

27TH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE IRISH CENTRE

Introduction:

As is customary at our Annual General Meeting, this report aims at giving a true and accurate picture of the activities of the Irish Centre for the callendar year 1981.

In listending to (or reading) this report we should all try to keep in mind the ideals and aims of the Irish Centre as set forth in our constitution. I now put before you the aims and objectives as set out in our amended Constitution of 1961.

Aims and objectives.

- (i) providing Hostels with chapels, canteens, libraries, living rooms, and residential accommodation in a christian atmosphere for workers unable to find or afford suitable lodgings or home.
- (ii) Setting up young workers in suitable employment and homes.
- (iii) Assisting poor or homeless workers to find respectable lodgings.
- (iv) providing in any way for the spiritual and moral welfare of such workers as aforesaid.
- (v) Relieving poverty, sickness and distress.
- (vi) Running a social club and providing amenities for social, recreation and sport in a Christian atmosphere.
- (vii) Raising funds for these objects by voluntary contributions, grants, legacies and functions.
- (viii) co-operating with other charitable and social welfare bodies having common objects and interests.

For over 27 years, you and your predecessors - The Council of the Irish Centre have laboured and toiled to realise these objectives. In your name I once again pay tribute to the hundreds of Irish people who have put their shoulder to the "great wheel" that the Irish Centre has become. Very many have gone to their eternal reward. Among the many who have gone from us I think it only fitting that mention should be made of Mr. Tadhg Weehan who died on 14th of November last. Of him and of all the Irish Centre people who have died in this last year we pray - 'Ar deis Dhe go raibh a anam'.

For well over a quarter of a century now, men and women, great and small, have come and gone - the Irish Centre goes on. (I present myself to you this evening as one who has 'come again' after an absence of over eleven years.) On 10th November, 1981, I was appointed as Chaplain, Director and Treasurer of the Centre at one of our Administrative Committee Meetings. I take this opportunity of putting on record our thanks and appreciation to Fr. Cagney, my predecessor and to the outgoing members of the Administrative Committee for seeing the Centre through what I consider to have been one of the toughest years of its existence.

From the records presented to me, I now present to you an account of the various workings of the Centre for the year in question.

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WELFARE:

A comprehensive Welfare Report for the year has been prepared and distributed and is well worth reading and studying. I make the following points:-

The statistics indicate an overall decrease of twenty per cent in the number of first time users of our services. We would like to think that this might continue in future years but we know that this trend will not last for long. When we take into consideration that fifty per cent of the population of Ireland (which now stands at almost four million) are under the age of twenty five, we cannot but be concerned about what this could mean in terms of emigration in the next decade.

Coming back to the report you will see that among those who came in the last year there tended to be a problematic core. I feel that I should mention our concern for the number of young people who left Ireland and came to us who are in some kind of trouble with the 'law'. From our hostel statistics a picture emerged which runs something like this. - One or two individuals arrived from a particular area or town. Then within a week or so they were joined by one or two others from the same place. The result was that very soon after a 'gang' had re-grouped and within a short time the last state of the gang was worse than the first. This pattern was repeated many times.

The Welfare Report outlines very clearly the invaluable help given to many categories of people - to pregnant girls, to married people who have separated from their spouses, to unemployed and unemployable, to mention but a few. More and more the need is emerging for specialised treatment for those arriving with particular problems. (Under a separate heading I will comment on the special needs of the retired and those on the threshold of retiring).

1981 will go down in history as the last year in which our Welfare Department operated its services in extremely limited physical surroundings. Throughout the year the staff lived in hope of moving to the new premises - alas it was not to happen until this present year. In spite of many obstacles and difficulties the work went on and I record our thanks and appreciation in particular to Sr. Joan for her perseverance and hard work.

When you read through or browse over the recorded statistics please keep in mind that every number represents a real person whose life has been enriched because there was an Irish Centre to come to.

HOSTELS:

You will recall that in order to qualify for funding from the Housing Corporation of Great Britain, the Irish Centre formed a Housing Association in 1975. Both our hostels are now under the 'financial wing' of the Housing Corporation. The Irish Centre manages these hostels and thus they remain, in a true sense Irish Centre Hostels.

ST. LOUISES GIRLS HOSTEL:

On 5th May, 1981, after many setbacks, the official opening took place of our Girls Hostel - 'St. Louises'. This hostel provides first class accommodation for 130 girls. At the opening ceremony and blessing His Eminence Cardinal Basil Hume described the hostel as 'a symbol of love and care which is the true measure of Christianity which we serve'. Since it has been opened requests for accommodation poured in. During the seven months since the opening, four hundred and forty six girls, representing thirty one nationalities have been accommodated. The largest single group was Irish, with an Irish-non-Irish ratio of 1:4. The hostel was very efficiently managed throughout

the year by Sr. Anthony and two other sisters (Sr. Benedict and Sr. Edna to whom we record our gratitude.

