

 **Article REVIEW**

Bernadette Whelan. “Ireland, the Marshall Plan, and U.S. Cold War Concerns”, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Winter 2006): 68-94.

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The Irish experience often generates vigorous research out of proportion to the size of the country, and in the last ten years a small group of Irish and British historians have rewritten much of post World War Two Irish foreign economic history. One seminal work was Bernadette Whelan’s *Ireland and the Marshall Plan, 1947-57* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), which started life as a chapter in her M.A. thesis at Cork University. This solid well-written book has stimulated a substantial literature, including edited collections by Michael Kennedy and Joseph Morrison Skelly, eds., *Irish Foreign Policy, 1919-66* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000) and Till Geiger and Michael Kennedy, eds., *Ireland, Europe and the Marshall Plan* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004). The former contains several essays on post-war Ireland, and two on the Marshall Plan and Ireland by Whelan and Till Geiger. The latter includes essays, *inter alia* written by Geiger, Kennedy, and Whelan. Since 2000, the literature has proliferated as scholars have sought unfilled niches and addressed different audiences.

In this article, Whelan’s main aim is to examine how the Marshall Plan promoted America’s anti-Communist and strategic concerns in Ireland. After briefly outlining the origins and historiography of the Marshall Plan, she examines why the United States offered to help Ireland. Initially it was doubtful that Ireland would receive aid as her wartime neutrality still rankled with the State Department. Nevertheless the U.S. and Britain wanted to draw her into the post-war economic and security system because of Ireland’s strategic location across the seaways to Europe. Britain also hoped to involve Ireland in the new international institutions to stave off a re-emergence of the anti-partition movement which opposed the 1921 division of the island of Ireland between the Irish Free State and Ulster. The Free State—henceforth Ireland—had not taken advantage of Britain’s problems during the war, and Britain supported her application to the Marshall Plan and the United Nations. Marshall Plan help for Ireland would also indirectly help the British economy by saving dollars.

The Irish government accepted the invitation to join the Marshall Plan, officially, the European Recovery Programme (ERP), but only after some debate. The Department of External Affairs was keen to accept to restore Ireland’s international reputation, and supported the implicit anti-Communist aims of the programme. The Irish Ambassador to the Vatican wrote ‘It seems to be useless to judge Russian reactions by ordinary standards’ (75). Finance on the other hand feared the ERP would divide Europe and wean Ireland away from her traditional neutrality. The Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Eamon de Valera did not think neutrality would be prejudiced, and argued Ireland needed the resources. The small Irish Communist Party opposed it—the ERP would expand U.S. imperialism and would draw Ireland into the British bloc. However Irish politicians and the public generally were reluctant to look a gift horse—especially an American one—in the mouth, and accepted the ERP for many reasons.

The ERP implicitly aimed to remake Ireland—like Europe—the American way—that is to divert energy from class war and national rivalries over fixed resources, into expanding production and consumption wherever possible, with new-world attitudes and technology. Information and propaganda had a major role in the Marshall Plan to spread this message and to defeat the left wing agenda. Ireland's strong religious tradition and weak Communist party made the threat there relatively weak. Nevertheless the U.S. was keen that Ireland should recognise the U.S. contribution, and the Irish government was prepared to help in imaginative ways. Whelan outlines some of these. The sticking point came over relations with Ulster. The U.S. (and Britain) had hoped aid would neutralize the anti-partition movement, but the more aggressive Irish politicians like Sean MacBride tried to use the free trade arguments in Marshall Plan and the Economic Co-operation Administration (ECA) theory and information programmes to attack partition, annoying the State Department and ECA.

The onset of the Cold War, rearmament, and the transformation of ECA into the Mutual Security Administration (MSA), brought the partition issue to a head in 1951. In February 1948, Ireland had elected a new harder line government. In 1949, she left the Commonwealth to become a Republic, and she was invited to join NATO, but declined, after a sharp internal debate. Politicians generally still supported U.S. policy, and in 1948 had even sent aid to help Roman Catholics in the Italian elections. The pact made strategic and ideological sense for Ireland. However, the nationalists argued, she could not formally ally with a country—Britain—that was occupying part of her territory. The U.S. reluctantly called her bluff. Truman and Acheson refused to discuss partition with visiting Irish politicians. Whelan carefully goes through the negotiations which led to the impasse. Hence Ireland was not offered arms under Mutual Aid in 1952, although the Administration tried to help where possible.

Whelan's brief account hides or finesses several disputed issues. For instance there is considerable debate about the reasons why the U.S. offered, Britain supported, and Ireland accepted Marshall Aid. Whelan in this article stresses the strategic importance of Ireland's geography to the allies. Elsewhere, however, she and other authors stress economic factors. In Ireland, as generally in Europe, the economic crisis came in 1947. Ireland had done relatively well from the closed British market during the war. Her trade, though, was threatened immediately after the war as her own imports increased, especially from the U.S., and Britain reopened her old supply sources. Normally she had paid the U.S. with dollars purchased from London in return for her payments surplus (trade plus invisible earnings, including large remittances by Irish workers in Britain) with Britain, but after the U.K. sterling crisis of 1947 this was no longer possible, and the Marshall Plan supplies filled the gap. In this sense Ireland was in the same position as many other British suppliers like Canada, the Netherlands, and Denmark who had relied on sales to the British market and British dollars to buy American goods. When the 1946 U.S. loan to Britain of \$3.75 billion (Anglo-American Financial Agreement) ran out in August 1947, they had to turn elsewhere quickly.

Whelan's conclusions in this article about the early run down, and quick end of Marshall Aid to Ireland might also be questioned. Other strategic areas such as Greece and Norway held on to their aid much longer. First Ireland's economy was so strongly linked to Britain, that her economy was lifted along with Britain's in 1949-50, following the British devaluation of sterling

in 1949, and the first effects of rearmament in 1950. Hence when Britain's Marshall aid was ended early in 1950, it was rational for the ECA to reduce Ireland's share also. From the Irish point of view therefore the cost—in lost aid—of playing the partition card had declined even though they complained bitterly. Similarly the major European governments led by Britain and France felt they had to rearm seriously from 1950 on for fear of losing U.S. support, and facing the huge Russian forces alone. Irish resources were so small however there was very little she could do to increase her own security, while she knew that in the last event the U.S. and Britain could not afford to allow her to fall into enemy hands. Ireland therefore could safely free-ride on U.S. and British security interests, however she played her domestic and partition politics. Obviously Greece and Norway were far more exposed. Fortunately from the British and American point of view the Irish anti-partitionist lobby in the U.S. which had been so troublesome post World War One was far less noisy post World War Two—the U.S. Administration could ignore it—and Ulster did not become a major issue until much later. That is how a non-Irish specialist might see it.

This article effectively brings Bernadette Whelan's work and conclusions to the attention of an important new audience. The work itself, although effectively rearranged to suit this purpose, is not entirely novel. A substantial part of this story can be found in *Ireland and The Marshall Plan, 1947-57*. The main thrust of that book, though, is on the effectiveness of the Marshall Plan in modernizing the Irish economy. Readers of this journal would probably never find the Cold War material hidden in the detail. Similarly some parts of the present article are drawn from her piece in Kennedy and Skelly, 'Integration or Isolation: Ireland and the Invitation to join the Marshall Plan'. In a few cases whole paragraphs have been pasted across. From the purist's point of view, it would have been better in these cases if she had varied the text more, even if the substance had remained the same. In conclusion, this article introduces a valuable new angle on the Cold War for readers of this journal who are unlikely to search exclusively Irish sources.

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