

## **The Irish in Latin American Politics, Government and Diplomacy**

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Guest Editors

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The activities of the Irish and their descendents in Latin America has been studied on the basis of their commercial, professional, religious and military pursuits. Although these areas are important, they also made a significant contribution in political participation. This goes some way in explaining the level of cohesion that they had or sought to enjoy in receiving countries, particularly in Argentina, the country with the greatest number of Irish migrants in the region. Political participation implied participating and mixing, associating themselves with and taking an active part in the public life of the community. Therefore, in a strict sense, political participation refers to situations in which the individual contributes directly or indirectly to a political situation (Sani 1983: 1181). It is important to take into account that politics is not solely confined to participation along formal or strictly electoral channels but rather also by other methods.

However, it should be noted that foreigners in general were reluctant to participate in politics, and it is probable that one of the causes has been the limited political space that the State grants to immigrants - and their own disinterest in enjoying political rights through naturalisation. The majority of sending countries take away nationality from people who adopt a new one. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento maintained that immigrants not only decided to remain isolated from political life, but a common feature was “the systematic abstention of foreigners from taking part in social life” (Cúneo et al 1967: 72). (2) Sergio Kiernan argues in relation to the low level of naturalisations that the “first generation was so reluctant to become Argentine that it attracted the ire of President Sarmiento, who wrote article after article damning the Irish as ungrateful” (Kiernan 2004). It is noteworthy that today for some

descendents their Irish identity is worth more than their Argentine one.

At any rate, as maintained above, the electoral route is not the only form of political participation, as, from the final third of the nineteenth century, foreigners claimed and defended their interests through alternative political channels to voting, such as the press, community associations and public demonstrations (Sabato 1998). In this sense, we can observe in the articles presented here how the Irish played an active role in the political life of Latin American receiving countries.

The majority of Irish people arrived between forty and fifty years before the onset of mass immigration between 1880 and 1914. As well as the circumstances that favoured their arrival before the great migratory flows, the Irish community was quantitatively smaller compared to the others. However, in the case of Argentina, their insertion into the most dynamic sector of the economy of the time was a vital activity, on the basis of which a limited number of people made great profits, and gained prestige in the life of the new country. Nevertheless, their political intervention pointed to how Irish migration was still an isolated case. Preliminary research allows us to affirm that both the Irish and their descendents were involved in numerous political events, within a broad ideological range. Among the most emblematic personalities were Guillermo Brown, the founder of the Argentine Navy; Edelmiro Farrell, president of Argentina; and the revolutionary Ernesto (Che) Guevara Lynch de la Serna, to name but a few. It is interesting to highlight that the military were present in one manner or another in politics, albeit from different places and with different objectives.

In Argentina the Irish had their own political party, the Admiral Brown Club, founded by Dean Dillon and others in 1884, with the objective of occupying a place in the Senate. The same Dillon had created a newspaper, *The Southern Cross*, which, together with community objectives, also reflected the political situation in Ireland and Argentina, and played a significant role during the process of independence on the island. (3) The editorial line of that newspaper maintained this characteristic of a “political tribune”. Although over the years it changed its ideological content, the imprint left by Dillon from the first edition remained. Apart from this particular experience, the main Argentine political parties had both Irish men and Irish women in their ranks, occupying elected positions as well as participating in uprisings and insurrections. (4)

Argentina was the country with the greatest number of Irish migrants in Latin America, though this is not to say that they were not important in other countries where they were also involved in local politics. One of these was Juan O'Donohue y O'Ryan, from Seville but of Irish origin, selected as the last Viceroy of New Spain. (5) In the same location, the activity of William Lamport was of significance (of whom more will be said below). In independent Mexico, John O'Reilly commanded the San Patricio Battalion; (6) and John Devereux commanded the Irish Legion in Colombia. (7) Daniel O'Leary, an Irishman, fought in the wars of independence in South America together with Simón Bolívar and was the representative of Gran Colombia in England. We can also mention Peter Campbell in Uruguay, and James O'Kelly, Leopoldo O'Donnell and Richard Madden in Cuba. (8) There was also Bernardo O'Higgins, national hero of Chilean independence – and Chile also had a descendent of Irish immigrants as president of the nation, Patricio Aylwin. In more recent years the relationship between the FARC and the IRA (9) represents a relationship between Ireland and Latin America, or, better said, between Irish people and Latin Americans. Edmundo O'Gorman, as a historian, generated a political debate that marked new and revelatory visions of the history of Mexico. Various generations of the influential O'Connor family in Bolivia

