

Ireland and the End of the British Empire: The Republic and Its Role in the Cyprus Emergency

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In April 2004, in the weeks leading up to the referendum on the Annan Plan, numerous events were held across Cyprus to discuss the relative merits and, more usually, drawbacks of the proposals for the island's reunification. One of these events, which took place in Nicosia, involved the then Irish Ambassador to Cyprus. Like many other European Union diplomats based on the island at the time, he openly supported the Plan. He therefore used the opportunity to call on people to vote 'Yes' in the forthcoming poll. At the end of his speech, a Greek Cypriot man got up from his seat and launched in to a full scale condemnation of the ambassador's position. In doing so, he uttered an immortal line. In all seriousness, he asked the ambassador what he could possibly know about conflict and division. The rest of the audience was left utterly dumbfounded. It simply defied belief that anyone could have made such a comment. Indeed, it was almost impossible to quite take in what had just been said. If anything, most Greek Cypriots were more than aware of the apparent commonalities shared by the two islands. Indeed, to most Greek Cypriots, it is almost as though the people of Cyprus and Ireland are spiritual kin.

Against this backdrop, it is perhaps surprising that there has been remarkably little written on the relationship between Cyprus and Ireland. Certainly, there are those who have sought to cast a comparative eye on the countries' respective conflicts. However, few have investigated bilateral ties between them. In truth, as 'Ireland and the End of the British Empire' shows, the relationship between the two countries is based on more than simply a shared sense of grievance. Rather, it has been shaped by very real encounters. In this light, this book is an important effort to correct this by examining the part played by Ireland and the Irish at one of the most crucial periods of modern Cypriot history – the 1955-59 EOKA uprising against British colonial rule.

One of the most interesting aspects of the book is the way that it takes a rather different approach to the subject matter than one might usually expect. Typically, such books would tend to take a broadly chronological approach. Ireland's reactions to the events taking place in Cyprus would have been traced in a fairly linear manner. However, this book instead adopts a thematic approach. In doing so, it feels more like an edited volume than a single authored work. While this could seem rather disjointed in some

situations, in this case it works rather well. It allows the author to explore a range of themes and topics with the range of detail that they deserve, but because it is written by a single author there is a single voice and a welcome evenness in terms of quality. It is also excellent inasmuch as it allows the author to truly reveal the wonderful range of oddities and paradoxes in the story.

Chapter 1 sets the stage by examining the way in which Ireland and Cyprus interacted from the start of British colonial rule, in 1878, through to the start of the EOKA rebellion. Thereafter, the book develops a number of themes. From the very start, one is confronted with a fundamental contradiction that lies at the heart of the relationship. For while many Cypriots have long sympathised with the Irish, few realise just what an important role Irishmen, and occasionally Irishwomen, played in the colonial administration. This is brought out very strongly in the book. Indeed, it seems as though British rule on the island was a rather Irish affair. And yet, over in Ireland itself, there was clear sympathy for the efforts of the Greek Cypriots to divest themselves of British rule. But then again, many Irish officials and members of the Irish establishment were rather more sympathetic towards, or at least uncritical of, British actions in Cyprus.

This sympathy is emphasised very well in Chapter 2, which explores the way in which the Irish press responded to the uprising. The chapter also notes a rather fascinating ambivalence of the Irish. On the one hand, they understood and supported the wish of the Greek Cypriots to be rid of British rule. However, the support many Irish may have had towards Cyprus was also tempered by a deep aversion towards Communism amongst many deeply Catholic Irish, so much so that at the early stages of the crisis there were even suggestions that Britain should retain control in order to see off the 'Red Menace'. What is particularly interesting is that the growth in Irish sympathy towards the Cypriots as the EOKA campaign wore on was actually down to the British press. As is shown, many people in Britain, were also deeply opposed to British colonialism. This was reflected in parts of the British media, which were widely accessible in Ireland. It was critical British media coverage that in many instances fed Irish criticism of British policy.

