup> Along with his good friend, the radical economist and economic historian Raymond Crotty, Coughlan was a driving figure behind the establishment of the Study Group. Despite limited resources, over the next year, the Study Group produced a number of pamphlets critically engaging the EEC issue, including a thorough and detailed study in early 1971 analyzing the effects of EEC membership on Irish agriculture by Crotty.<sup>41</sup> However, as the completion of accession negotiations grew more likely in 1971, the need for a more proactive organization became obvious to opponents.

39. Anthony Coughlan, *The Common Market: Why Ireland Should Not Join* (Dublin: Common Market Study Group, 1970). The first edition came out in June, 1970, with a subsequent revised edition in October, 1970, and a further reprint edition in June, 1971.

40. C. Desmond Greaves was a Marxist historian and editor of the *Irish Democrat* newspaper, the main organ of the Connolly Association. The Connolly Association, founded in 1938, was dedicated to the promotion of the teachings of James Connolly and the anti-imperialist struggle for Irish freedom, as well as decolonialism around the world. Although nominally a nonpolitical party group, most members were either communists or socialists of various shades and supported labor causes in Britain and Ireland. It was later active in agitating against Partition and for supporting the civil rights strategy of republicans in Northern Ireland in the 1960s and 1970s. Anthony Coughlan has claimed that the *Irish Democrat* "was probably the first or one of the first organs of opinion in Britain to oppose the Common Market from the beginning. I remember Greaves saying sometimes around 1961 this is going to dominate the rest of our lifetimes and yours." Coughlan interview.

41. Raymond Crotty, *Irish Agriculture and the Common Market: the Consequences and the Alternatives* (Dublin: Common Market Study Group, 1971).

42. Amusingly enough, Coughlan has described this as "a rather silly name, in retrospect." Coughlan interview.

This more pro-active body was the Common Market Defence Campaign, which emerged in May, 1971.<sup>42</sup> Coughlan, Crotty, and Michael O’Loingsigh, a Drogheda printer and businessman, circulated an appeal for patrons to more than a hundred Irish citizens prominent in cultural, political, and business life. Their letter claimed that “large and growing sections of Irish public opinion are very much worried about the threat which full Common Market membership poses to such independence and sovereignty that Ireland has,” and that this increasing consternation was desperate for “a more active campaign on the Common Market than has hitherto taken place in Ireland.”<sup>43</sup> Acknowledging their organizational model as the Common Market Safeguards Campaign in Britain, the authors attached a provisional constitution for the CMDC. Prominent among the constitution’s objectives were the need to increase public awareness of the EEC issue in Ireland and the need to “defend the sovereignty of the Irish State in relation to the Common Market and to maintain the permanent and indefeasible right of the Irish people, through their elected representatives in parliament, to be the final arbiters of whatever laws are passed for the State.”<sup>44</sup> After receiving a positive response from more than sixty Irish public figures—among them the academics de Courcy Ireland and Liam de Paor; the journalist and author Desmond Fennell; Con Lehane, a former member of the short-lived socialist republican party Clann na Poblachta; Tom Barry, the most famous guerilla leader of the Irish War of Independence; and the socialist republican and activist Peadar O’Donnell—the CMDC was formally launched in early July, 1971, with a press conference in Jury’s Hotel in Dublin.<sup>45</sup>

Although some viewed both groups as one, the two organizations had different tasks. The Study Group’s purpose was ostensibly informational—to serve as a provider of comprehensive analyses of the implications of Ireland’s potential EEC membership—but also one of advocacy. It served as the intellectual clearinghouse for the anti-EEC campaign. The Study Group provided a forum to develop anti-EEC arguments beyond the immediate needs of campaign advocacy, and sought to apply a rigorous, academic approach to the issue. In contrast, the CMDC aspired to be a campaign organization that served as “a coordinating agency for activity on the Common Market throughout the country, with a full-time staff, producing a regular information bulletin and other documentation on the EEC and Ireland, holding occasional public meetings

43. Letter from Common Market Study Group, 20 May 1971, UCDDAD, JdCI, P29/C/11(3).

44. Letter from Common Market Study Group., UCDDAD, JdCI, P29/C/11(4).

45. Letter from Common Market Defense Campaign, 1 July 1971, UCDDAD, JdCI, P29/C/11(5). On the legacy of Tom Barry and his personal account of the Anglo-Irish War, see Tom Barry, *Guerilla Days in Ireland* (1949; Boulder: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1995).