continue to undertake important political activity, at this moment in opposition to President Evo Morales. In many of these examples, the relationship between the military and political contexts is significant, not only as a military strategy in itself, but also as a form of creating power. It was not only a case of political action by the military but also military action by civilians.

How important was Irish ascendancy and insertion in local politics? It was a result of the necessity for integration in the new lands. Can causal relationships be established or are we simply dealing with a list of names with a common origin in extraordinary situations? To provide definitive responses would be too hasty; it is hoped that there will be new research projects that respond to old and new questions. This first special issue on the Irish in politics seeks answers to these questions and proposes new perspectives on a theme that is still being explored.

As we mentioned above, political participation is understood to mean any activity in which the individual contributes directly or indirectly to a political situation. The articles selected for this special issue represent distinct forms of political participation by Irish people and their descendents in Latin America. These studies do not come exclusively from the fields of history and political science but rather they build upon the strong presence of politics in people's lives, prioritising an interdisciplinary analysis to approach this theme, without temporal or thematic limits.

Jorge Cernadas Fonsalías studies how attentive to Irish politics and immersed in the Argentine context the Irish-Argentines were during the period of the creation of the Irish Free State and the role that they adopted. Along the same lines, María Eugenia Cruset analyses the role of the diaspora as agents of diplomacy. Another article related to the role of the Irish-Argentines during the revolution in Ireland is the contribution of the researcher Rebecca Geraghty who analyses the relationship between the Irish revolutionary Arthur Griffith and Patrick McManus who lived in Argentina and was a link to the local community. Brad Lange, for his part, presents an article in which he examines the social and

political participation of the Irish Catholic community in Argentina, and their identification and involvement in their adopted country.

Yannick Wehrli's article focuses specifically on the relationship between the Free State, created in the 1920s, and Latin American countries. The work of Sean Lester in the League of Nations is his main object of study, taking as an example his intervention in the Chaco War and the conflict between Colombia and Peru.

Another historical article that we include is that of Natalia Silva Prada who conducted research in the archives of the Spanish Inquisition in order to investigate two cases against Irish people: William Lamport and Gilbert Nugent. As a backdrop to the lives of these two men born in Ireland, Inquisitorial disputes and European monarchical tensions are revealed.

José Antonio García Quintana presents a revelatory article, illustrating the Abolitionist actions of Richard Madden in Jamaica and Cuba, on the basis of reports, legal testimonies, a book and the stimulus for the creators of a nascent anti-slavery literature. Moisés Enrique Rodríguez's article about the diplomatic career of Daniel Florence O'Leary illustrates the flexibility of one of the Irish officers in Simón Bolívar's army of independence in adapting to changing conditions.

An article that plays on the borders of the historical and the literary is that of María José Punte, who presents the figure of John William Cooke, leader of the Peronist resistance of Irish descendents, through a novel by José Pablo Feinmann – *La astucia de la razón*, which has among its protagonists a delegate of Perón. In the area of Argentine educational politics, Nancy Escobar presents work undertaken by Santiago Fitz Simon, an Irish educator who undertook activities in the country during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and whose contribution

was fundamental for the development of technical education in the country.

A sociological perspective is provided by Olivia Sheringham, who analyses recent Brazilian immigration to Gort, Ireland. A country accustomed to emigration, it is now, due to the ups and downs of neoliberal economic policies, attracting Brazilians escaping the crisis, who find in the “Celtic Tiger” a new place to live though ravaged by the crisis itself.

