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‘We are trying to do our share’: the Construction of Positive Neutrality and Irish Post-War Relief to Europe

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores aspects of Ireland’s post-war relief programme, both governmental and non-governmental, including the provision of post-war relief to Germany. Irish relief efforts to Europe during and after the Second World War should inform the wider debates about the nature of Irish neutrality and Ireland’s relationship with the post-war world, but they are overlooked in the major analyses on Ireland and ‘the Emergency’. The provision of relief on the basis of need led to the diagnosis that Germany deserved relief just as the other war-torn countries did. This paper argues that many factors intertwined in the instigation and sustenance of the relief programme to Europe. The Irish post-war aid project was and remains ~~unprecedented, in terms of the scale and the level of national engagement, in the history of Irish humanitarianism.~~ It is paradoxical that it is not remembered.

INTRODUCTION

> To the people of all the nations which have been directly involved in the war our thoughts go out in sympathy on their deliverance from the daily terrors in which they lived, and in sorrow that they must still endure the inevitable suffering of the aftermath.
>
> Éamon de Valera, 16 May 1945

Irish relief efforts to Europe during and after World War II are overlooked. This is anomalous, as such efforts should inform the wider debates about the nature of

*This paper is based on a presentation to the conference of the International Affairs Standing Committee of the Royal Irish Academy, titled ‘A society of free nations? Identity and values in 21st-century foreign policy’, which took place at the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin on 30 May 2016. The source ~~of quote~~ in the title of the paper is *Dáil debates*, vol. 97, no. 25, col. 2785 (19 July 1945).

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Irish neutrality and Ireland's relationship with the post-war world. Irish charitable responses commenced in the latter half of the war. By 1943 the government began to appreciate the catastrophe unfolding as Europe was liberated from defiant Nazi domination. ~~Nazi~~ military resistance to the Allied campaign in Italy, which began in September 1943, amplified an emerging and colossal humanitarian need on mainland Europe. Rolling media reports underlined Nazi predations on many occupied populations, which, until late in the war, had been systematically farmed for slave labour, or whose food supplies had been reduced to the bare minimum to sustain the German war machine and boost German living standards. In time the genocidal horrors of the concentration camps began to emerge.

To what limited degree the Irish population appreciated the horrors of Nazism before Allied victory in Europe deserves further investigation. This is not immediately apparent, owing to the Irish censor's almost obsessive efforts to present an even-handed account of the war and sustain domestic popular support for neutrality.[1] Some elements of the population were instinctively pro-Axis for reasons of their antipathy to Britain but many other quarters were pro-Allied, and this was partially reflected in the substantial numbers of Irish volunteering to fight in the British (and American) armed forces and working in the British war industries. Regardless of the conflicting sympathies, however, people in Ireland were largely united by their generous post-war humanitarian responses to the indiscriminate devastation and slaughter wrought by total warfare. As the tide turned decisively against Nazi Europe after 1943, the humanitarian need grew exponentially. By early 1946 the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration's (UNRRA) Emergency Economic Committee for Europe predicted that in a few months 140 million Europeans would have to subsist on a diet 'below the minimum normally necessary to ensure the ability to work and fight disease'.[2]

Ireland's undiscriminating charity earned it approbation, but also criticism. Some condemnation originated from those who questioned the equanimity of Ireland's pan-European relief when the decision was taken by the government to include Germany in the official aid programme in late 1945. This was critiqued as a sign of unedifying Irish sympathy for the German people, who were considered undeserving. Criticisms were also heard domestically, about the desirability of sending relief to the continent at a time when many Irish people suffered from acute deprivation, although such criticism failed to influence government until 1947.[3]

All major works on Ireland and 'the Emergency', even those that have discussed its post-war implications for Ireland, are silent on the subject of relief to Europe.[4] Cathy Molohan's specialist work on Irish–German relations in the

[1]See Donal Ó Drisceoil, *Censorship in Ireland, 1939–1945: neutrality, politics and society* (Cork, 1996).

[2]'A lesson for Ireland', Editorial, *Irish Independent*, 7 February 1946.

[3]Letter to the editor from 'Eire First', *Sunday Independent*, 26 January 1947, 6; 'Free food gifts to Europe "Uncalled for"', *Irish Independent*, 5 February 1947, 2; 'Let the people vote: should food gifts be sent away?', *Sunday Independent*, 16 Feruary 1947, 1.

[4]The general accounts overlook or barely mention the phenomenon of Irish humanitarian aid. See: Robert Fisk, *In time of war: Ireland, Ulster, and the price of neutrality, 1939–45* (London, 1985); Brian Girvin, *The Emergency: neutral Ireland, 1939–1945* (London, 2006); Joseph T. Carroll, *Ireland in the war years* (New York, 1975); T. Ryle Dwyer, *Behind the green curtain: Ireland's phoney neutrality during World War II* (Dublin, 2009); Clair Wills, *That neutral island* (London, 2007); Bryce Evans, *Ireland during the Second World War: farewell to Plato's cave* (Manchester, 2014). The many specialist works on aspects of diplomacy, defence, strategy, intelligence, society, the economy, politics and espionage are also remarkably quiet on the issue of Ireland's post-war relief programme.

post-war decade has, however, illuminated Ireland's aid to occupied Germany. It explored Irish assistance to Germany but largely failed to appreciate it was part of a continental-wide aid effort.[5] Indeed, Irish generosity extended beyond Europe. For instance, the Irish government endeavoured to alleviate the famine in Bengal, India, following an appeal by the mayor of Calcutta in late 1943.[6] That famine in Bengal was in fact caused by the war; following the fall of Singapore in February 1942, the Japanese then invaded Burma, which was the main source of rice imports for Bengal.

Traces of the Irish humanitarian project were recently revealed in investigations of Ireland's engagement with the European Economic Community (EEC) from the late 1950s onwards.[7] These unearthed recurring evidence in the archives of the original six member states of the EEC of positive European memories of the aid received from Ireland. Recollections of Irish generosity remained imprinted on the consciousness of several European statesmen who deliberated on the fate of Ireland's application to join the EEC during the 1960s.[8] Not alone had the states that went on to form the EEC been recipients of Irish charity but so had almost every country from the Atlantic, perhaps not to Urals, but ~~as~~ least as far as and including Greece, Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria and the Baltic states.

This article will explore aspects of Irish post-war relief, both governmental and non-governmental. It will also devote attention to Germany, because Taoiseach Eamon de Valera's immediate post-war policies towards that defeated country remain matters of perennial comment. It is well-known that de Valera, some other members of his government, and Joseph Walshe, the secretary of the Department of External Affairs, were reluctant to repatriate German spies captured and interned in Ireland into Allied custody in the immediate aftermath of the war, fearing they would be interned and interrogated again by the Allies or possibly deported to the Soviet zone. De Valera was especially averse to the repatriation of ex-German diplomats, particularly the former minister Eduard Hempel whom he ~~considered,~~ rightly or wrongly, as having behaved honourably during the course of the war. The official Irish line was that the Allies had no right to interrogate or punish former spies and ex-diplomats for alleged crimes that had been committed against Ireland, a neutral country. Historians have explored and discussed these topics predominantly through the lens of the diplomatic ballet between Ireland, the US and the UK. That is indisputably a major element in the Irish state's posture at the end of the war and the early post-war period, but it is not the only thread.[9]

To be sure, it is undeniable that de Valera's overarching intention was to ensure that the validity and propriety of Irish wartime neutrality was recognised fully by the Allies. Allied propaganda critical of Irish neutrality was viewed as

[5]Cathy Molohan, *Germany and Ireland 1945–1955* (Dublin, 1999).

