



Coming to America: how Dev



Éamon de Valera's 18-month tour of the US acted as a catalyst for international support for Ireland's cause, writes **Gessica Cosi**

The establishment of Dáil Éireann in January 1919 brought a renewed focus on international recognition of the Irish Republic. From Gloucester Prison earlier that month, Arthur Griffith had exhorted the new assembly to concentrate above all "on the post-World War One peace conference at Versailles. He highlighted the significance of America and Irish America for the settlement of the Irish question.

His vision demonstrated how, by 1919, the domestic, international and diaspora-related aspects of the struggle for Irish independence had become crucially intertwined. This was reflected in the organisation of an embryonic foreign service and, a few months later — once it became clear that the case of Ireland would not be heard in Paris — in the reorientation of Irish foreign policy towards the United States.

In June, Éamon de Valera, president of the council of ministers of the self-proclaimed Irish Republic, landed in New York for a tour designed to achieve international recognition and to finance Ireland's young institutions. He travelled for 18 months across 36 states, addressing numerous legislatures and speaking before varied American and Irish American platforms. The mission acted as a catalyst for broader international support for Ireland's cause.

De Valera seized on the concept of 'Americanism' as the promotion of universal values of liberty and democracy. He frequently recalled the principle of self-determination as invoked by president Woodrow Wilson for the development of a new post-war international order and indicated its application to Ireland would be a real 'test' of the US values of liberty and democracy.

At the same time, he tried to reconcile such moral and idealistic messages with practical considerations concerning the financial and political potential of the Irish in the United States. On many occasions, he strategically recalled their American patriotism and loyalty while offering them a specific role in achieving Ireland's independence.

This was a vision shared by other prominent nationalists including Harry Boland and Michael Collins who, by early 1920, had

discussed the possibility of establishing a "worldwide organisation" directly controlled from Dublin.

Both in Ireland and in America, however, the reflections on a 'Greater Ireland' were profoundly interlinked with other political themes including the rising of violence at home, the attitude towards emigration and, in particular, the role of Irish leaders to represent Irish agenda abroad. The latter would create the most delicate task for De Valera in America.

During the American campaign, Ireland's ties with the diaspora were affected by the complex interactions with the dominant Irish American organisations such as Clan na Gael and the Friends of Irish Freedom, which had traditionally claimed the right to 'speak' on behalf of Ireland. They had a growing perception of De Valera's presence as interference in Irish-American domestic affairs, and the mission was beset by growing tensions and ideological differences between de Valera and the leaders of

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the bond drive campaign and their different approach towards American politics.

The tensions came into the open in February 1920 after de Valera's controversial interview with the *Westminster Gazette* where he referred to the relations between Cuba and the US as a possible model for Britain and Ireland. Devoy and Cohalan feared this would strengthen the British empire.

These frictions reached a climax with the foundation of a new organisation, the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic in November. Designed to promote the 'democratisation'

of the American movement, John Devoy and Daniel F Cohalan.

Distinct Irish and Irish American perspectives and agendas were projected into the ideological, political and organisational arenas in which de Valera and the Irish American leaders interacted, including the organisation of the tours, the management of



of the existing organisations, the association openly challenged the New York-based leadership of the Friends of Irish Freedom, reinforcing the role of individual 'state units', a move that indirectly fostered a 'devolution' of power back to Ireland.

De Valera reflected Ireland's image of the diaspora at the time. In April that year, on behalf of the Irish Republican Brotherhood supreme council, Collins had explained that the Irish in Ireland looked at an international organisation "having the purely Irish aspect as the first object" of its existence. He later clarified that this simply

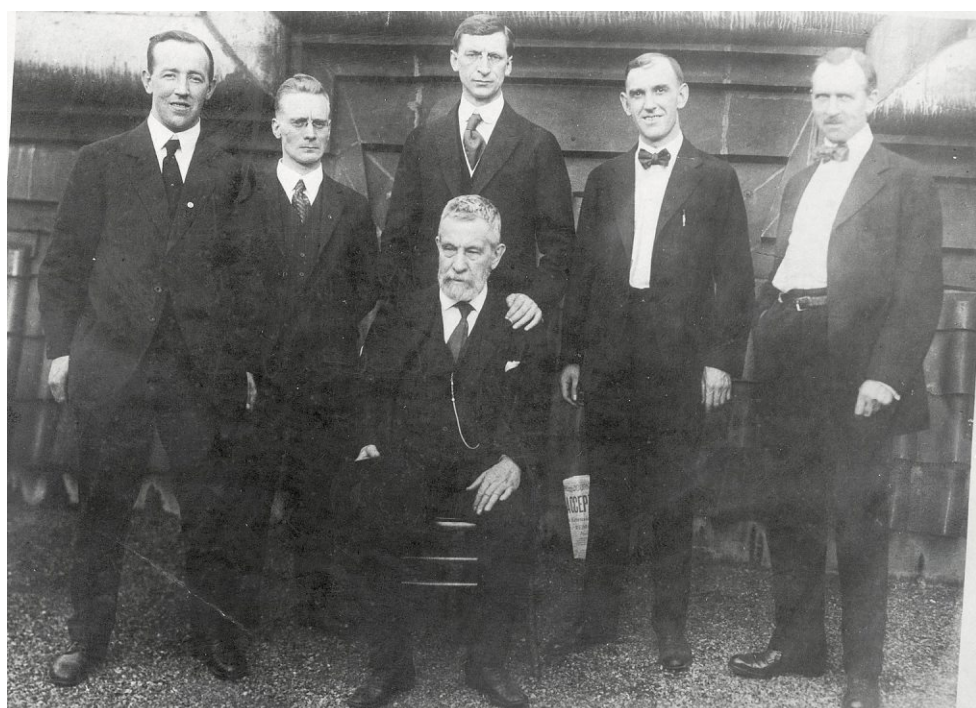
meant "direction from Ireland".