Also in reference to the Latin American crisis we cannot lose sight of the countryside vs. Government conflict initiated in Argentina one year ago. John Kennedy analyses the role played by the descendents of Irish people who are connected to the agrarian sector and who led a protest that is ongoing against the national Government due to the rise in deductions on the exportation of soya and the absence of an agricultural policy.

The issue is completed with four book reviews: Jean Ziegler's *La Haine de l'Occident*, reviewed by Edmundo Murray; Enrique García Hernán and Óscar Recio Morales's (eds.) *Extranjeros en el Ejército: militares irlandeses en la sociedad española, 1580-1818*, reviewed by David Barnwell; Lourdes De Ita Rubio's *Viajeros Isabelinos en la Nueva España*, reviewed by Cristina Borreguero Beltrán; and James P. Byrne, Philip Coleman and Jason King's (eds.) *Ireland and the Americas: Culture, Politics and History*, reviewed by María Graciela Adamoli and María Graciela Eliggi.

We hope that this first issue on the Irish and their descendents in Latin American politics will result in the appearance of new studies on the theme, the derivations and reaches of which we are just beginning to unravel.

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## **Notes**

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2. “la abstención sistemática de los extranjeros de tomar parte en la vida social”.

3. Barry, Carolina. "Ciento Treinta Años andando su senda" in *The Southern Cross* 130: 5896 (January 2005), pp. 1-2. A short history of *The Southern Cross* on its 130th anniversary; "El nacimiento de una terrible belleza: Repercusión de la Pascua de 1916 en TSC y los hiberno argentinos" in *The Southern Cross* 313: 5915 (August 2006), pp. 1-2.
4. See, among others, MacLoughlin Bréard, Guillermo. "La presencia irlandesa en las invasiones inglesas" in *The Southern Cross* 132: 5927 (August 2007), 2; Coghlan, Eduardo A. *El Aporte de los Irlandeses a la Formación de la Nación Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1982). Dandan, Alejandra and Silvina Heguy. *Joe Baxter: del nazismo a la extrema izquierda* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Norma, 2006). Barry, Carolina: "Politically Incorrect: Irish Argentines in the Early Peronist Period" in *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America* (www.irlandeses.org), cited 18 October 2005. "Lorenza Reynafé, una cuestión de género" in *The Southern Cross* 131: 5917 (October 2006), p. 2; "Los borbones argentinos" in *The Southern Cross* 131: 5912 (February 2006), p2. Murray, Edmundo, 'Baxter, José Luis [Joe] (1940-1973)' in *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America* November-December 2005 (www.irlandeses.org). 'Guevara, Ernesto [Che] (1928-1967)' in *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America* November-December 2005 (www.irlandeses.org). Cané, Gonzalo, 'O'Farrell, Juan Adrián (1866-1942)' in *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America* November-December 2005 (www.irlandeses.org). Another example of the broad participation in local political life of Irish immigrants was the nomination of Michael Duffy as the intendant of Carmen de Areco in 1866 (Coghlan, 1987: 287), (Hannon, 2007: 293) and Juan Bautista Dowling (an Irish-Argentine) as a military commander (Coghlan, 1987: 273); (Hannon, 2007: 283).
5. Diego Téllez Alarcia, D. Juan Odonojú, El Último Virrey de Nueva España (1821), paper presented at the Second Symposium of Irish Studies in South America: "Irlanda y América Latina: Hacia Nuevas Perspectivas", 5-7 September 2007.
6. Jaime Fogarty, *Voices of Mexico* magazine, April-June, 2000.
7. Brown, Matthew, 'Crusaders for Liberty or Vile Mercenaries? The Irish Legion in Colombia' in *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America* (2006). Available online (www.irlandeses.org).
8. Burton, Gera, "Liberty's Call: Richard Robert Madden's Voice in the Anti-Slavery Movement (1833-1842)" in *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America* 5:3 (November 2007), pp. 199-206.
9. Murray, Edmundo, 'Explosive Journey: Perceptions of Latin America in the FARC-IRA Affair (2001-2005)' in *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America* 2006.

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