[6]See National Archives of Ireland, Department of the Taoiseach (hereafter cited as NAI DT), S13373 A, Note, 10 November 1943 and Telegram from de Valera to mayor of Calcutta, 11 November 1943.

[7]See Mervyn O'Driscoll, Dermot Keogh and Jérôme aan de Wiel (eds), *Ireland through European eyes: Western Europe, the EEC and Ireland, 1945–1973* (Cork, 2013), *passim*.

[8]See: Mervyn O'Driscoll, 'Germany', in O'Driscoll *et al*., *Ireland through European eyes*, 9–74: 24–6, 71–2; Christophe Gillissen, 'France', in O'Driscoll *et al*., *Ireland through European eyes*, 75–127: 82–3; Dermot Keogh, 'Italy and the Holy See', in O'Driscoll *et al*., *Ireland through European eyes*, 128–89: 145, 146; Jérôme aan de Wiel, 'The Netherlands', in O'Driscoll *et al*., *Ireland through European eyes*, 190–244: 190, 206–9, 215, 216; Jérôme aan de Wiel, 'Belgium', in O'Driscoll *et al*., *Ireland through European eyes*, 245–90: 247, 261–2.

[9]These subjects are investigated in many works such as Fisk, *In time of war*; John P. Duggan, *Neutral Ireland and the Third Reich* (Dublin, 1989); Molohan, *Germany and Ireland*; Mark Hull, *Secret Ireland: German espionage in Ireland, 1939–45* (Dublin, 2003).

particularly offensive by Irish democratic republicans; they interpreted it as querying Ireland's right to an independent foreign policy. Thus, neutrality became an incontrovertible part of de Valera and Fianna Fáil's policy of fortifying the sovereignty and independence of the Irish state. Many Irish commentators and historians consider he stretched safeguarding neutrality and Irish 'honour' too far, particularly in the case of offering his condolences to the German minister on the death of Hitler, given the backdrop of the atrocities and genocide committed by Nazi Germany.

In contrast to de Valera and Walshe's insistent defence of the integrity of Irish neutrality by negative means ~~after the termination of the war~~, that is, a reluctance to comply quickly and fully with Allied requests for the early repatriation of former Axis personnel and former assets of the Axis, this article contends ~~that~~ the Irish relief programme to Europe fitted into an emerging construct of positive neutrality. This reinforced a national sense of good fortune for having avoided the ravages of war and retrospectively justified neutrality on moral grounds. At a popular level, this positive assertion of neutrality was reinforced and sustained by a strong sense of thanksgiving for national salvation from the ravages of total and industrialised war. The evidence of popular donations to relief funds and NGO activity substantiates this. From a national elite perspective (particularly on the part of the governing party of Fianna Fáil and the Department of External Affairs), the humanitarian programme also served other purposes: it counteracted Allied and liberated people's criticisms that Irish neutrality had been self-regarding and self-interested. It also differentiated Ireland from Britain as part of Ireland's national and independence project.

~~But in addition~~, it legitimised neutrality as a progressive human and political value in many Irish citizens' minds. Allied indifference to, and compounding of, German human suffering in the aftermath of victory was viewed by de Valera as counterproductive and unwise. In adopting this position de Valera interpreted World War Two as the outcome of vindictive peacemaking against Germany after the Great War. This was consistent with his interwar posture.[10] Irish impartiality in the distribution of relief in 1945 and 1946 was viewed as neutralist. Relief on the basis of need led to the diagnosis that Germany deserved relief just as the other war-torn countries of Europe did.

ORIGINS OF IRISH ASSISTANCE

Irish government and Irish Red Cross interest in providing for relief to war-affected regions of Europe commenced as early as December 1942 and January 1943 with an offer to send a food consignment to Belgium or Greece.[11] In November 1943, Dáil Éireann voted £200,000 in financial aid to the Red Cross to alleviate distress caused by war and famine in Europe and India.[12] In Europe, the pope's appeal for the relief of starvation in Italy, as the Anglo-American forces advanced through the peninsula during the autumn of 1943, provided a strong confessional impetus.[13] At least seven humanitarian proposals were put forward to provide Irish assistance to Europe from 1943 until the spring

[10]See Mervyn O'Driscoll, *Ireland, Germany and the Nazis: politics and diplomacy, 1919–1939* (Dublin, 2004).

[11]NAI DT, S13373A, Walshe to de Valera, 25 April 1945; NAI, Department of Foreign Affairs (hereafter DFA), 419/4 Part I, Memo for taoiseach, 24 April 1945.

[12]*Dáil debates*, vol. 91, no. 6, col. 1987–2014 (11 November 1943).

[13]*Dáil debates*, vol. 91, no. 6, col. 1987–2014 (11 November 1943); *Dáil debates*, vol. 94, no. 6, col. 1926 (26 September 1944); *Dáil debates*, vol. 95, no. 10, cols. 1332–43 (1 December 1944).

of 1945.[14] Until the end of hostilities in Europe, however, the Irish relief effort faced ~~almost~~ insuperable logistical and transportation obstacles.[15] It was impossible to acquire navicerts from British authorities to ship the foodstuffs and livestock to the war-torn regions; the prosecution of the war took centre stage from the British perspective and Ireland remained dependent on the British merchant navy, in spite of the efforts of the Ministry of Supplies, led by Seán Lemass, and the recently established Irish Shipping Limited.[16]

In March 1945, the government established a high-level interdepartmental committee, afterwards termed the European Relief Committee, to deliberate on the commodities Ireland could offer for the relief of Europe.[17] This top-level official committee comprised of secretaries and deputy secretaries of the departments of Finance, External Affairs, Industry and Commerce, Supplies and Agriculture and it met for the first time on 27 March.[18] James McElligott, the secretary of the Department of Finance, chaired the committee, which undertook a review of the 'urgently needed' commodities the country could release. At the first meeting both Anthony Leydon (secretary of the Department of Supplies) and Joseph Walshe pointed to the emerging food shortages and referred

> to the danger that unless this country showed and publicised its readiness to provide assistance there would be considerable loss of good will and colour would be given to the propagandist charges levelled against us in ~~section~~ of the British and American press that we were concerned only about ourselves and were enjoying higher standards of living than in any other part of Europe.[19]