CONWAY HOUSE - MEN'S HOSTEL:

During the past year the hostel has experienced its lowest ever intake of residents. The total number of new people seeking accommodation was two hundred and ninety four. The figure does not include seventy five or so already in residence at the beginning of the year. (Those who return to the hostel for the second or third time are not considered as new residents). A number of men who during their residency at the hostel, achieved sufficient social and financial security and occupational stability to move to more independent living in flats, requested re-admission. They had lost their jobs and were no longer solvent. Some of those who sought re-admission had not been able to survive without the social and personal support of the hostel.

It was estimated that eighty five per cent of those seeking accommodation had no money. Prior to approaching the hostel many would have lived in emergency DHSS hostels and subsequently lived rough or in squats. They were unable to provide adequate identification and therefore could not claim the social benefits to which they were entitled.

Due to a substantial grant from the Housing Corporation a programme of extension and modernisation began at Conway House towards the end of 1981. The first phase is a completely new block, being built on the site of the old chapel. When completed, towards mid 1982, it will accommodate thirty three men in single and double-bedrooms. The extension will provide modern wash and shower facilities, a larger kitchen and a new dining room.

The new building will not immediately afford any extra accommodation but will house residents from the 'old block' while the second phase of modernisation takes place.

To Fr. Ryan, Brother Gallagher and Sr. Marie de Lourdes who make up the management team, our sincere thanks and appreciation.

It should be noted that our social workers visit the hostels each week and when necessary on request.

NOTHER HOSTEL?

Earlier I referred to the needs of the retired and those on the threshold of retiring.

There is a change in the age structure of the domiciled Irish community in Britain. The emigrants of the forties, who built up a local and national network of Irish social and cultural activities are now an ageing Irish community. Considerable numbers live alone or in relative isolation. There are many elderly Irish men, and fewer, but still a significant number of Irish women, living in large hostels or lodging houses. They have worked in this country all their lives and now, deprived of or unable to work they are homeless and very much alone. Last year Irish Centre Hostels Ltd. applied to the Housing Corporation for a 1.3 million pound grant to obtain and develop a special hostel for these special people. The application did not succeed last year but it is something that we will be pursuing in this current year.

SOCIAL CLUB:

Towards the end of last year we had the beginnings of a new 'face-lift' to the club premises proper. Thanks to the generous contributions made by the Leitrim Association and Tommy Maguire, the 'small lounge' and the Douglas Hyde Lounge took on a new appearance. Financed by Leitrim and with the help of local volunteers the reception area was moved from the old entrance to its present position.

To quote from a previous Annual Report - "The health and development of any community demands a meaningful and fulfilling social life". It would seem that for the past year the organisation of 'club events' has been left in the hands of the few. I express our thanks to Mary Kenny and to Theresa and Martin Doyle and their helpers for their unrelenting hard work throughout the year. I am sure that you will agree that there is much that can be done to enhance and improve our social club activities. I trust that in a few weeks time when we call our club Annual General Meeting you yourself will come forward with many new ideas and a willingness to be part of a committee that will put these new plans in action.

Each week hundreds of people use the Irish Centre as their haven of relaxation and the centre of their social lives. Today's high-pressure living demands that healthy and balanced social activity be provided. This is an area in which we can help and support each other and at the same time benefit from a healthy social life. The Irish Centre is not a set of buildings but a living symbol of Irish life, sustained and enriched by the Irish people themselves.

The following is a list of events for the last year:-

Meetings - 262; 'Quiz' gatherings - 14; Card Drives - 4; Conferences - 2; Wedding Receptions - 10; Boxing Events - 7; Dinners - 80; Banquets - 2; Dances - 32; Bazaar - 1; Bingo takes place three times each week. On Friday and Saturday evenings 'sessions' (of music and dance) take place in the Douglas Hyde Lounge. A card game can be had most evenings in the Lounge. For most of the year a lively 'Ceili' was enjoyed in the Douglas Hyde Lounge on Sunday evenings. 'Comhaltas' met on average once a month providing a wealth of entertainment and enjoyment in the form of traditional Irish music, song and dance. Sunday lunch-times have been a feast of Irish music provided by top class musician Tommy Maguire and his band. In addition we have had weekly classes for the children in Irish music and Irish dancing. There is also an adult class in Irish Ceili dancing as well as classes in Irish 'pipe music'.

A literary group - Green Ink - meet once a month and share the richness of the vast inheritance of Irish Literature.

To the many individuals, too numerous to mention, who are dedicated to keeping Irish culture alive here at the Irish Centre we extend our sincere thanks and hope that the good work will continue.

