

America and the Irish revolution

Anton Chaitkin outlines the joint projects of both countries' nationalists for a peace-winning economic strategy.

The people of Northern Ireland gave President Bill Clinton a tumultuous reception on his historic peacemaking visit there Nov. 30. They waved American flags in thanks for the U.S. effort to stop decades of brutal oppression and chaotic killing. Britain's occupation of Ireland's northeastern six counties rests largely on the claim that Irish Protestant-loyalists and Irish Catholic-republicans will murder each other unless British troops restrain them. Peace between the Irish factions will inevitably undermine the British position and doom the "United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland."

President Clinton has been completely even-handed, and peace inherently favors the hopes of the nationalists, prompting the furious London *Daily Mail* to lecture President Clinton that Ireland is "None of your damn business!" But contrary to that tabloid's view of the matter, Irish and American patriots have always seen their two countries as sharing a common fate, in a common struggle against the British Empire. As a contribution to the peace process, we shall outline here the unique role of the American and Irish *nationalists* in securing the national existence of the U.S.A., and of Ireland. The history of their joint projects contains some good lessons, particularly as it points toward an economic strategy that is vital for the success of a stable peace.

Franklin, Carey, and the Irish revolution

America's senior political leader, Benjamin Franklin, visited Ireland in 1771, four years before the American Revolution began. Franklin was working for an alliance that could stand up against the British, who then governed Ireland as a conquered territory. He wrote that he found the Irish patriots "to be friends of America, in which I endeavored to confirm them, with the expectation that our growing weight might in time be thrown into their scale, and, by joining our interests with others, a more equitable treatment from [the English] might be obtained for them as well as for us.'"1

Contrary to the imperial "free market" dogma, Franklin outlined the protective policy that American and Irish leaders would follow to unite farmers and city dwellers and create national power independent of Britain:

"Every manufacturer encouraged in a country makes part of a market for provisions within ourselves, and saves so much money to the country, as must otherwise be exported to pay for the manufactures he supplies. . . . [W]herever a

manufacture is established which employs a number of hands, it raises the value of land in the neighboring country all around it. It seems, therefore, the interest of our farmers and owners of land to encourage our young manufacturers in preference to foreign ones."²

A young Irish Catholic, Mathew Carey (1760-1839), was hired in 1775 by the patriotic Dublin paper *Hibernian Journal*. The American Revolution began that year, when British forces invaded Massachusetts, and the *Hibernian Journal* called for British government officials to be tried as murderous criminals. Benjamin Franklin, moving to France in December 1776, sought money, arms and allies for the Revolution. In November 1778, the *Hibernian Journal* published an open letter from Franklin to the Irish people, showing that America and Ireland had a common cause against the British. Irish patriots were by then arming and drilling in the "Volunteers" movement, under the pretext that they would defend the country from the threat of invasion by France, America's ally! The Irish nationalists emulated America's non-importation associations, boycotting British goods and pledging to wear only Irish-made clothes.

The British oligarchy's senior intelligence expert, Lord Shelburne, wrote from Ireland that he found "all classes more animated about America than in England. In every Protestant or Dissenter's house the established toast is success to the Americans."³ Shelburne was informed that trade had opened up between northern Ireland and the American rebels, and that the Irish had arranged with Franklin to deal with them as America's ambassador on matters of mutual interest and support.⁴ Shelburne's Whig party was saying in Parliament that the rebellious Irish were in correspondence with the Americans, that they had made a treaty with "the Arch-Rebel Franklin."⁵

The Volunteers had 100,000 men under arms by the end of 1779. But these were almost all Protestants. British rule forbade Irish Catholics (the majority) to own weapons, to hold public office, to own land or to speak out against their condition. The Catholic Church submitted meekly, while the Protestants' British-nurtured suspicion of their Catholic countrymen undermined the nationalist effort.

Acting to bridge the gap, young Mathew Carey now wrote, anonymously, "The Urgent Necessity of an Immediate Repeal of the Whole Penal Code against the Roman Cath-

olics." On Nov. 11, 1779, a bold advertisement appeared in various Dublin papers, headlined "An Appeal to the Roman Catholics of Ireland," showing the title page of the anonymous pamphlet which was to be published the next day. Leaflets were distributed throughout Dublin and were stuck on the doors of churches and cafés.

In this explosive situation, a reward was put out for the identification and arrest of the dangerous rebel author. Carey went into hiding, and then fled to France. He had a letter of introduction to a Paris priest, who brought him to Benjamin Franklin, and Carey now went to work printing American revolutionary literature in Franklin's headquarters at Passy. Carey was interviewed by General Lafayette about the Irish readiness to receive a Franco-American invasion of the British Isles.