McElligott disputed there was any evidence of such a propaganda campaign. Generally the committee agreed Ireland had to contribute to provide humanitarian assistance to mitigate continental suffering. Ireland could quickly provide beef and live cattle. It might also provide butter and eggs by reducing the domestic rations.[20] It was felt by Walshe that there would be 'very little objection' to giving gifts in kind to devastated areas, and the assistant secretary of the Department of External Affairs, Frederick Boland, emphasised 'the necessity for making it clear in any public announcement, that the giving of relief on the scale proposed represented a real sacrifice to the people of this country'.[21] The committee concluded at its third meeting on 25 April 1945 that food and goods to the value of £3 million could be made available for European relief.[22]

[14]NAI DFA, 419/4 Part I, Memo for taoiseach, 24 April 1945.
[15]NAI DT, S13373A, de Valera to Kingsmill-Moore, 24 April 1945; NAI DFA 419/4 Part I, Memo for taoiseach, 24 April 1945.
[16]See Frank Forde, *The long watch: the history of the Irish Mercantile Marine in World War Two* (Dublin, 1981); H.C. Spong, *Irish Shipping Ltd. 1941–1982* (Kendal, 1982); B. Cleare, B. Boyce, L. Coy and J. Boyce, *Irish Shipping Ltd.: a fleet history* (Rosslare, 2013); Fisk, *In time of war*, 315.
[17]Walshe christened it the European Relief Committee in his report of its meeting on 30 July 1945. See NAI DFA, 414/4 Part I, Note by J.P. Walshe, 30 July 1945.
[18]NAI DFA, 419/4 Part I, Department of Finance 'Note', 28 March 1945.
[19]NAI DFA, 419/4 Part I, Department of Finance 'Note', 28 March 1945.
[20]NAI DFA, 419/4 Part I, Department of Finance 'Note', 28 March 1945.
[21]NAI DFA, 419/4 Part I, Department of Finance memorandum (Account of committee proceedings on 25 April 1945), n.d.
[22]NAI DFA, 419/4 Part I, Department of Finance memorandum for the government, 'Relief in Europe', 26 April 1945; and Department of Finance memorandum (Account of committee proceedings on 25 April 1945), n.d.

In May 1945, adhering to the recommendations of the interdepartmental committee, the Irish government budgeted for expenditure of £3 million for post-war relief of liberated western European countries.[23] Minister for Finance Seán T. O'Kelly, in announcing the provision in the budget speech of 2 May 1945, highlighted that the Irish relief ~~should~~ not be comprised of surplus Irish food and goods simply, but would provide food, money and other essentials, 'even at the sacrifice of our own consumption'.[24] The official public discourse surrounding the announcement of the programme was one of 'self-denial'. Seán MacEntee (the minister for Local Government) even advocated government borrowing to maximise the Irish relief effort.[25] De Valera noted in the Dáil on 18 May that Sweden and Switzerland were playing a large role in assisting distressed neighbouring countries.[26] The drawing of this neutral parallel signified that de Valera desired Ireland to act in a similarly positive fashion.

Unremitting news coverage, of famine and disease in Europe, emanating from international news agencies fuelled a sense of urgency. The devastation and dislocation caused by the war coincided with a drought among major food producers especially in the Southern hemisphere (Argentina, Australia) in the mid-1940s. Global food production was falling. The US was also affected by the unfavourable weather conditions and had to reduce its lend–lease food supplies to the UK in early 1945 and divert some of its supplies to liberated Europe.[27] In May it was reported that 10,000 had died of starvation in Amsterdam.[28] Proposals to plant the Phoenix Park and the Curragh with potatoes to meet European needs were made in the Dáil, only to be rejected by the minister for Agriculture—it was too late in the season to plant with any reasonable chance of success.[29]

The neglect of the country's continental relief efforts is curious, given that de Valera announced the relief package in 1945 as part of his much-cited critique of Churchill's post-war victory speech. In his address on 13 May, the British prime minister congratulated Britain for not having laid 'a violent hand' on neutral Ireland despite British 'necessity' during the war. In his response on 16 May, de Valera's accusation that Churchill was ungracious played successfully to nationalist opinion ('Could he not find it in his heart the generosity to acknowledge that there was a small nation that stood alone, not for one year or two, but for several hundred years against aggression').[30] It was high drama over the air waves as the two leaders engaged in a duel of words and rhetoric. They simply could not resist needling one another even as they both claimed their own form of victory in the latest European conflict. But as is often the case, political rhetoric and contention between nations obscures much.

[23] *Dáil debates*, vol. 97, col. 725–6 (18 May 1945); NAI DT, S13373A, Walshe to de Valera, 25 April 1945; NAI DT, S13373A, Department of Finance memorandum for government, 'Relief in Europe', 26 April 1945.

[24] *Dáil debates*, vol. 97, no. 1, cols. 44–5 (2 May 1945).

[25] NAI DT, S133373A, MacEntee to de Valera, 18 April 1945.

[26] *Dail Debates*, vol. 97, no. 7, col. 726 (18 May 1945). The Department of External Affairs closely monitored the measures taken for relief of war victims in other neutral countries from the end of the war. See NAI DFA 419/24. Arguably the example of other neutrals, in particular Sweden and Switzerland, served as a precedent for and reinforcement of Irish humanitarian measures.

[27] '*Spectator's* Leader Page parade', *Irish Independent*, 25 April 1945, 2.

[28] '10,000 died of starvation' and 'Dutch hotel menus, black market prices', *Irish Press*, 12 May 1945.

[29] *Dáil debates*, vol. 97, no. 3, col. 748 (23 May 1945).

[30] Maurice Moynihan, *Speeches and statements by Eamon de Valera 1917–73* (Dublin, 1980), Document 91, 476.

In his radio broadcast to the nation of 16 May, de Valera principally rejoiced at the deliverance of the Irish nation from the ravages of the war. He requested a growth in Irish food production to feed the European peoples less fortunate than the Irish:

> We have been spared what so many nations have had to undergo, and there lies upon us, accordingly, a duty, within our limited power, to assist in succouring those who have been less fortunate than we have been.[31]

De Valera anticipated food shortages and famine would continue in Europe 'over the next few years'. He encouraged Ireland to play its part in meeting the global food deficit, if necessary by making sacrifices, including the extension of food rationing so that supplies could be diverted to Europe.[32] De Valera's humanitarian arguments struck home as news of the desolation that prevailed throughout Europe saturated press reports.

