

## 29th ANNUAL REPORT OF THE LONDON IRISH CENTRE

### Introduction:

My Lord President, Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my privilege to once again present to you, the Council of the Irish Centre, our Annual Report. The report covers the year 1983, but in the interest of accuracy, some of the happenings of 1984 which alter the 1983 picture, must be taken into account.

If the history of the Irish Centre is ever written, the year 1983, will have to be referred to - somehow in terms of "The Year of the Cycle Ride" or even "The Year of our Salvation". I refer of course to the work of two great men, namely, Fr. Jim Butler, OMI for his 1000 mile Cycle Ride and to Mr. Tony Beatty for his skill and professionalism in putting 'the financial fruits' of Fr. Butler's efforts to their maximum use to the benefit of our Irish Centre. When all the formalities have been completed, the over-all effect on our financial statement is equivalent to an improvement of half a million pounds. I pay tribute also to all who organised and contributed to this massive fund-raising campaign resulting in such a wonderful success-story.

This time last year I appealed to you, our Council, for "advice and suggestions to the incoming committee with a view to helping the Irish Centre through what can only be described as a very difficult era of its existence". I this year congratulate and thank the organisations and individuals who responded so positively to this appeal thus ensuring our continuity and making it possible to 'paint a good picture' of the last year.

Without doubt, the 'high-light' of this report is our financial 'success-story'. However, I must once again ask you to keep in mind that at all times The Irish Centre gives priority to people. All our efforts continue to be for the welfare of Irish people here in London.

### REPORTS

The following reports are meant to convey an understanding of the activities of the Centre throughout the year.

#### Welfare:

A comprehensive account of the exclusive welfare work is given in a separate Annual Welfare Report. This report gives a thorough account of the primary works of "Irish Centre Community - Welfare - Services", "Conway House Mens Hostel", "St. Louise's Hostel". I thank most sincerely those who prepared this fine report. I refer to my own words in the foreword of the Welfare Report - "I record my sincere and heartfelt thanks to the dedicated staff at the Irish Centre and at our Hostels. This is extended to the vast numbers of genuine helpers who serve on committees and sub-committees and those who are not on any committee and who give of themselves in time and effort in supporting our services to the needy".

#### Existing Services:

In last year's Annual Report we looked forward to making progress in the field of....  
**CARE OF THE ELDERLY:-** Great effort has been put into providing facilities for this work. However, during 1983 it has not been possible to bring to completion the plans that we had made in this regard. It was our great hope to get funding for the refurbishment of the basement of numbers 50/51 Camden Square which would serve as a Day Care Centre for our Elderly Irish People and in the evenings would double up for.....

**YOUTH ACTIVITIES:-** Our grant applications for this project did not meet with success



and so we find ourselves in this current year making approaches to the same end. The Welfare Report shows that a great deal of preparatory work was done during 1983 to set up NEW GROUPS within our department to meet special needs. I refer in particular to a group that has formed to work with.....  
 UNSUPPORTED WOMEN:- This group is currently providing for the needs of approximately twenty Irish women who because of marital breakdown, abrasive interpersonal relationships or basic personality problems, are experiencing isolation, stress and unhappiness. On your behalf I thank all who are engaged in this work especially those who are engaged on a voluntary basis.

The statistics recorded show that 'THE UNEMPLOYED' are increasing in numbers almost daily. So also are their needs. We have tried to provide special skills for the unemployed such as LITERACY and NUMERACY, TYPING and 'MICRO COMPUTING'. We are living in the age of the computer and we are finding that it is necessary to provide an opportunity for well educated Irish Young people who are unemployed to acquire specialist skills in this field in order to increase their chances of obtaining employment. As an extension of this facility we look forward to one day having an 'OUT-REACH OFFICER' who will be able to seek out specialist employment for those whom we can train.

#### Areas of Concern:

In looking at the statistics for NEW CLIENTS we report an over-all increase of 36% who were in need of our Community Welfare Services. 53% of these were male. New female users of our services only increased by 5%. It is significant that the increase became very evident in the latter half of 1983. The figures of the early part of this present year show that we are looking at a 'RISING GRAPH'. The number of people that we placed in employment was significantly greater than the previous year.