American commander George Washington issued General Orders in March 1780, directing a day of rest for his army on St. Patrick's day to celebrate "the very interesting proceedings of the Parliament of Ireland, and of the inhabitants of that country . . . [who aim] to remove those heavy and tyrannical oppressions on their trade, [and] to restore to a *Brave and Generous People*, their ancient Rights and Freedom, and by their operation, promote the cause of America."⁶

Carey returned to Ireland in late 1780, and began editing the *Freeman's Journal* in 1781. Carey's pro-American paper was the main outlet for the Volunteers. In December 1781, as soon as the news hit Ireland of the British surrender at Yorktown, the Volunteers called for a delegated meeting of the whole movement to occur in Dungannon on Feb. 15, 1782. At this meeting the Volunteers issued resolutions for an independent Irish parliament and for the repeal of the penal laws against Roman Catholics.

One suspicious Anglican bishop saw the guiding hand of Franklin in the Protestant-Catholic rapprochement. He said of the Dungannon pronouncement, "If it had more of violence and passion, I should fear it less. It partakes the coolness of my late acquaintance, Dr. Franklin, and I am persuaded was not penned at Dungannon. The resolutions relative to Papists never originated there."⁷

Within two months, the armed Volunteers movement was in control of the Irish situation. Viscount Hillsborough, British Secretary of State for the southern department, wrote on March 12, 1782 to British intelligence official William Eden: "Your cursed Volunteers, and Patriots have alarmed us here very much. . . . That infamous Franklin by his agents is certainly attempting mischief in Ireland."⁸ The British government resigned a week later, March 20, 1782. A new government under Lord Shelburne negotiated peace with the Americans and granted an independent parliament to Ireland.

Mathew Carey now created and published a new paper representing the nationalist movement, called *Volunteers Journal or Irish Herald*. In line with Franklin's views, the paper set forth the program of national sponsorship for the

development of manufacturing, through which to "complete the emancipation of our country from domestic and external slavery." Britain, he wrote, had gained prosperity and power by "protecting [industries] against external competition" and had excluded "from her ports all those manufactures whose introduction might depress and injure her own."⁹

This Franklin-Carey program was adopted during the brief rebirth of Ireland's freedom. The newly independent Irish legislature enacted tariffs to stop British trade war, put the garment factories back into business by making credit available, and offered bonuses for new inventions. Canals were begun to move Irish commerce; an Irish postal system was created; the publishing industry started up in earnest and the publishing of Classical music and serious literature was encouraged. State control over the grain market favored the farmers. Restrictions on Catholic landholding were repealed.

But British police-state measures never let up. Mathew Carey became an Irish national hero after his 1784 arrest for sedition. Indicted for high treason, Carey was able to flee to America. He settled in Ben Franklin's Philadelphia, and started as a publisher under the sponsorship of Washington and Lafayette.

By 1801 the British had crushed Irish resistance; the nation was juridically erased in the Act of Union creating the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Over succeeding decades Britain closed Ireland's factories and reduced the people to penury and starvation.

The second Irish revolution

In Philadelphia, Mathew Carey went on to become the great shaper of American nationalist politics. He revived the protectionist polemics of his mentor Franklin and Franklin's ally Alexander Hamilton, after the free trade faction had blocked the Founding Fathers' first attempts at industrializing the country. Mathew Carey's "Pennsylvania school" economics writings instructed the statesman Henry Clay. Carey, Clay, and Carey's German protégé Friedrich List were the policymaking leadership that promoted the government sponsorship of canals, railroads and manufacturing, from the 1820s through the 1840s. Mathew Carey's son, Henry C. Carey (1793-1879), became much more famous: His books instructed the Japanese, the Russians, and Americans including the nationalist, Abraham Lincoln. As President, Lincoln reversed the earlier free trade policy disaster of Presidents Pierce and Buchanan, and enacted the Carey program for government creation of industry and infrastructure.

Henry Carey became a venerated American figure, with a circle of fiercely loyal allies extending from Philadelphia industry and scientific circles into politics, diplomacy, the military, and trade unions.

In the 1870s—100 years after his father had joined the Irish nationalists—Henry Carey took responsibility for reviving and shaping the Irish movement. A Philadelphia apostle of Carey's, the Irish Protestant physician William Carroll,

took the assignment on behalf of the Carey grouping to manage the Irish revolutionary underground. Dr. Carroll was chairman of the executive board of the Clan na Gael or “Fenians” in the United States and Ireland from 1875 to 1880. Other Carey allies helped to lead the movement, men such as Knights of Labor chief Terence V. Powderly, and University of Pennsylvania economics professor Robert Ellis Thompson.

As a crisis developed pitting Russian against British interests in the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean, Carey’s nationalists worked to bring Russia and the U.S.A. into a war to finish off the British Empire, which included an Irish uprising. They built warships for the Russian Navy in Philadelphia, negotiated with Russian and other European officials, and shipped money and weapons into Ireland. The Clan na Gael “skirmishing fund” paid Irish immigrant inventor John Holland to build prototype submarines to make war on British ships; later the U.S. Navy hired Holland to build its first battle submarines.