Pope Pius XII's acknowledgement of Ireland's generosity in June 1945 added a renewed impetus to Irish efforts. He argued that Ireland had emerged unscathed from the desolation; it had a special task in alleviating Europe's distress.[33] In late August, the pope, as part of a general appeal for world cooperation, requested 'the victorious nations not to abuse their victory'.[34] This served to highlight the need for former neutrals to demonstrate equability and compassion. The head of the Catholic church's intervention resonated in Ireland, given the population's predominant religious faith. Even the *Irish Times*, which was traditionally perceived to be associated with Anglo-Irish interests and pro-Allied in sympathies, estimated that the remarks of the head of the Catholic church were partially calculated to stay the hand of American and British vengeance. The paper noted that it would be unjust to hold the Germans as individuals or as a people responsible for the crimes of 'Hitler and his gang', observing that Pius XII clearly preferred the Anglo-Saxon system, despite its imperfections, to the Soviet one. The editorial pointed out that the Anglo-American publics still suffered from an understandable, but nonetheless ill-advised, 'war psychosis' and it would take time for this to abate.[35] The newspaper adopted a position of equanimity that seemed to characterise much of Irish public opinion. Though there were domestic critics from the outset in mid-1945, de Valera was firm and was supported by a general cross-party consensus that the aid package was required. De Valera advised the Dáil, when it voted for the £3 million in aid on 19 July 1945, that when confronting such criticism from constituents:

> You will always find some people who will not do that [accept the government's explanation for the relief], but at least you can say to them they have been saved; that Providence has saved them from the effects of a disastrous war; that as human beings they have responsibilities to other human beings and, whilst other nations have had to undergo all the horrors of war, we have been saved here. You can ask them whether they are not willing voluntarily to make these sacrifices for the sake of fellow human beings who are suffering.[36]

[31]Moynihan, *Speeches and statements by Eamon de Valera 1917–73*, 471.
[32]Moynihan, *Speeches and statements by Eamon de Valera 1917–73*.
[33]'Pope's views on Ireland', *Irish Times*, 23 June 1945, 1.
[34]'Pope calls for world co-operation', *Irish Times*, 31 August 1945, 1.
[35]'Pope's plea', *Irish Times*, 31 August 1945, 3.
[36]*Dáil Debates*, vol. 97, no. 25, col. 2785, (19 July 1945).

He stressed the US and Britain were taking the main burden of sending food to Europe, and Sweden and Switzerland were also playing a 'splendid part'. Ireland had to play its role.[37]

The Vote on the relief package did not cover the cost of surplus stock (valued at £86,000), such as blankets and cooking apparatus, supplied by the Department of Defence, that was also provided for European relief.[38] The French, Italian, Belgian and Dutch governments accepted the offer by late July 1945.[39] One-fifth of the supplies was allocated to the Joint Relief Commission of the International Red Cross based in Switzerland, which distributed aid to the following: Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Northern Italy, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia.[40] The Irish state and voluntary collections provided food, clothes, medicine, essential equipment, vaccines and temporary shelter to distribution centres in association with the International Red Cross and national relief agencies throughout Europe. In France, for instance, the Irish contribution even included the establishment of a temporary hospital and the provision of appropriate Irish medical personnel.[41] In the summer of 1945 Irish government relief was allocated in equal parts to the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Italy and the International Red Cross. Bilateral government-to-government aid-in-kind deals were worked out with the four west European governments.

Many Europeans derived benefits from both the Irish official relief programme to post-war western, central and eastern Europe, and from the Irish public's donations to charitable organisations. The government made a further sum of £3 million available for shipments of relief supplies to Europe in June 1946. The bulk of this 1946–47 Irish government gift was shipped to central and eastern Europe, in contrast to the 1945–46 gift, which was largely focused on western Europe.[42] This generated a positive image of Ireland in the post-war period, regardless of whether or not the recipients considered Irish neutrality during the late war had been the correct policy. It was a major piece of public diplomacy conducted at a continental scale. In 1946 and 1947 the Irish public's charitable donations overtook the government monies set aside for the relief of Europe. Many voluntary organisations collected donations of non-perishable food, in addition to clothing and other life-sustaining provisions, from an unstinting public. By late 1946 Ireland was exporting its estimated food surplus as part of the government's relief scheme to Europe.[43]

Despite the exhaustion of the land, for want of sufficient imported fertilisers and quality arable land, and mounting hostility from the opposition political parties and farmers, the government sustained its emergency policy of compelling Irish farmers to keep up and increase tillage production.[44] The government argued there was a continued need for increased domestic wheat and other cereal production to relieve Irish demands on global stocks and to contribute to

[37]*Dáil Debates*, vol. 97, no. 25, col. 2785 (19 July 1945).
[38]*Dáil Debates*, vol. 97, no. 25, col. 2785 (19 July 1945).
[39]'Survey page', *Times Pictorial*, 28 July 1945, 2; *Dáil debates*, vol. 97, cols. 2785–6 (19 July 1945).
[40]NAI DFA, 419/1/7, Memorandum, 'The alleviation of distress in Germany and Austria', *c*. April 1951.
[41]See Phyllis Gaffney, *Healing amid the ruins: the Irish Hospital at Saint-Lô (1945–46)* (Dublin, 1999).
[42]NAI DFA, 419 AA, Notes by Boland for de Valera, 7 March 1947.
[43]NAI DFA, 419/4/20, Molloy to Bourke, 18 September 1946.
[44]*Dáil debates*, vol. 98, no. 2, col. 155 (11 October 1945); *Dáil debates*, vol. 130, no. 12, col. 1749–50 (28 Nov. 1946).

relieving European hardship until global cereal production recovered. Besides, it could be anticipated that an increase in Irish demand for American and Canadian wheat would not be entertained by US decisonmakers, in view of the European continent's subsistence crisis. As a former neutral, Ireland was a lower priority than Allied nations and liberated countries.

Voluntary gifts to Europe, and particularly to Germany, grew in 1946 and 1947 when Irish food production fell. First, during the harvest of 1946 many parts of the country were afflicted by heavy and unseasonal flooding. This led to the unprecedented action of de Valera going on the national air waves on 8 September 1946 to rally 'a united national effort to save the harvest' as a 'considerable portion of the grain crop' was by then lost. Volunteers were required in a last-ditch effort to save some of the crop in breaks in the inclement weather. Even civil servants were released from work to assist.[45] Then in the spring of 1947 the country was affected, like the remainder of Europe, by an acute and harsh late winter, that some have called an Arctic Siege. In Ireland it was known as the 'Big Snow of 1947'. From late January until March ~~that year~~, Ireland received its most extreme and relentless snow and ice offensive since meteorological records began.[46] The government considered it necessary for the Agricultural Credit Corporation to introduce a scheme to make loans without interest available to farmers to restock following the 'serious and abnormal losses of cattle and sheep as a result of severe weather in the early months of 1947'.[47]

GERMAN CRISIS

The appalling and deteriorating conditions affecting the German people became apparent during the late summer and autumn of 1945. The Nazi economy had collapsed. Food, clothing, shelter and coal shortages generated inflation and hardship as winter approached. The division of Germany into four zones administered by the US, Soviet Union, France and the UK disrupted the internal food supply system between east and west and immeasurably complicated food distribution.[48] As one of the largest food importing countries in the world, Germany traditionally depended on imports from its neighbours, especially in eastern Europe, but in the final stages of the war these supplies halted. What ~~is~~ more, Germany's population was artificially swollen with millions of forced labourers especially from eastern Europe; these had been uprooted by the Nazis to work in the German war economy. Many were reluctant to return to their homelands, which were now Soviet-occupied territories.