The American campaign also acted as a catalyst for establishing broader transnational connections within the Irish diaspora. Throughout 1920, the American mission assumed a strategic role in the 'co-ordination of Irish opinion' abroad. De Valera remarked on the promotion of Irish affairs in places such as Canada, Australia and South America.

The tensions between de Valera and the Irish American leaders in 1919-20 resurfaced at the Irish Race Congress in January 1922, when delegates from 21 countries



harnessed the Irish diaspora



Clockwise from above: republicans Harry Boland, Liam Mellows, Éamon de Valera, Patrick McCartan and Diarmuid Lynch with John Devoy (seated) in the US in 1919 or 1920; de Valera in Los Angeles; with two US soldiers; and in a Native American headdress.



gathered in Paris to discuss the diaspora's political, cultural and economic contribution to the cause of independence.

The presence of multiple agendas and expectations within the different Irish communities abroad contributed to a constant reassessment of Ireland's diasporic connections during the War of Independence.

The support of the Irish diaspora was reaffirmed through fundraising missions, propaganda and lobbying. It was an essential pillar of Ireland's campaign for international recognition from 1919 to early 1922.

The stalemate at Irish Race Congress in



1922 and its republican trajectory, the issue of direction and, in particular, the Treaty split would force a temporary disengagement of Irish political discourse from diaspora affairs. There was a shift of attention towards a complex domestic situation that reached its climax during the Civil War.

● *Dr Gessica Cosi's doctoral thesis at UCD was titled 'Atlantic Connections: Éamon de Valera, the United States and Irish America, 1917-1921'. She is a former visiting fellow at the UCD Clinton Institute and UCD School of History*

Éamon de Valera: 'English propaganda will no longer have here the fertile field for its seeds of falsehood'

From 'Éamon de Valera Private Correspondence', UCD Archives
December 28, 1919

From the Waldorf-Astoria, New York
My darling wife, I spent 24, 25, 26th with mother — but it was by no means the private visit I had hoped it would be. There was good work of a public character to be done and so I spent most of the time doing it. It was however a consolation seeing that I could not be at my own home to be at mother's.

I was thinking of you and the children all the time — It was I know lonely for you. Three Xmas's absent out of four is a big proportion. Please God it will not be our fate to be separated the coming Christmas.

I am making Washington DC my headquarters as I write to you and letters should be addressed to me there. Put two envelopes on — on the outside one "Personal" and on the inner — "Private from Mrs de Valera". That will ensure that it will come to me without being opened by a secretary.

As you have said in your letters the greatest privation is to be unable to correspond freely.

Mother was anxious to know if Dr Lalor gave you the photos of my early days. I have one in which I look very like Ruaidhrí. By the way, Joe McGarrity, one of the best Irishmen in America, has a young son — I am to be godfather and the question is what name. I am against saddling a child with a "Christian" name DeValera and suggested Ruaidhrí in memory of a great friend of his whom our Ruaidhrí commemorates.

Everything is going as well for Ireland as could be expected here. If we can organize so as to make effective all the forces in our favour I



An order form for phonograph records of speeches by Éamon de Valera.

PHOTO: UCD/OFM PARTNERSHIP

Inset below: a photo of the original of Dev's letter to his wife Sinéad from the Waldorf Astoria. PHOTO: UCD ARCHIVES

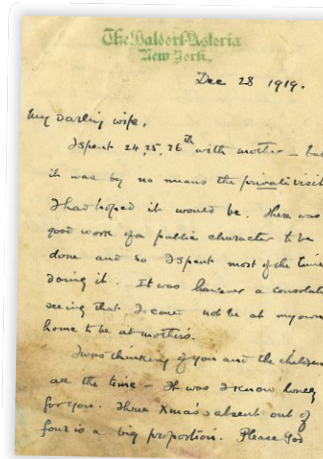
am confident that all we desire here can be accomplished. I have seen men and women old and young in tears

— tears of emotion because they have seen the day when the people of Ireland have boldly proclaimed what they had secretly hoped for so long.

English propaganda will no longer have here the fertile field for its seeds of falsehood. English imperial selfishness is apparent to all now, and the war necessity of blinding themselves to the obvious is removed.

I will be thinking of you particularly on the 8th.

Love of my heart to the children. Remember I will not be an hour away from you longer than is necessary.
DeV.



Middle man: Eamon de Valera (circled) travelled for 18 months across 36 states, addressing numerous legislatures and speaking before varied American and Irish American platforms

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