Throughout the year management and staffing provided great difficulties. We are indebted to the dedicated few who persevered under great pressure to see the Irish centre through what can only be described as some very 'dark days' in 1981. Towards the end of the year we seem to have managed to get a winning combination together in the persons of our manager Mr. John O'Shea and our chef Mr. Jimmy McCluskey and their staff. We look forward to the good days ahead.

The London Irish Festival in July once again proved to be a day that all could be truly proud of. The Irish Centre with the Irish Counties Associations provided a day of first class entertainment.

DEVELOPMENT:

During 1981 the main development was to No. 50 Camden Square, the home of our new welfare department. Thanks to the funding of the Irish Government and the London Borough of Camden this work was undertaken and almost completed during 1981.

Much work remains to be done. So far in my report I have refrained from using that word 'money' but you all know that it couldn't last. I believe in that well proven adage - 'where there's a will - there's a way'. I believe that the will to complete what has been begun,

exists in you, the Council of the Irish Centre, and in the people you represent. Although it is not a matter for this report - so far this year we have seen what can be done by the County Associations in terms of fund-raising, to complete the development. This is most encouraging and I can assure you that I have every confidence in the Counties and the other Irish organisations to provide us with even greater things to report on in the years that lie ahead.

ADMINISTRATION:

One of the most important functions of this annual general meeting is to elect an Administrative Committee for the next twelve months. Let me once again make it very clear that the Irish Centre belongs to the Irish people living in this country. It does not belong to the Church as so many people still seem to think. Our Cardinal appoints the priests as chaplains. The appointments of Director and Treasurer are made by the Administrative Committee. In a few moments you will elect eight members of this committee. Among this Council there are people of great talent and experience. All of us have doubts about our ability to serve on such a committee. If you are nominated as a candidate, I ask you to be generous in accepting the confidence that others have in you as a person who has something to offer to this great work. Let us accept the truth expressed in the paraphrasing of that great Irish writer George Bernard Shaw, made by the late American President, John F. Kennedy (after whom we named one of our Irish Centre Halls) - "Some men dream dreams of things that were and wonder why; but we dream dreams of things that never were and say why not?"

FINANCE

The Accounts show that our liabilities have decreased by £39,296 to £921,022.

Current assets have decreased by £164,731 to £152,241. This results in a decrease in working capital of £125,435.

Fixed assets have increased by £149,433 to £1,510,348. Such increase representing the redevelopment of No. 50 Camden Square, out of the grant awarded by the Irish Government.

The interest payable by the Centre during the year amounted to £99,343. This substantial charge for interest is a very heavy burden on the operations of the Centre. There is a very urgent need to reduce the debts outstanding, so that the interest accruing would correspondingly be reduced on the running costs of the Centre.

During 1981 the funds of the Centre were augmented by amounts contributed from Grants, Covenants, Donations, Charity Walks, Car Raffle and Management Income.

The net loss as per the Income and Expenditure account was £70,451 after interest payable. During the year there was a capital profit on the sale of Hornsey Lane Gardens amounting to £94,447, thus converting the net loss to a profit of £23,996.

The Grants, Covenants and Donations are gratefully acknowledged and I take this opportunity to appeal for extra financial assistance either in the form of Donations, Covenants or Grants. For the Centre to remain financially viable it is essential that we have the continued support of existing sources of finance and also to increase such sources.

GRANTS:

London Borough of Camden	£32,000.00
Irish Government (i)	7,859.00
Irish Government (ii)	8,081.00
	<u>£47,940.00</u>

COVENANTS INCOME (£10,490)

Bank of Ireland	5,100.00
Allied Irish Banks	5,100.00
M. Moroney	100.00
M. Brunton	100.00
Looney & McCann	70.00
W. Smyth	20.00
	<u>£10,490.00</u>

DONATIONS:

Sea-Link	£4,380.00
Leitrim Assoc.	£2,278.00
Irish Centre Golf Soc.	£2,000.00
Cavan Assoc.	500.00
Carrick-on-Shannon Golf	400.00
Fermanagh Assoc.	200.00
'Holy Show'	142.00
Sundries	£2,268.00
	<u>£12,104.00</u>

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion I wish to place on record my very sincere thanks to my brother Oblate Fr. James Butler. As my assistant he is an example for me of perseverance and dedication to the Irish Centre. I thank him especially for his patience and guidance in helping me to settle into the Centre.

Finally, I thank our Irish Ambassador Dr. Eamonn Kennedy for his whole-hearted support in all our ventures

I express my heart-felt thanks to the staff and voluntary workers and to the various committees for their loyalty and hard work throughout the year. If I have left anyone out in my words of thanks I beg their indulgence and assure them of my appreciation.

May God be with us in the year that lies ahead.

Thank you.

Fr. C. Malone, O.M.I. (Director)