Chapter 3 looks at how Irish republicanism viewed the campaign to end British rule. Here an interesting story emerges concerning the very high degree of cooperation that developed between EOKA and the Irish Republican Army (IRA). However, this did not develop because either of them went looking for the other. Instead, it was inadvertently fostered by London after it decided to start sending EOKA fighters to jails in Britain. Also, while one might expect that EOKA learned a lot from the IRA, in fact, it seems to have been the other way around. EOKA, under George Grivas, drew on the experience of anti-Nazi resistance in Greece during the Second World War. In many ways, this was even more formidable than the IRA's experience of fighting Britain – something

recognised by the Irish. However, while the Irish Republicanism was building up strong links to Greek Cypriot fighters, the attitude of the Catholic Church was rather different. As is shown in Chapter 4, the Catholic Church remained distinctly unsupportive of the Greek Cypriots. This was in part down to the antipathy between Catholicism and Orthodoxy. However, it was also shaped by a deep concern about AKEL's strength. There was a view that if Cyprus and Greece united, they would fall to Communism. And if Greece and Cyprus fell to Communism, then Italy would follow. Instead, it was actually the Church of Ireland, the branch of the Church of England in Ireland, which expressed far greater public criticism of the British policy in Cyprus. It seems hard to believe that it was therefore more in line with popular Irish sentiment on Cyprus than the Catholic Church.

The next two chapters explore the ways in which Ireland approached Cyprus on the international stage. Chapter 5 takes a look at how it responded to efforts to bring the matter of Cypriot self-determination before the United Nations. As is shown, at first Ireland took a very cautious approach to discussions on Cyprus – not least of all due to its exceptionally Anglophile representative at the UN. However, as time continued, the temptation to use Cyprus as a means to open up discussions about the partition of Ireland became just too great, especially after a change of government in Ireland in 1957. Nevertheless, its position was more moderate than many may have expected. Following on from this, Chapter 6 looks at the how Dublin addressed the Cyprus question within the context of the Council of Europe. This may sound a rather obscure angle to explore until one realises that, following Ireland's exit from the Commonwealth in 1949, this was Ireland's only outlet for international multilateral engagement until it joined the UN in December 1955. Here again, a fascinating tale emerges as Ireland's two delegates to the Council held rather different positions. One was broadly balanced in his views towards Britain. The other was vehemently Republican and staunchly anti-British. This became important inasmuch as the Council became heavily involved in examining allegations of human rights abuses by the British colonial authorities in Cyprus.

Finally, the last two chapters take a closer look at the role played by Irishmen on the island at the time. Chapter 7 explores the part they played in the Colonial Legal Service. Once again, this produces some very surprising and unexpected insights. For example, both of the Chief Justices of Cyprus during the Emergency were from Catholic Irish families. The first of these, Sir Eric Hallinen, oversaw the trial of the first Cypriot to be tried and executed. Meanwhile, the second death sentence handed down was by a Judge Shaw – a cousin of the famous Irish playwright, George Bernard Shaw. Understandably, Greek Cypriots found very it very hard to reconcile this with popular Irish sympathy for their cause. Lastly, Chapter 8 explores Irish involvement in the British counter-insurgency efforts. Through a series of examples, the author shows how

Irish soldiers serving in the British Army, both Protestant and Catholic, came to play an important part in the fight against EOKA. Indeed, the exile of Archbishop Makarios to the Seychelles was planned and implemented by an Irish RAF officer.

Overall, the author has done a marvellous job in outlining the Irish involvement in the Cyprus Emergency. The book is meticulously researched and full of wonderful and surprising pieces of information and anecdotes. Most importantly, the degree to which Ireland and the Irish were involved in Cyprus during the period, and the often astounding paradoxes and contradictions that this created, are brilliantly brought to the fore. As is shown, in many instances, Irish views on Cyprus were not just fed by anti-British sentiment, but, given the close cultural ties that existed between the United Kingdom and Ireland, drew on strong criticism of British policy expressed in Britain itself. Meanwhile, elsewhere, there were many instances where Anglophile tendencies reduced the degree of official criticism of Britain. The book simultaneously confirms the view that many Greek Cypriots have of the Irish as natural sympathisers. And yet it manages to convey the extent to which the British colonial rule in Cyprus was so strongly influenced by so many Irish. Overall, this is a fascinating and absolutely excellent addition to the historiography of Cyprus. And Ireland.

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