Dr. Carroll wrote to a colleague in 1876, calling for a meeting “to immediately prepare a plan of operations. 10,000 men should be enlisted and drilled here. No. 2 should be authorised to get the men at—in readiness with the least possible delay. We could then send in our men by detachments as ‘friends returning to see their relatives,’ etc. Arrangements must be made for seizing the strongholds there. We must also provide means of introducing arms. I will see No. 2 on Sunday, and settle all details. . . .”¹⁰

Dr. Carroll toured Ireland and England clandestinely in 1878. He reunited the 20,000 members of the underground Irish nationalist movement, who had split into three squabbling factions. The Careyite leadership proposed to revive the movement with a program “such . . . as the movement has not had since the days of Mathew Carey. That is—‘The right of Ireland . . . to protect her people in securing the fruits of their toil agricultural, commercial and manufacturing. . . .’ We should . . . show Irish and Americans what Henry C. Carey laboured to show them, that until Ireland and America protect their manufacturing and other industries against English tyranny and monopoly the work inaugurated here in 1776 is but half completed, if that half, even, is not ultimately lost by allowing England to reign an absolute despot over the industries of the two countries—Ireland and America.”¹¹

Allies of Henry Carey pressed on in the leadership of the Irish freedom movement after his death, persisting in the 1880s and 1890s even after much of the U.S. policymaking establishment became subservient to British Empire strategy objectives. They built up new organizations and coalitions, uniting Irish-Americans to Ireland’s cause, until an Irish advocate of Carey’s ideas, Arthur Griffith, founded the Sinn Fein movement in 1902. Arthur Griffith proposed to throw off British rule and rebuild Ireland with the Carey program: State-controlled finance and State-sponsored industrial de-

velopment to achieve self-sufficiency in manufacturing. Sinn Fein founded the Irish Free State in 1921, and Griffith was Ireland’s first President until his death in 1922.

Griffith wrote: “Adam Smith[’s] . . . *Wealth of Nations* was . . . the best example of a subtle scheme for English world-conquest . . . under the guise of an essay on political economy. . . . [The free trade] doctrines of Adam Smith were sedulously promoted [in other countries] by England. . . . The Secret Service money of England was lavished . . . on [foreign] journalists and . . . theorists to influence them to advocate opening [their] . . . ports to English products. . . .

“Frederich List . . . fell under the influence of the two Irishmen, Carey, whose ideas, incorporating with his own, formed the foundation of his doctrine of National Economy, on which modern Germany is built. . . . [Mathew Carey’s] famous son, Henry Carey, elaborated the doctrine of Protection which the United States adopted in opposition to the doctrine of Smith. Henry Carey is the author of the United States as England’s commercial rival. . . . Modern Germany and modern America—England’s political rivals and commercial competitors—are the creation of List and Carey.”¹²

Now Arthur Griffith’s political successor, Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams, has been President Bill Clinton’s main partner in the Irish peace process. It is therefore well worth quoting from President Clinton’s Nov. 30 address to the people of Derry, Ireland: “Pennsylvania [was] a colony unique in the new world because it was based on the principle of religious tolerance,” he told them. “Philadelphia . . . became the main port of entry for immigrants from the north of Ireland, who made the Protestant and Catholic traditions valuable parts of our treasured traditions in America. Today . . . [we are reminded of] the phrase, that Americans established in Philadelphia, as the motto of our nation, *E Pluribus Unum*—out of many, one.”

Notes

1. Franklin to Thomas Cushing, Jan. 13, 1772, quoted in Maurice R. O’Connell, *Irish Politics and Social Conflict in the Age of the American Revolution*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965, pp. 25-26.
2. Quoted in Robert Ellis Thompson, *Social Science and National Economy*, 1875, reprinted as *Elements of Political Economy*. . . , New York: Garland Publishing Co., 1974, pp. 242-3.
3. Shelburne to Richard Price, Sept. 5, 1779, quoted in Maurice R. O’Connell, op. cit., p. 124.
4. *ibid.*, p. 191.
5. *ibid.*, p. 197.
6. Quoted in *The Pennsylvania Packet*, March 30, 1780.
7. Dr. Woodward, The Bishop of Cloyne, quoted in O’Connell, pp. 322-323.
8. *ibid.*, p. 325.
9. *Volunteers Journal*, Dec. 29, 1783, in the National Library of Ireland.
10. William Carroll to John Devoy, in *Devoy’s Post Bag*, Dublin, C.J. Fallon, Ltd., 1948, Vol. 1, p. 207.
11. William Carroll to John Devoy, May 11, 1880, *ibid.*, pp. 525-526.
12. Arthur Griffith, *The Resurrection of Hungary: A Parallel for Ireland*, Dublin, Whelan and Son, 1918, pp. 122, 124, 126.