46. Letter from Common Market Study Group, 20 May 1971, UCDDAD, JdCI, P29/C/11(3).

and lobbying the Government and public representatives in pursuit of the objectives listed in the attached [constitution].<sup>46</sup> There was considerable overlap in the rather limited membership for both groups; Coughlan and Crotty served as joint secretaries for the CMDC, and O’Loingsigh as chairman. Given the broad, diverse—if in actual numbers, shallow—base of support that the CMDC entertained, including many active in the labour, socialist, and republican movements, one could expect that diversity to translate into its rhetoric. Surprisingly, this was not the case. Nominally the Study Group adopted the customary think-tank position of assigning the opinions of its pamphlets to the individual authors, and not to the organization itself. However, Coughlan and Crotty essentially *were* the Study Group, which meant the messages coming from the campaign were consistent. As its credo, which appeared across everything from letterhead to solicitation materials to the Study Group pamphlets, suggest, one can reduce the varied strains of CMDC rhetoric to four main areas: democracy, sovereignty, employment, and neutrality.

Among these four concerns, it was sovereignty that underpinned all other arguments—even those issues related purely to economics. The CMDC insisted that the EEC issue was essentially a political one that had economic consequences.<sup>47</sup> Coughlan, in his revised pamphlet from 1970, spent considerable time rebutting charges by pro-EEC advocates that opponents were “out-of-date nationalists, ignorantly and vainly trying to uphold antiquated conceptions of national independence in a world dominated by political giants.”<sup>48</sup> Rather, Coughlan argued that it was the pro-EEC advocates who had little to no faith that Ireland could stand on its own as an independent nation in the modern world. He accused them of expropriating internationalist rhetoric to gloss over the fundamentally undemocratic nature of the EEC.

The supranationalism of the Common Market is the very opposite of genuine internationalism. It demands the suppression of the national sovereignty and independence of small States in the interest of the big ones, rather than guarantees and extends national independence. Imperialist and colonialist States have always known how to use an internationalist rhetoric, stuffed with high-sounding sentiments, to justify their domination of others; and the collective imperialism of the big powers who have formed the Common Market is essentially no different. The supranationalism of the Common Market is in reality the political ideology of multi-national Big Business which today finds the national State restrictive on its expansion.<sup>49</sup>

47. E. T. Nevin and Bishop James Moynagh, *The Common Market: Yes or No* (Dublin: Common Market Study Group, 1972), p. 2.

48. Coughlan, *Common Market*, p. 2.

49. Coughlan, *Common Market*, p. 3.

As far as Coughlan and the CMDC were concerned, this was the crux of the debate. They believed merging with the EEC meant being bamboozled into a fundamentally undemocratic, capitalist-dominated superstate, where Ireland lost its ability to make its own economic and political decisions. It was a “unique and unparalleled surrender of sovereignty,” comparable to the 1800 Act of Union with Britain, which Ireland should not be forced to make in the name of economic prosperity.<sup>50</sup>

The CMDC’s nationalist rhetoric represented a strikingly different conception of Irish independence and sovereignty from that which pro-EEC advocates in Ireland offered. Opponents characterized the CMDC and its arguments as “isolationist” or “insular”; a correspondent in the *Irish Times* charged them with employing a type of “reactionary particularism [using] emotional clichés . . . to whip up anti-EEC fervour.”<sup>51</sup> Labour’s Brendan Halligan later described the CMDC as an organization “more comfortable with old certainties” and fixated on “nostalgia for the old.”<sup>52</sup> Such characterizations were, in some respects, political distortions of what the CMDC and other anti-EEC advocates were trying to achieve. The CMDC’s brand of sovereignty entailed a definite and distinct vision of what Ireland was (a postcolonial state still dependent upon Britain); of what its past colonial legacy was (repression and poverty); and of what it needed to do in order to increase prosperity for all (break from neocolonial capitalism as represented by Britain and the EEC). Socialist and republican ideals and beliefs played crucial parts in the CMDC’s thinking and membership; their understandings were rooted in the revolutionary republican tradition that had fought and died for Irish independence. On the one hand, this was a vision driven predominantly by a leftist critique of Irish society that sought fundamental change to its socioeconomic structures, for instance, by removing the domination of big business and unscrupulous English industrialists and landlords. On the other hand, it was also a traditionalist vision, seeking to resist whatever innovations did not come from the Irish people themselves.