Before moving to the Hostels Report two special needs come to mind in relation to further development. There is a growing need for 'EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION' for young people. Quite often, late at night, young people arrive here at the Irish Centre without sufficient money for bed and breakfast. It is with regret that sometimes we have to refer innocent 'first arrivals' to emergency accommodation hostels who cater for the homeless and down-and-outs. One night's exposure to this can be enough to put some on the wrong road. Again through lack of funding we have been unable to take on the refurbishment of the upper storey of 51/52 Camden Square. This is becoming more urgent as the number of emergency cases grow.

#### Irish Youth at Risk:

We are conscious of the fact that a big number of young people are DRIFTING to the West End. In general this group of young people have been 'drifting' in the cities and large towns of Ireland before coming here. Although young, they have left home for some time before 'coming to England'. They 'drift' onto the boat and arrive totally unprepared, quite often without as much as identification.

The 'Voluntary Agencies' in the West End, here in London, have come to us to form an 'ACTION GROUP FOR IRISH YOUTH'. We have done so, and this gives an indication of how the problem is growing. Good progress is being made in getting together this group. It is a question of firstly establishing contact with these young people and providing a structure of keeping in touch with them. They appear on the streets often as 'punks', 'rockers', 'skinheads', etc. This 'Action Group' will have its base here at the Irish Centre.

#### Second Generation Irish:

I have already mentioned our disappointment in not being successful in providing



adequate premises for our Youth Group in the past year. It is among our priorities for 1984. I congratulate the Irish Centre Youth Group for achieving so much with so little resources.

### OUR HOSTELS

#### Irish Centre Hostels Limited:

It is delightful to be able to report on another successful years work at our Hostels. Although constituted as an independent Company our Hostels are very much our own and a great credit to all who have built them up.

#### Conway House, Quex Road, NW6:

Without doubt 1983 will be remembered as a year of redevelopment. This has meant a reduction in bed spaces for most of the year but in the end we have finished up with a standard of accommodation that is recognised as being exceptionally high. In the interest of having a first class hostel and at the same time keeping essential bed spaces available, great sacrifices were made by the staff at Conway House and they deserve great praise and thanks. It can be truly said that all concerned exemplified the virtue of "giving and not counting the cost". Already very many young Irish men are benefiting from these sacrifices.

The "Conway House Report" states - "A hostel is not just a building but a place where staff and voluntary helpers have established a constructive and caring environment for the benefit of the many young people who stay or who pass through". For making it, as close as is possible to being a real home, we thank all concerned. Unemployment stands out as the fate of most residents.

#### St. Louise's Hostel, Medway Street:

".....each one (of 353 young women) according to her needs, enjoyed the support and hospitality which the hostel aims to offer" - The Girls' Hostel Report in thanking God - humbly admits that it is proud of the good work that has gone on there in the past year. However, lest we get the impression that we "have arrived" - the report states that most new arrivals are unemployed and have to be referred for Supplementary Benefit. While most are successful in finding work, for many, unemployment remains a distressing reality. "To the staff and committees who 'pour themselves out' to help others - out heartfelt thanks.

#### Housing for Elderly People:

As a housing association our hostels are making every effort to put into practice the resolution to seek a separate "independent-type flats" - hostel, for the growing number of single elderly Irish who live in sub-standard lodging houses and lonely rooms. Some success can be reported on finding a suitable site. Once again funding must be awaited. The application has been made to the Housing Corporation.

### CULTURE

#### Irish Language:

In addition to the services provided from our "Community Welfare Services", we can boast of highly successful Irish Language Classes. As well as those who are "picking up on their Irish" we have adult beginner classes and a most encouraging group of young children who are enthusiastic in learning the Irish Language. We



are most fortunate in having a very talented teacher and also a support group of parents and volunteers to ensure that learning Irish is a pleasant and enjoyable experience.

#### Music and Dancing:

We can boast of having outstanding talent in the classes provided for Irish Music.- THE TOMMY MAGUIRE SCHOOL OF MUSIC - THE CREAN SCHOOL OF IRISH DANCING..... THE "UTLEANN PIPERS" - All are household names and in their turn fill the Centre with Irish sounds and movements.

COMHALTAS CEOLTORI EIREANN: - As the head-quarters of the North London Branch, we are proud to be able to do our bit in preserving the unwritten inheritance of our home-land in music, song and dance.

CEILI DANCING:- Sunday evenings have never been so good. To those who teach and organise our Ceili Dancing we have to say well done. You are witnessing in many ways what the Irish Centre should be.

#### Social Club:

Thanks to the unstinting efforts of a great number of people some of whom served on committees and others who prefer not to belong to committees the social activities at the Centre have been of a very high standard and give great enjoyment to thousands of people.

