

## THE U.S. LOSES THE IRISH SWEEPSTAKES

In a display that would warm the heart of a leprechaun, the House of Representatives interrupted its regular business on March 11 and passed by voice vote a bill authorizing the expenditure of a quarter of a billion dollars for economic and social reconstruction and development--in Northern Ireland, an integral part of the United Kingdom. Under the orchestration of Speaker Tip O'Neill (D-MA), this newest scheme to send American tax dollars abroad sailed through the House with hardly a dissenting voice, just in time for the St. Patrick's Day visit to Washington of the Prime Minister of Ireland (who made Tip an honorary citizen of the Emerald Isle).

The issue is expected to be considered in early April in the Senate, where Senators Edward Kennedy (D-MA), Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY), and Claiborne Pell (D-RI) are co-sponsoring a Senate version of the bill that passed the House.

The proposal to send foreign aid to Ireland is related to the Anglo-Irish Agreement signed last November 15 by Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher of Great Britain and Garret Fitzgerald of the Republic of Ireland. The two governments pledged to work together to settle the political strife in Northern Ireland. They will cooperate in promoting the economic and social development of those areas of Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic that have suffered most from the instability of recent years. The two governments hope to "secure international support for this work."

Ronald Reagan immediately announced his support of the agreement and promised to "find tangible ways for the United States to lend practical support." That apparently meant money. The U.K. and Ireland set up an International Fund for Reconciliation and Development, for which they obtained "expressions of interest" from the European Community, Australia, and Canada. Whether those countries actually will put up cash, and how much, remains to be seen. But the Administration did not delay in preparing a proposal for U.S. government assistance.

The Administration proposal calls for a U.S. contribution of \$250 million over five years, of which \$20 million a year, or a total of \$100 million, would be cash. The \$150 million balance in the Administration bill would be in the form of housing loan guarantees and other credit support. However, after hearing strong appeals from Speaker O'Neill and Majority Whip Thomas Foley (D-WA), Chairman Dante Fascell (D-FL) of the House Foreign Affairs Committee introduced his own bill giving \$50 million in cash to the Anglo-Irish fund for each of the next five years. The Fascell Bill sailed through the Foreign Affairs Committee and the full House with virtually no debate.

However commendable the Anglo-Irish accord may be, the economic and social problems of Northern Ireland and the adjoining areas of the Irish Republic are the responsibility of the British and Irish governments, not the American taxpayer. Britain and Ireland are not impoverished Third World countries; indeed, they are members of the Common Market. This proposal to provide funds for economic and social development in an industrialized foreign land is a departure from the basic concept of foreign aid, which is to help underdeveloped countries with low per capita incomes.

The U.S. already is the single largest investor in Northern Ireland. Two dozen U.S. companies have plants or operations there, including General Motors, Ford Motor Company, United Technologies, and American Brands. The U.S. Air Force has a \$300 million contract with the Short Aircraft Company of Belfast for NATO support work.

With only about two million people in the area covered by the fund, \$250 million in cash seems especially generous in the Gramm-Rudman era of widespread budget cuts and huge federal deficits. But what is most disturbing is that a conservative administration would agree to a whole new concept of foreign aid--international social experimentation in industrialized countries, to be paid for by the U.S.

Is this really a payoff to Margaret Thatcher for supporting the Strategic Defense Initiative? If so, Britain's support is not worth a \$250 million giveaway. Is it in part conscience money for John DeLorean's failed auto plant in Northern Ireland? Let's hope not. DeLorean's activities are not the responsibility of the American taxpayer. Or is it just another election year political handout, this time to win the support of American voters of Irish descent?

Whatever the reason for this virtually unprecedented extension of foreign aid to advanced, industrial nations, the Senate should remember the American taxpayer and the budget deficit when it votes on the Anglo-Irish aid bill.

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