Intensifying the situation, millions of refugees from the east crowded into the already heavily populated and seriously bomb-damaged urban-industrial western zones (administered by Britain, France and the United States). Many cities had been carpet bombed leaving massive shortages in residential housing even for the pre-war German population.[49] The refugees were fleeing the advance of the Red Army or were forcibly expelled from various parts of eastern Europe in

[45]NAI DT, S 13907.

[46]Kevin C. Kearns, *Ireland's Arctic siege: the Big Freeze of 1947* (Dublin, *c.* 2011).

[47]NAI DT, S 14605, Advertisement, 'Special temporary scheme of loans for purchase of cattle and sheep', 21 April 1947.

[48]Graham Hallett, 'West Germany', in Andrew Graham and Anthony Seldon (eds), *Government and economies in the postwar world: economic policies and comparative performance, 1945–85* (London, 1991); NAI DFA, 419/1/7, Report on visit to Germany, Austria and Hungary by Brian Brady, 7 January 1947, 8.

[49]NAI DFA, 419/1/7, Report on visit to Germany, Austria and Hungary by Brian Brady, 7 January 1947.

retribution by local partisans and new governments aiming to establish national states. The moving of the Polish border further west to the Oder-Neisse line also displaced millions. Then there were the Sudetenland Germans of Czechoslovakia, many of whom were unceremoniously dispatched in similarly horrific conditions. These Sudetens were the largest constituents of the *Volksdeutsche* that either fled west or were forced out in a brutal manner. The *Volksdeutshce* were the ethnic Germans who lived in eastern European lands for many generations. There were also Germans whom the Nazis had settled in the east during the war, as part of their *Lebensraum* (living space) programme. Most arrived to a devastated Germany half-starved, traumatised and in need of medical attention. Indeed any unwanted minorities were pushed from eastern Europe into Germany, and particularly into the western zones. Minorities, the destitute, the elderly, the unwanted and the hated were all expelled. Tragically, most of the few remaining Jews left in eastern Europe after the Nazi holocaust were also pushed west. The Western allies were complicit in this. As a UK Foreign Office draft memorandum warned in March 1946: 'we tend to regard occupied Germany as a waste-paper basket with a limitedless capacity for the unwanted waste of the world'.[50] The deportations were part of the Potsdam final agreement and a subsequent Allied Control Council (Germany's temporary four-power government) agreement (named 'Operation Swallow'). Although Potsdam stipulated that any transfers taking place should be 'orderly and humane', they were anything but and led to the immediate deaths of at least 500,000 in a sort of cathartic brutality exercised by local populations following their oppression under the Nazis. British opinion became scandalised in 1946 when these atrocities first began to be reported, but American and French opinion ~~were~~ less concerned.

In the last decade or so, these events gained greater recognition. There is still an unwarranted fear that to acknowledge the inhumanity involved in the massive population transfer of 12–14 million people to Germany is, somehow, to excuse the crimes of Nazism or diminish them. War damage in Germany was aggravated by poor Allied post-war planning and administrative infighting. The early post-war Allied deindustrialisation and pastoralisation policies (the punitive Morgenthau Plan), combined with the requirement to make war reparations (to the Soviet Union primarily), exacted a heavy cost on the swollen population of Germany.[51]

Unsurprisingly, the citizens of defeated Germany were a low priority in the estimation of the victors. The United Nations' Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) statutes initially forbade it from alleviating German distress in the ~~immediate~~ aftermath of the war. Its targets were the liberated peoples. UNRRA was largely controlled by the US, its largest donor. It operated from 1943 to 1947 to relieve and administrate liberated countries. Among the Allies, the UK had to continue domestic food rationing after the war, and precarious food situations prevailed in France and the Soviet Union. Simultaneously, a forthright absence of international sympathy for Germany prevailed.[52] One UK Foreign Office specialist (Robin Hankey) wrote in the summer of 1947:

[50]Cited in R.M. Douglas, *Orderly and humane: the expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (London, 2012), 192.

[51]Volker R. Berghahn, 'West German reconstruction and American industrial culture, 1945–1960', in Reiner Pommerin (ed.), *The American impact on postwar Germany* (Providence, RI, 1995), ~~65–81.~~ 70–71; Konrad H. Jarausch, *After Hitler: recivilizing Germans, 1945–1995* (Oxford, 2006; translated by Brandon Hunziker).

[52]See Giles MacDonough, *After the Reich: the brutal history of the Allied occupation* (New York, 2007).

'I cannot work up much sympathy for the poor Germans, much as I condemn the way they were treated.'[53]

The tenor of early US policy towards Germany was stated in directive JCS 1067 issued by the military governor of the US Occupied Zone, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, in October 1945. This directive decreed: 'Germany will not be occupied for the purpose of liberation but as a defeated enemy nation'.[54] Vengeance and a feeling of 'just desserts' dominated Allied attitudes towards Germany. Policies of reparations, occupation and immiseration aggravated subsistence and housing crises. Parts of occupied Germany teetered on the brink of a full-blown humanitarian disaster.[55] The rights of the defeated were not a primary concern. 'Germany as *the* enemy still loomed over international relations for a while, then, after 1946, the Soviet Union slowly began to fill this role.'[56]

FAVOURITISM?

From the late summer of 1945 the Irish dailies saturated readers with coverage of the emerging German crisis from international news agencies, Christian organisations and humanitarians. In October, the *Journal of the Medical Association of Ireland* requested immediate aid for Germany. It professed, 'our motto should be to send relief supplies to where they are most needed, irrespective of political consideration', adding that 'the sending of food to Germany especially may be fraught with many difficulties' but charity demanded it.[57] It continued: 'Let us do all we can to prevent this from being the worst European winter since the Thirty Years War'.[58] In the autumn, Allied occupation authorities dimly realised the scale of the potential food crisis in Germany, which had received less favourable assistance than liberated countries. General Eisenhower was now reported as expressing the view that Germany's most serious problem was a food deficit.[59]

The Americans gradually shifted 'from a policy of punishment to one of restoration of Germany' from late 1946, because of the looming threat that the Soviet Union was constructing an alternative political and economic system in the east.[60] At this point the extent of German general deprivation was incontrovertible, as swathes of the population teetered on the edge of starvation. Then the poor judgement animating the earlier 'tougher' and badly designed policies towards Germany was exposed. The initial sign of a softening US policy occurred when Harry Truman first authorised US humanitarian relief to Germany in February 1946, but a time-lag ensued before US aid organisations

[53]Douglas, *Orderly and humane*, 346.

[54]U.S. Department of State, *Germany, 1947–1949: the story in documents* (Washington DC, 1950), 23.

[55]To a great extent, Allied policies 'seemed to emphasize destruction rather than reconstruction' in the case of Germany until at least 1947: see Christoph Buchheim, 'From enlightened hegemony to partnership: the United States and West Germany in the world economy, 1945–1968', translated by Richard Sharp, in Detlef Junker, *The United States and Germany in the era of the Cold War, 1945–1990* (Cambridge, 2004), vol. 1, 1945–1968, ~~255–70:~~ 258–9.