A mild strain of cultural intolerance or chauvinism against the interference of other Europeans in Irish affairs further accentuated this traditionalist, leftist nationalism. This stance was partially the product of years of insularity and British domination, and therefore a core part of Irish political discourse. It also reflected the fact that a few among the CMDC’s personnel and membership had ties to revolutionary republican circles; some had come of age in a political environment thick with charges of treason against the pro-Treaty Irish. Fears about non-nationals, specifically the Germans and the French, having unlimited access

50 Draft letter, dated July 1970, UCDDAD, JdCI, P29/C/11(1).

51. *Irish Times*, 4 May 1972.

52. Halligan, “What Difference,” pp. 28–29.

to Irish land purchases; fears of increased migrants from non-Catholic countries; and a general belief that support for the EEC in Ireland was driven by what Tom Barry came close to describing as “foreign traitors” permeated the CMDC’s rhetoric.<sup>53</sup> Comparisons of the EEC with Hitler’s Europe were nothing new; John de Courcy Ireland often made the connection. However, the tone and tenor of CMDC were even more stringent, with further correlations between the European project and Hitler’s Europe and a greater sense of indignation at particularly German control of Ireland. Coughlan wrote in 1970 that

Ironically, it is Bismarck’s successors in West Germany today who are the most ardent advocates of European integration. Having failed militarily to conquer Europe in two bloody World Wars, the Germans are now trying to become its economic masters. They seek to achieve their expansionist ambitions, including a hold on nuclear weapons, through the supranational institutions of the Common market and the political and military union which they hope to see develop on the basis of the E.E.C.<sup>54</sup>

Such a claim was not contentious for some, but others in Ireland found the excessive rhetoric—a reason against supporting the CMDC.

Ties to revolutionary Irish republicanism ultimately proved highly controversial for the CMDC. Because the EEC debate was taking place against the backdrop of renewed violence in Northern Ireland, some people expressed concerns about how close the CMDC coordinated with various republican groups, and whether or not this lent credibility and acceptance to Sinn Féin “methods” in the North.<sup>55</sup> The CMDC’s leadership—most notably Anthony Coughlan himself—appeared to have had longstanding personal connections with Irish radical republicanism. Although Coughlan has repeatedly denied that he was ever a member of Sinn Féin or the IRA, Coughlan’s activist career was intimately connected with the republican movement’s leftward shift toward social repub-

53. Quoted in Barry Desmond, *Finally and In Conclusion: a Political Memoir* (Dublin: New Island, 2000), p. 77.

54. Coughlan, *Common Market*, p. 9. Concerns for the survival of Irish national identity in a German-dominated European project were nothing new for Coughlan, as he had argued for several years previously that cultural distinctiveness “could not long survive the loss of a nation’s political and economic independence.” *Irish Times*, 22 June 1967.

55. For a notable expression of this sentiment, see Desmond, *Political Memoir*, pp. 75–76.

56. According to Coughlan in 2005, “I was never a member of that party [Sinn Féin] or any other party, but as a student in UCC [University College Cork] way back in 1953–1956 I was in Labour for two or three years, then I went to England after leaving UCC and dropped out and never joined a party again. I was never a member of any party.” Coughlan interview. On the new IRA leadership’s attempts to move the republican movement away from its military-revolutionary purpose toward being a socioeconomic political movement that attempted to infiltrate other social pressure groups in Irish society, see: Henry Paterson, *The Politics of Illusion: A Political History of the IRA* (London:

licanism under the leadership of Sinn Féin president Tomas Mac Giolla, IRA chief of staff Cathal Goulding, and Roy Johnston.<sup>56</sup> Serving as the assistant secretary of the Dublin Wolfe Tone Society (the republican movement's main think-tank), as well as the editor of its bulletin *Tuairisc*, Coughlan had a close working relationship with Johnston.<sup>57</sup> With him, Coughlan organized the society's campaign against the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement in 1965, participated in the society's agitation against the EEC in the late 1960s, and aided in the foundation of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) in Belfast in 1967.<sup>58</sup> Although much of this is purely circumstantial, and Coughlan's and the CMDC's connection with radical republicanism have never been conclusively proven, at least some sections of the Irish government viewed certain anti-EEC campaigners like Coughlan as appendages of the republican movement, so much so that they had him under surveillance in 1974 by Army Intelligence.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, it was these connections (or perhaps their perception) that helped to stimulate a common cause-type relationship between the CMDC and Sinn Féin as the organizations conducted their anti-EEC campaigns in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Regardless of the reality behind direct links with Sinn Féin and the IRA, there is no question that some people in Irish politics in the early 1970s believed there to be a connection. This belief almost certainly hindered the CMDC's efforts to sway the Irish public toward the No side in the 1972 EEC Referendum.<sup>60</sup>