"Care of the Elderly" has always been a dimension of our Social Club. Through small but intimate Bingo Session and the ensuing 'chat' and 'little drink' many a lonesome hour is avoided. To the organisers and the 'not so old' who come along to make the sessions so enjoyable a very sincere word of thanks is in order.

The Social Club Committee who arrange the programme each week - who "staff" the door and who "keep and eye on" law and order - as well as take the criticisms when necessary, deserve our thanks and support.

We have had more meetings and gatherings than in any other year. Wedding Receptions and Dinner Dances filled our diary most weekends.

To a group of people who are known as "OUR REGULARS" we again thank you because you are the ones who welcome new-comers and keep the home-fires burning.

In the course of 1983 we decorated and refurbished this very fine Kennedy Hall which also serves as our "Church" on Sundays.

#### Voluntary Workers:

We have never before had such a heading in an Annual Report. It is about time because those of you who know how the Irish Centre works - are aware that a great deal depends on voluntary helpers. You will understand that I must single out for special mention that wonderful support-group who accompanied Fr. Jim Butler, O.M.I. on the Great Cycle-Ride - The following deserve our appreciation - Miss Mary Kenny, Mr. & Mrs. Martin & Theresa Doyle, Mrs. Doris Daly, and Mr. & Mrs. Jock & Rose Rutherford.

Apart from the Cycle-Ride there is a host of volunteers who give of their time and effort as well as their money to keep the Irish Centre alive. In particular I record our thanks to those who provide essential services that would otherwise



cost a great deal of money. The fact that so many people rallied around to fill the gap created when Fr. Butler was engaged in the Cycle-Ride and since his transfer to Dublin is most encouraging and a good omen for the Irish Centre.

At the risk of repeating myself I wish to once again acknowledge the six years of very unselfish services dedicated to the Centre by Fr. Butler. We wish him every blessing and success in his new Mission.

The London Irish Festival 1983 was an outstanding success. To our co-organisers and co-beneficiaries - Council of Irish County Associations - and to the legion of helpers we express our appreciation for a job well done.

#### DEVELOPMENT

##### Hostels:

In the section on hostels, reference has already been made to 'Housing for the Elderly'.

##### Elderly/Youth:

On the site of 51/52 Camden Square, application for funding has been made to the Greater London Council to refurbish the basement area for a Day Care Centre for the Elderly. This would double up in the evenings as premises for youth. To date this application has not been successful.

##### Emergency Accommodation:

The two top floors of 51/52 Camden Square are totally unused at the moment. There is need for total internal refurbishment. This would be an excellent location for the emergency accommodation that was mentioned earlier. Our new committee will have to look at the feasibility of this project and sources of funding.

##### Maintenance:

Some of the "Air Conditioning" Plant relating to the Douglas Hyde Lounge and Kennedy Hall is in need of a major overhaul. This could prove quite costly.

##### Front Entrance:

There is in existence a 'Grand Plan' for a new entrance from Murray Street but this will have to remain on the drawing board for some time.

##### Administration and Management:

Last year's report spelled out in detail the management structure at the Centre. In reply to our appeal from Cardinal Hume to allow the priest to do his priestly work - definite plans were made to hand over the secular administration of the 'commercial operation' at the Centre to professional management. This will take some time but it remains high on the list of priorities.

A very sincere word of thanks must go to Mrs. Florrie D'Arcy who 'stepped in' when we lost our manager in the early summer. For almost nine months of the year, under her guiding hand, the management of our bars and halls was efficiently undertaken. This brought more pressure on other members of staff and to their credit the Centre continued to serve the needs of the people.



For most of 1983, while Fr. Butler gave of his time and energies to the Cycle Ride the Centre functioned with only one priest. As yet, no replacement priest is available thus emphasizing the real shortage of priests for this and other good works. The hope is that there will be a replacement. From my own point of view I would like to say thanks to the number of people who increased their voluntary work-load to help out.

#### Finance:

Before moving on to the Financial Report which will spell out the need for continued fund-raising, some formal words of thanks must be recorded. - To a major creditor who does not wish to be named, - we owe un-precedented words of gratitude for a most generous settlement. The payment was made possible mainly by the £81,778 (nett) raised by Fr. Butler's Cycle-Ride. We record our heartfelt thanks to the Irish Bishops, Priests and people for the vast majority of this sum of money. The massive publicity given in the "Irish Post" week after week in advertising and coverage was free of charge. The "Universe" also donated prime space on several occasions. We record our very sincere thanks.