[56]Manfred Overesch, 'Senior West German politicians and their perception of the German situation in Europe 1945–1949', in J. Becker and F. Knipping (eds), *Power in Europe? Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany in a postwar world, 1945–1950* (Berlin and New York, 1986), ~~117–34:~~ 118–9.

[57]'Medical journal urges Irish aid for Germans', *Irish Times*, 3 October 1945, 4.

[58]'Medical journal urges Irish aid for Germans', *Irish Times*, 3 October 1945, 4.

[59]'Eisenhower reports food problem serious in Germany', *Irish Times*, 1 October 1945, 1.

[60]William I. Hitchcok, *The struggle for Europe: the history of the continent since 1945* (London, 2003), 31.

could assemble and ship the relief. The first American aid packages arrived in August 1946—fourteen months after Germany's unconditional surrender. US aid only poured into Germany in large quantities in 1947 following Washington's tardy recognition of the scale of the problem and of the prospective political repercussions of its dilatory efforts.[61] Until then it was left to neutrals such as Ireland and other independent-minded and humanitarian-motivated parties to alleviate the widespread distress and subsistence crisis in Germany. Hopelessness prevailed.

Brian Brady, a Fianna Fáil TD, undertook an extensive fact-finding visit on behalf of the Irish Red Cross Society to Germany, Austria and Hungary from 2 November to 21 December 1946. He confirmed the parlous food, housing, fuel and refugee conditions prevailing in Germany and Austria in an expansive report to the both the Red Cross and the Department of the Taoiseach.[62] He gained an exceptional insight into conditions in Germany. In addition to visiting the three western occupation zones, he was the first representative of an outside relief organisation to be granted permission to visit the Soviet zone.[63] Brady recommended that the continuation of Irish relief to Germany was paramount, as the need for it was 'greater than ever before' and the 'inadequate rations' had undermined the health of the population to such a degree that 'resistance to disease is very low'. The majority of victims of disease were children and young people: 'The picture of destitution in German cities and towns could not be exaggerated and one shudders to think of the conditions under which these people, particularly the children, are existing this winter.'[64] He indicated that 'people seem quite apathetic and have no hope in the future', and that thus far there was no 'appreciable effort' to 'cope with the widespread destruction' of the country, with the urban ruins of Germany 'practically untouched'. Rebuilding could not commence and consequently the accommodation crisis would not be solved until the population had food and clothing. An acute challenge was the shortage of manpower. It was estimated six million German men had been killed in the war and another six million were POWs, internees or invalided. These were all within the productive age cohorts.[65]

The cold and harsh winters of 1946–47 and 1947–48 heightened the subsistence struggles of millions in Europe and Germany. In the pre-war period the western zones of Germany had depended on extensive imports of food funded by industrial exports, but this was no longer possible. A decline in German coal production added to the misery in the near Arctic winter conditions in some of the immediate post-war years, but especially in the winter of 1947–48. In this context, Irish post-war humanitarian assistance and its ~~equability allocating~~ that assistance ~~is~~ significant.

Irish government supplies were distributed in all four occupation zones of Germany, including Berlin and the Soviet zone, following the negotiation of a special agreement between the Soviet commander and a delegate of the

[61]Godehard Weyerer, 'CARE packages: gifts from overseas to a defeated and debilitated nation', translated by Eric Weinberger, in Detlef Junker (ed.), *The United States and Germany in the era of the Cold War, 1945–1990*, vol. 1, 1945–1968 (Cambridge, 2004), 522–7; 'US plan to rush', *Irish Times* 16 May 1947.

[62]NAI DFA, 419/1/7, Report on visit to Germany, Austria and Hungary by Brian Brady, 7 January 1947.

[63]NAI DFA, 419/1/7, Report on visit to Germany, Austria and Hungary by Brian Brady, 7.

[64]NAI DFA, 419/1/7, Report on visit to Germany, Austria and Hungary by Brian Brady, 11.

[65]NAI DFA, 419/1/7, Report on visit to Germany, Austria and Hungary by Brian Brady. The US assessment of the manpower shortage was similar. See NAI DFA, 417/1/7, Excerpt from a report of the American Military Government on the German Prisoners of War, returning from Russian captivity, in *Neue Zeitung*, 8 August 1947.

International Red Cross. The agreement with the Soviet zones stipulated that aid was to be provided to all on the basis of need, regardless of political allegiance or religious affiliation. The Irish relief was the first foreign aid to be distributed in the Soviet zone.[66] The philosophy underlying the official government gift was: 'Needy people in all four zones benefit equally without consideration either of their political belief or religious faith'.[67] Following the request of the Chief Rabbi of Palestine, Isaac Herzog, Eamon de Valera, made arrangements for the provision of kosher canned meat for displaced orthodox Jews.[68]

Many Irish NGOs contributed separately and generously to the relief of Germany; for example, the Irish Red Cross, the Religious Society of Friends ('Quakers'), the Cork–Cologne Fund, the St Vincent de Paul Society, the Save the German Children Society, the Knights of St Columbanus and the various churches.[69] These organisations undertook their own fundraising and collections. Confessionalism played a potent role in the voluntary donations. A survey of Irish newspaper reports indicates that emphasis was placed on assisting the Catholic population of Germany in particular. Recalling Nazism's persecution of the Catholic Church was a notable item in Irish newspapers, particularly the *Irish Independent*, with the implication that German Catholics were deserving recipients of aid.[70] In parallel, the small Irish Protestant congregations assisted German Lutherans, drawing on their church-based networks. With the outbreak of the Cold War, an additional factor impelling Irish charity towards Germany was the need to alleviate the distress as a means to halt the spread of Communism and save Europe for Christian civilisation.

The city of Cork adopted Cologne as the target for its humanitarian donations during 1947 and 1948, and the local branch of the Save the German Children Society was a driver in this relief effort. The German Caritas organisation selected children—many of them orphans—from the heavily bombed industrial region of the Ruhr, including Cologne, to be sent to Ireland for recuperation and fostering with Irish families for up to three years as part of 'Operation Shamrock'. Cologne was an area with a high Catholic population, and Cardinal Josef Frings of Cologne wrote to thank the lord mayor and citizens of Cork for sending clothes relief. This relief and spreading news of 'Operation Shamrock' in the Ruhr region sparked a special connection between Cork and Cologne. In September 1946, the commander of the military government in the city, Lieutenant Colonel J.M. White, appealed to Cork's lord mayor 'to render whatever assistance was possible to alleviate the terrible distress in Cologne', which he pointedly noted was 90% Catholic and had supported Nazism 'far less' than 'most other parts of Germany'.[71] 'The threatening spectre of hunger and misery is standing before us', he reported.[72] His pleading had added potency in Cork by virtue of the fact that White's grandfather held the office of lord mayor

[66]NAI DFA, 419/4 AA, Memorandum: 'The alleviation of distress in Germany and Austria', 10 April 1951, 2.