Serif, 1997); Brian Feeney, *Sinn Féin: A Hundred Turbulent Years* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2002), pp. 211–32; Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA* (London: Allan Lane, 2002), pp. 54–59; and Bob Purdie, *Politics in the Street: The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1990), pp. 123–31.

57. Coughlan has acknowledged this in a November, 1988, interview with *IRIS Magazine*, a Republican Movement publication, excerpts of which can be found at <http://www.etext.org/Politics/INAC/coughlin.interview>. Purdie also notes that Coughlan and Johnston were the “intellectual leaders of the Wolfe Tone Societies,” Purdie, p. 123.

58. Roy Johnston has noted Coughlan's role in the Society's Anglo-Irish Trade Agreement campaign, remarking that an “economic committee, spearheaded by Tony Coughlan, brought out some memoranda on the proposed Anglo Irish Free Trade Agreement.” Roy Johnston, “Roy Johnston's Apologia,” *Hibernia*, 31 March 1972. On Coughlan and the Dublin Wolfe Tone Society's role in the creation of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), see Purdie, pp. 130–31. On the Society's agitation against the EEC, see its statements against Irish EEC membership reported on in the *Irish Times*, 7 April 1967. See also the pamphlet *The Case Against the Common Market—Why Ireland should not Join*, published by the Society under the authorship of Coughlan in his capacity as secretary of the economic sub-committee, a report on which can be found in the *Irish Times*, 21 June 1967.

59. Deaglán de Bréadún, “Army Intelligence Monitored Anti-EEC Campaigners,” *Irish Times*, 3 January 2005.

60. For a detailed examination of the 1972 EEC Referendum, see Keogh, *Ireland and Europe*, pp. 236–56.

Anthony Coughlan has admitted as much, noting in hindsight that the republican factions brought with them an association of violence and intimidation that threatened to tar the CMDC's anti-EEC campaign. For instance, in discussing the impact of the Provisionals' bombing of the Belfast Co-operative Society on the eve of the 1972 Referendum vote, Coughlan has said, "There was a lot of votes down the drain . . . these supporters were losing votes in retrospect, as you might say."<sup>61</sup>

---

The growth and development of Irish opposition to EEC membership in the late 1960s and early 1970s was a gradual, halting process. This was largely because of the overwhelming influence the positive consensus opinion on Irish EEC membership had in marginalizing expressions of discontent with European integration. In the early 1960s, what anti-EEC arguments there were usually came from individuals who were prominent nonconformists, such as John de Courcy Ireland or the maverick TD Noël Browne, and not from the development of organized pressure groups. It was only later, when the EEC issue became a more widely discussed matter in Ireland toward the end of the decade, that attempts were made to organize against membership in the EEC. But even organizations like the CMDC were not so much expressions of mass political campaigning or of a social movement as they were individual byproduct of the forceful, energetic personalities of the founders, Anthony Coughlan and Raymond Crotty. Along with limited resources, these deficiencies helped to continue the marginal impact on Irish political life of those against Irish membership in the EEC. The 1972 EEC Referendum offered EEC opponents an opportunity to put their message before the whole country in a manner unavailable previously, but resulted in defeat and repudiation all the same.

Ultimately, the ideology and arguments of anti-EEC campaigners proved the key to this defeat. Crafted by an eclectic group of academics, intellectuals, and radicals, the anti-EEC argument often emphasized the negative consequences of EEC membership for Ireland, promising dire economic costs and railing against the seeming repudiation of Ireland's nationalist heritage and political sovereignty. But such appeals, which had more resonance in the idyllic Ireland of de Valéra, lost their emotive power in what Brian Girvin and Gary Murphy call the "Lemass Era." Opponents of European integration never grasped that fact, and soon found themselves swept aside as Ireland embraced Europe once again.

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

andrew.devenney@wmich.edu

61. Coughlan interview.