After much pleading and skilful negotiations the door was opened to approaching our Bankers for a new deal. They responded generously and we pay tribute to the Bank of Ireland for their part in this new 'survival pack', details of which will be pointed out in the Financial Statement.

Three Brewers are also among our creditors. We are grateful to Charringtons, Courages and Whitbreads for their great patience in respect of their loans to the Irish Centre.

It must be emphasized that our 'new deal' with our Bankers is conditional on the targets that were set, being reached. We have come so far, that I am confident that you, our Council, will make every effort to bring this new deal to actualization.

The Audited Accounts for the Year Ended 31st December, 1983 reflect two separate negotiated deals which dramatically improve the financial position of the Centre.

The Income and Expenditure Account for the Year shows a surplus of £106,739 (£34,209, deficit in 1982). This improvement was made possible by the extra fund raising activity contributed by Fr. Butler's Cycle Ride amounting to £81,778 and a substantial reduction in the interest payable during the Year. The surplus for the Year made possible one of the deals which was a compromise agreed with one of the Centre's major Creditors who accepted £100,000 in full and final settlement of their outstanding debt. The other major Creditor being the Centre's Bankers (Bank of Ireland Ltd.) agreed to the compromise and in addition agreement has been reached with the Bankers on realistic repayment terms on their outstanding Loan. The main terms of this agreement are contained in Note 4 to the Accounts. The Balance Sheet reflects these two agreements which indicates that Current Liabilities have decreased from £999,902 to £244,216. The Loans from the Bank of Ireland and the Breweries are now treated as Long Term Loans and amount to £490,000. Net Expenditure on Fixed Assets during the Year amounted to only £6,662.

It is important to bear in mind that the Long Term Loans still require Financing and during 1984 it is necessary to raise £63,000 for repayment to the Bankers.

The Sales achieved by the Centre during the Year amounted to £288,104. There is a need to increase the Turnover of the Centre and the Finances would be improved if all Irish Organisations use the facilities available and help in Marketing the Function Halls available.



Grants received during the Year were from Camden Borough Council £32,500 and from the Irish Government a welfare grant of £9,087.

The Covenant Income for the Year was as follows:-

COVENANT INCOME

|                    |          |
|--------------------|----------|
| Bank of Ireland    | 3,571.00 |
| Allied Irish Banks | 3,571.00 |
| McCann & Looney    | 70.00    |
| P. Smyth           | 20.00    |

The refund of the Tax relevant to the above Covenants amounts to £3,031.

Donations received during the Year were as follows:-

DONATIONS

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Waterford Golf Society                   | 10,455.00 |
| London Irish Festival (1982)             | 7,885.00  |
| Anon (Loan Waiver)                       | 4,000.00  |
| Srs. of Charity - St. Vincent<br>De Paul | 2,100.00  |
| Comhaltas Ceoltori                       | 1,800.00  |
| Leitrim Association                      | 1,679.00  |
| Irish Centre Golf Society                | 683.00    |
| Takings - Bull                           | 415.00    |
| Aer Lingus                               | 260.00    |
| Clonfert Reunion                         | 200.00    |
| Chaplains                                | 200.00    |
| Per Mrs. Coughlin                        | 200.00    |
| Tyrone Association                       | 100.00    |
| Rev. Gordon                              | 100.00    |
| T. Hanley                                | 100.00    |

In addition there were a number of Sundry and Anonymous Donations which have contributed to the Financial Income of the Centre.

Conclusion:

You have been very patient in listening to this lengthy report. I believe that I can truthfully state that "the tide has turned" in the fortunes of this Irish Centre. This is because we have somehow won the good will of our Irish People here and at home. Our Centre here, in one of the largest cities in the world, is one that as Irish People we can be truly proud of. To the tens of thousands of people the living and the dead we say "Go raibh míle míle maith agaibh". To the many wonderful people whom the Good Lord has taken to himself we pray "Ar dheis Dhé go raibh a anam".

To the outgoing Administrative Committee, to those who have served on sub-committees, to a very dedicated and loyal staff, to the London Borough of Camden, the Irish Government and to so many individuals and groups here and at home in Ireland I express on behalf of all who have benefited and are benefiting from the Irish Centre a heartfelt word of thanks.

May God continue to be with us in our work "Is go mbeirimid beo ar an am seo arís".  
"Go raibh maith agaibh léir".