

of advice not acted on and missed opportunities, providing a glimpse of alternative economic histories of twentieth-century Ireland with lessons for policymakers as well as academics.

*The Irish Department of Finance, 1959–99* should be recommended reading for scholars of the economic and social history of twentieth-century Ireland. Its contribution, in terms of both content and analysis, is sure to stimulate debate.

doi:10.1017/ihs.2023.38

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NORAID AND THE NORTHERN IRISH TROUBLES, 1970–94. By Robert Collins. Pp 221. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2022. €50.

*Noraid and the Northern Ireland Troubles* charts the turbulent story of militant republican Irish American activists during the Northern Ireland Troubles, where Robert Collins describes the activities of not only Noraid — Irish Northern Aid (I.N.A.) — but of allied and competitor organisations that share the same social and political space. From the introduction of internment to Bloody Sunday, through the hunger strikes to the beginning of the peace process, Collins weaves the history of Noraid around the familiar narrative of the Northern Ireland conflict. In often meticulous detail, the book shows how Noraid depended on events in Northern Ireland to provide it with an impetus, as well as how as political campaigners in their own right they were later active in championing their own interventions too, on top of fundraising for the provisional republican movement.

What becomes clear in Collins's book is the importance of personal viewpoints in this tightly knit and highly charged network of organisations. The author does well personalising the readers' understanding of prominent figures like Michael Flannery and Martin Galvin, especially when it comes to issues of wider association and loyalty in the midst of the various splits that pepper the history of militant Irish republicanism more generally. The episodic narrative works well too, with the turn of emphasis to the MacBride principles changing the tone from earlier discussions of fundraising and a middle period of legal support for those charged with gun running.

Collins poignantly links the issue of plastic baton rounds and I.N.A. via the death of John Downes during a Royal Ulster Constabulary (R.U.C.) attempt to arrest Galvin at a rally in Belfast in August 1984, and in these passages the writing and research elements of this work best come together. However, one is left wondering at times what the purpose was of describing quite so many interminable dinner dances, beyond creating a published record of their mere occurrence. Certainly, the reader does not get the impression that I.N.A. and its associated organisations were mainstream or mass organisations in Collins's account, and he balances well the competing views of them as either a tiny bunch of disgruntled political exiles, or conversely, as the whole of Irish America united by this vanguard of organised Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.) supporters.

In other words, *Noraid and the Northern Ireland Troubles* is not partisan, but it is source led — and honest to these groups' primary sources. However, this kind of subjectivity carries risk; seen from the I.N.A.'s perspective, the death of John Downes (pp 148–54) appears to be judged as more tragic than the death of 29-year-old mother-of-one Joanne Mathers. Mathers was murdered by the I.R.A. while collecting census forms in 1981. Collins might have questioned I.N.A.'s defensive line that Mathers was murdered because the Provisional I.R.A. thought census workers were 'potential informers' (p. 92) and the fact that Mathers was nothing of the sort would not have taken much to clarify.

This loyalty to the sources unfortunately leads to more questions than answers when it comes to Noraid's involvement in supplying weapons and money for weapons, as well as other activity beyond their stated public aims. Often when little else did, allegations of gun-running united both British and Irish government attitudes to Noraid throughout the Troubles. When the F.B.I. found machine guns and a flame thrower in a Brooklyn basement

linked to Michael Flannery (p. 113), it seemed to this reader a ripe moment for a wider introspection of whether Noraid's financial reporting mandated under the Foreign Aliens Registration Act was entirely the whole story.

The book ends in something of a rush. In 1989, Denis Donaldson — by then an MI5 agent inside Sinn Féin — began work for I.N.A. in an undetermined capacity for an indeterminate amount of time (p. 184). It would have been interesting to have explored Donaldson's work. So too, despite earlier discussions of visa problems for Sinn Féin speakers, there is no discussion of how this impasse came to be resolved prior to Gerry Adams's visit in the autumn of 1993. The conclusion summarises but offers little in the way of further insight or analysis as to I.N.A.'s activities and it would have been interesting had Collins chosen to evaluate his findings at this point. The book remains a dutiful history and certainly a useful work and reliable reference of interest to scholars of Irish America at these important moments.

doi:10.1017/ihs.2023.39

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LEARNING BEHIND BARS: HOW I.R.A. PRISONERS SHAPED THE PEACE PROCESS IN IRELAND. By Dieter Reinisch. Pp 240. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 2022. US\$70.

The central focus of this work by Dieter Reinisch is the examination of the role played by Irish political prisoners on both sides of the border during the conflict in Northern Ireland. More specifically, Reinisch concentrates on their impact on the trajectory of the outside republican movement through political education and command structures. An important contribution to the existing historiography of the conflict, Reinisch's decision to discuss both the similarities and differences of Irish republican prisoners on both sides of the border makes for a compelling narrative. The book, which is predominantly the product of a dissertation, is extensively supported by secondary literature but its biggest strength lies in the interviews with former activists and volunteers, of which forty-one are cited throughout. In addition, many of the interviewees formed the nexus of prison leadership in Portlaoise Prison and Long Kesh Detention Centre (later Maze Prison), which certainly enhances the level of detail and analysis.

In introducing the research, Reinisch points out that according to some studies, roughly 50 per cent of prisoners in Belfast surveyed had no educational qualification when incarcerated, whereas another study showed that 53 per cent of republican prisoners got some academic qualification whilst imprisoned (p. 26). Despite a limited dataset, it is a telling marker of the emphasis placed on education, formal or informal, throughout the conflict. Moreover, prisoners in Long Kesh were often unemployed owing to discriminatory practices in employment and education, and were, therefore, usually radicalised by conditions on the streets of Belfast or Derry, as opposed to southern republicans who were more likely to join for reasons of ideology or family.

Reinisch continues by discussing the prisoner experience in Portlaoise Prison, which took over from Mountjoy as the hub for republican prisoners in 1973. The focus has rarely been on this cohort of prisoners, given their usurpation by the prison protests and hunger strikes in Maze Prison. Reinisch refers in chapter 2 to a feeling amongst prisoners in Portlaoise of a lesser importance compared to their northern counterparts. Nonetheless, the waves of protest against conditions, including a hunger strike in 1976–7, were important precursors to the later protests, as well as objections to strip searching following the 1980–81 hunger strikes.

Interestingly, Reinisch highlights the introduction of a Sinn Féin cumann in Portlaoise that took charge of the formal education for the prisoners. Through the correspondence and statements by interviewees, Reinisch draws two conclusions regarding this, the first of which is that 'only those who had experience with Sinn Féin activity outside the prison joined this Cumann' (p. 80). Furthermore, it appeared that more prisoners joined the gaeltacht than the cumann itself, which he asserts 'can be interpreted as revealing a greater interest in