[67]NAI DFA, 419/1/7, Report on visit to Germany, Austria and Hungary by Brian Brady, 7 January 1947, 7.

[68]NAI DFA, 419/4 AA, Kosher meat, 18 February 1947.

[69]'German gift to be unveiled on Saturday', *Irish Independent*, 26 January 1956, 8; NAI DFA, 419/4/20, Secretary to Teclaff, July 1948.

[70]Editorial, 'The pope on persecution', *Irish Independent*, 4 June 1945, 2; 'The Holy Father indicts Nazis', *Irish Independent*, 4 June 1945, 2.

[71]'Cologne cardinal's letter to Cork mayor', *Irish Times*, 14 August 1946, 3; 'Irish officer appeals for aid to Germans', *Irish Times*, 3 September 1946, 3; 'British colonel's moving plea: plight of Cologne's population', *Irish Independent*, 3 September 1946, 2.

[72]'Irish officer appeals for aid to Germans', *Irish Times*, 3 September 1946, 3; 'British colonel's moving plea: plight of Cologne's population', *Irish Independent*, 3 September 1946, 2.

of the city some 80 years previously.[73] The Cork–Cologne link persisted until at least 1949.[74] War-shattered West Berlin became a focus for Irish aid even before the commencement of the Berlin blockade (1948–49).[75]

A popular reflexive view underlay Irish relief after the ending of World War Two: great wars were the product of great power politics, and such conflicts were visited upon helpless humanity. Irish neutrality during the 'Emergency' was partly sustained by such popular and fatalistic preconceptions. On viewing the devastation visited upon Europe by war, it was considered morally and politically mandatory that Ireland should demonstrate positive neutrality in peacetime by contributing generously to the alleviation of the suffering. As a neutral, it felt bound to provide humanitarian assistance to defeated belligerents too, in light of the reluctance of the victors to act charitably.[76] In June 1945 in the American occupation zone the 'normal' ration was 860 calories for a German adult.[77]

Getting disaster relief into Germany and Austria, and distributing it, proved challenging until Allied opinion recognised a calamity in the making and policy was reversed. Much early Irish aid was delivered into the occupied zones via a fellow neutral, Switzerland. The Caritas organisation also distributed the Irish supplies throughout all four occupation zones in Germany according to 'the size of the population of the individual zones and dioceses, the percentage of Catholic population, the degree of destruction and the number of refugees in each zone'.[78] Irish generosity was highlighted throughout the relief and feeding centres in operations across Europe, including Germany.[79] The Irish government received heartfelt expressions of gratitude from relief agencies, including the German Central Committee for the Distribution of Foreign Relief Supplies, in addition to requests for additional supplies.[80]

The anti-fascist and anti-Nazi humanitarian, Dorothy MacArdle, published a massive tome, *Children of Europe*, in 1949. This noteworthy piece of advocacy detailed her travels throughout Europe, focusing on the plight of the continent's children after the war, but it also illuminated the general refugee and subsistence crises in many countries. Although its goal was to document the situation of children in destroyed liberated countries, it recognised the plight of German children too.[81] MacArdle was an acquaintance of Éamon de Valera, having written her gargantuan *The Irish Republic* in 1937 in close consultation with him. It is not surprising that MacArdle's campaigning *Children of Europe* was published by Victor Gollancz's London firm, which had also published *The Irish Republic.*

Gollancz, a committed left-wing and humanitarian activist, had publicised the extermination of the Jews by the Nazi regime as early as 1942, but he did not ascribe collective guilt to the German people. After the war he crusaded for humanity to be shown in the treatment of the German population, critiquing the

[73]'Irish officer appeals for aid to Germans', *Irish Times*, 3 September 1946, 3; 'British colonel's moving plea: plight of Cologne's population', *Irish Independent*, 3 September 1946, 2.

[74]'Cologne thanks Cork', *Irish Times*, 26 January 1949, 3.

[75]'German cardinal thanks Ireland for food', *Irish Times*, 14 February 1947, 3; 'Bishop of Berlin thanks president for food gifts', *Irish Times*, 11 March 1948, 1; NAI PRES, P2665, Konrad Cardinal von Preysing, Bishop of Berlin to President Seán T. Kelly, 9 February 1948.

[76]Auswärtiges Amt-Politisches Archiv (AA-PA), Berlin, Bestand B31, Band 61; Editorial, 'A German gift', *Irish Press*, 23 January 1956, 4.

[77]AA-PA, Berlin, Bestand B31, Band 61; Editorial, 'A German gift', *Irish Press*, 23 January 1956, 4.

[78]Molohan, *Germany and Ireland*, 45.

[79]NAI DFA, 419/1/7, 11 February 1947.

[80]NAI DFA, 419/1/7.

[81]Dorothy MacArdle, *Children of Europe: a study of the children of liberated countries; their war-time experiences, their reactions, and their needs, with a note on Germany* (London, 1949).

harsh occupation policies of the Allies as a threat to the values of 'western civilisation'.[82] To give effect to his beliefs he published his arguments and organised the campaign 'Save Europe Now' to convince the British government to rescind its ban on allowing Britons to post food parcels to Germany.[83] This same ban prevented Irish people from sending food parcels via Britain to Germany until Gollancz's 'Save Europe Now' succeeded in reversing British policy in September 1946.[84] MacArdle's perspective complemented Gollancz's, and her *Children of Europe* fitted into an emerging pattern of humanitarian transnationalism.

It is clear that Irish voluntary donations to Germany were particularly high during successive Christmas seasons after 1945. In December 1947 the Irish people donated nearly US$2-million worth of food and clothing to Germany.[85] The elderly, ill, children, orphans, displaced persons and expellees were particular targets of the assistance. German commentators and recipients noted and appreciated this generosity. Unsurprisingly, Irish charity drew many expressions of gratitude from German individuals and bodies in the succeeding years.[86]

Conversely, some Allied, pro-Allied and liberated peoples initially formed the unfavourable impression that Ireland was either foolishly or suspiciously favourable towards defeated Germany. They could not comprehend how Ireland could give assistance in equal measure on the basis of need to Germans and non-Germans. Accusations of suspicious Irish Germanophilic behaviour were quickly forthcoming. One example was the French publication *Libres* which, in October 1945, published a disparaging and critical report. *Libres* claimed that Ireland, together with Spain, could be considered the most favourable neutrals towards Germany, although the paper approved generally of the Irish government's assistance programme of £3,000,000.[87]

One dimension of Irish assistance engendered particular controversy both domestically and internationally: the motives of the Save the German Children Society. This organisation, founded in October 1945 by Dr Kathleen E. Murphy, had an avowed non-political purpose of saving 'as many German children as possible from death by starvation this winter. . .irrespective of class, creed or politics'. It correctly contended that children were the most vulnerable and were innocents. Its reputation became tarnished at its foundation, however, when a newspaper reported the atavistic nationalist and anti-British comments of two individuals attending its inaugural meeting. A Colonel J.J. O'Byrne provocatively expressed his reasons for supporting the work of the society:

> on the grounds of [my] pro-German feelings and [my] hatred of Britain. [We] should do everything possible to end the Anglo-Saxon influence, not only here, but elsewhere. If [we] took those German children, [we] should see that they are brought up as Germans, and do not come under Anglo-Saxon influence.[88]

[82]Victor Gollancz, *Our threatened values* (London, 1946); Victor Gollancz, *In darkest Germany* (London, 1947); Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Victor Gollancz: a biography* (London, 1987).

[83]Peggy Duff, *Left, left, left: a personal account of six protest campaigns, 1945–65* (London: 1971).

[84]Victor Gollancz, Letter, 'Parcels for Germany', *New Statesman and Nation*, 14 September 1946; NAI DFA, 419/4/20.

[85]Molohan, *Germany and Ireland*, 41.

[86]For example, see NAI DFA, 4/22/2; NAI DFA, 4/22/2 A; NAI DFA 419/1/7; NAI DFA 419/1/8. These files contain innumerable letters expressing heartfelt and endearing appreciation of Irish generosity. They emanate from a wide range of German sources (orphanages, hospitals, sanatoria, old people's homes, schools, displaced person's camps, shelters for the homeless, and from many individuals.).

[87]'L'Irlande veut secourir «l'Allemagne malheureuse»', *Libres*, 19 October 1945.

[88]'"Save the German Children Society" formed in Dublin', *Irish Times*, 17 October 1945, 1.

Although Dr Murphy responded to these sentiments at the meeting, claiming the society was intended to be explicitly apolitical and that the focus was on saving the vulnerable, the advertisement of such extreme opinion on the part of some of its members at its inception damaged its public image. A police report documented the anti-British and pro-Nazi tone of some of the comments made at the meeting and revealed that some of the society's members were associating with former German internees or were associates of IRA men.[89] Nonetheless, the *Irish Times* expressed strong support for the efforts to save German children from starvation, while decrying the overt political pronouncements of some members of the society and the hatred of Britain voiced by some attendees at its foundation. The paper's editorial observed that Germans appeared to suffer disproportionately because of an unwise Allied occupation policy, under which the innocent as well as the guilty suffered.[90] Regardless, the society's ability to fulfil its vision as a leading player in organising assistance for Germany was gravely impaired. In light of the newspaper report and the dubious connections of one or two of its founding members, the Irish authorities, the Red Cross and other voluntary organisations adopted a guarded attitude to the Save the German Children Society. The committee of the Irish Save the Children Fund moved quickly to disassociate itself from the newly formed society. It issued a statement 'so as to prevent confusion' to the effect that it was 'recognised internationally for the relief of children, irrespective of race or creed, and that it is regarded by the Red Cross as the natural channel through which money for child relief should pass'.[91] Henceforth the Save the German Children Society was relegated to playing a supporting role to other, higher profile organisations, notably the Red Cross.[92] Its political pedigree or alleged dubious associations meant it would remain suspect in the eyes of the authorities and long established NGOs, although it did continue to operate into the early 1950s and it did engage in considerable humanitarian work.

CONCLUSION

It is ironic that the Irish post-war relief effort remains largely overlooked and underexplored. This is surprising, considering the Irish public's widespread participation in aid efforts and the Irish exchequer's subvention of the relief programme. It was a complex phenomenon that defies simple explanation, but Ireland's post-war aid to European countries was represented publicly to the Irish people by Taoiseach Éamon de Valera as an appropriate policy, using 'positive neutrality' arguments: Ireland as a neutral and a Christian country had an obligation to contribute to post-war reconstruction and the creation of an improved international order.

In general, Irish policy-makers and citizens presumed ~~that~~ a neutral country was obligated to provide essential food and humanitarian supplies to defeated Germany and Austria, as well as to the nations that had been the victims of Nazi aggression and rule. This view fitted in with the approach adopted by the Swiss and Swedes ~~in the humanitarian responses~~ and served to assert a form of positive neutrality. The neutral nations believed their contributions would compensate partially for the lack of aid from the Allies to defeated nations, until the western Allies reversed their punitive policies towards the German people in 1947 and

[89]Molohan, *Germany and Ireland*, 121 n. 37.
[90]*Irish Times*, 20 October, 1945, 3.
[91]'Save the Children', *Irish Times*, 19 October 1945, 2.
[92]For a more detailed assessment, see Molohan, *Germany and Ireland*, chapter three.

1948. Of course, the demonstrative effect of these traditional neutrals galvanised the Irish. Perhaps it was a case of 'neutrality learning'?

The Irish post-war aid effort might even be termed a therapeutic neutrality performative act that would differentiate Ireland from the belligerents and retrospectively legitimise its neutrality on humanitarian grounds. The effort can be viewed through the prism of the presumed moral superiority of Irish neutrality in the face of Allied criticism that Ireland had defaulted on its responsibility as a democracy to fight Nazism. But there is more to it than just that.

Another consideration animated the Irish governmental and public responses to the humanitarian crisis that followed World War Two: 1945 marked the centenary of the commencement of the 'Great Famine', which scarred Irish collective memory. There was little by way of a national commemoration of the Famine in 1945; Irish people were unsure how to commemorate it; the tragedy was simply too enormous and recent to comfortably commemorate. But Irish aid to war-torn Europe was a form of famine commemoration, and it appears that many saw it in this light. It was also a celebration and thanksgiving for deliverance from another catastrophe, this time an unprecedented global, wholly man-made, catastrophe. In 1943 when government was considering how to alleviate the Bengal famine it was mindful of the fact that India had sent donations to Ireland nearly 100 years previously.[93] Likewise, in preparation for the June 1946 Dáil debate on the vote for a second year of the government aid programme, briefs were prepared for de Valera enumerating the gifts that Ireland received from Europe and America during the 'Great Famine' to assist in the debate.[94] The Irish memory of the 'Great Famine' was certainly an impetus for the post-war aid effort.

In sum, many factors were entangled in the instigation and sustenance of the Irish relief programme to Europe. Collective memory, nationalism, neutrality, public diplomacy, a popular humanitarian impulse, thanksgiving for surviving the war unscathed, and religion all became interwoven as Ireland contemplated a devastated Europe. The entire project was larger than a simple government programme, and it resonated with large components of the Irish population and the voluntary sector. Identity, values and self-interest each played a role.

Was Ireland in Plato's cave? Not in this respect at least. The Irish post-war aid project was and remains unprecedented in scale and national involvement in the history of Irish humanitarianism. It is paradoxical that it is not remembered. That is another riddle. It would seem to have a lot to do with the 'history wars' over the rights and wrongs of the Irish 'Emergency' and the debate over Irish post-war insularity. Yet, after their recovery, several European states and relief organisations were effusive in their praise of the broadmindedness and liberality of Irish charity after the war.

[93]NAI DT, S13373 A, Memorandum, 'Assistance from India during Famine', 10 November 1943.

[94]NAI DFA, 219/4A, Vote 72—'Alleviation of distress', Note for minister's information when replying to the debate, 19 June 1946.