

## Eamon de Valera and Hitler: An Analysis of International Reaction to the Visit to the German Minister, May 1945

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### INTRODUCTION

The Fianna Fail government of Eamon de Valera adhered to a strict policy of neutrality throughout the Second World War, known officially as the 'Emergency'. Many studies have treated of the tensions and difficulties between Dublin and Washington/London from 1939 until 1945<sup>1</sup>. The time of greatest difficulty, perhaps, was the summer of 1940 when there were fears in government circles that the British might be tempted to invade in anticipation of a possible German landing<sup>2</sup>. Other well publicised difficulties between Dublin, London and Washington in the later war years, resulted in well organised press campaigns

1. *Leader*, 31 January 1953. T. D. Williams, 'A study in neutrality', *The Leader*, 31 January 1953 to 25 April 1953; the series was also published in the *Irish Press*, July 1953. See also 'De Valera in Power', in Francis MacManus (ed.), *The years of the great test, 1926-1939* (Mercier Press, Dublin, 1967), pp 30-42, 173-83; 'Ireland and the war', in T. D. Williams and K. B. Nowlan (eds), *Ireland in the war years and after* (Dublin, 1969), pp 14-27, 201-12; 'Irish foreign policy, 1949-1969' in J. J. Lee (ed.), *Ireland, 1945-1970* (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1979), pp 136-50; Deirdre McMahon, *Republicans and imperialists - Anglo-Irish relations in the 1930s* (Yale University Press, 1984). See Paul Canning, *British policy towards Ireland 1921-1941* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1985); J. T. Carroll, *Ireland in the war years 1939-1945* (David and Charles Newton Abbot, 1975); T. R. Dwyer, *Irish Neutrality and the U.S.A. 1939-47* (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1977); Robert Fish, *In time of war - Ireland, Ulster and the price of neutrality 1939-45* (Andre Deutsch/Brandon Books, 1983); J. P. Duggan, *Neutral Ireland and the Third Reich* (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1985); Carol Carter, *The shamrock and the swastika - German espionage in Ireland in World War II* (Pacific Books, Palo Alto, 1977); John Bowman, *De Valera and the Ulster question* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1982); Patrick Keatinge, *A place among the nations - issues of Irish foreign policy* (IPA, Dublin, 1978); *The formation of Irish foreign policy* (IPA, Dublin, 1973); and *A singular stance - Irish neutrality in the 1980s* (IPA, Dublin, 1984).

2. Dermot Keogh, *Ireland and Europe 1919-1948* (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1988) and expanded paperback version, *Ireland and Europe, 1919-1989* (Hibernian University Press, Cork and Dublin, 1989), Chapters 4 and 5 in particular, and Fisk, *In time of war*, *op. cit.*, in note 1, Chapters 6-9. I argue that there is some evidence to suggest that in spite of the 'invasion psychosis' in Dublin in June, July and August 1940, there were senior officials who believed that the British would not invade. The secretary of the Department of External Affairs, Joseph Walshe, was of the opposite opinion. My hypothesis is that the most senior army officers on whom De Valera had come to rely were of the opinion that the country really only had to fear a German invasion.



against Irish neutrality. However, historians may discover that the highlighting of differences between national leaders, like de Valera and Churchill, has deflected attention away from the high level of cooperation which the taoiseach permitted at various levels. Irish wartime policy, irrespective of the refusal to give access to the ports, was emphatically pro-allied. The extent of that cooperation will remain unknown until histories of Irish intelligence, counter-espionage and defence policy have been written. Traditional nationalists may well be surprised by the degree of willing cooperation between de Valera's government and the allies<sup>3</sup>.

De Valera was obstinate and he was somewhat partial to high-profile confrontations between himself and Churchill. (It should not be forgotten that Fianna Fail fought two general elections during the war; politics did not stop just because of the international conflict.) On balance, however, very few of the allied officials and military personnel who were in regular contact with the situation in Dublin would have said that de Valera was being deliberately obstructive. He was cantankerous and annoyingly punctilious at times: the British Minister, Sir John Maffey, found him cross-grained in some of his attitudes, but Maffey stressed in his wartime reporting that de Valera was neither pro-Nazi nor pro-Axis<sup>4</sup>.

In the course of a speech in Cork after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, de Valera said, on 14 December 1941:

Since this terrible war began, our sympathies have gone out to all the suffering peoples who have been dragged into it. ... It would be unnatural, then, if we did not sympathise in a special manner with the people of the United States and if we did not feel with them in all the anxieties and trials which this war must bring upon them. For this reason strangers who do not understand our conditions have begun to ask how America's entry into the war will affect our state policy here. We answered that question in advance. The policy of the state remains unchanged. We can only be a friendly neutral. From the moment this war began, there was for this state only one policy possible - neutrality<sup>5</sup>.

3. In my conversation with diplomats, civil servants and army officers who served during the war years I have been struck by the consensus on this judgment. In their individual capacities, each had knowledge of how the allies were helped in a very discreet fashion. That is also the perception of a number of British and American personnel who served in the armed forces during the Second World War. I interviewed one former member of the OSS, Martin Quigley, who told me that in his short tour in Ireland during the war he had been impressed by the level of support in government circles for the cause of the allies. That put him in the opposite camp to the US minister in Dublin, David Gray, who tended to be a believer in the 'malign' scenario. On balance, Quigley was correct in his judgment.

4. Dermot Keogh, 'The Irish Department of Foreign Affairs', in Zara Steiner, *The Times survey of foreign offices of the world* (Times Books, London, 1982), pp 287. Here I quote from Maffey's profile of Walshe, which was written in 1946. It gives the envoy's opinion of both the secretary and de Valera.

5. Maurice Moynihan (ed.), *Speeches and statements by Eamon de Valera 1917-1973* (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1980), pp 462-3.



De Valera simply made explicit in that speech the policy that his government had adopted since the outbreak of war in 1939: in the totality of relationships between Dublin and the allies, the British and the United States to be specific, the position of Ireland being a 'friendly neutral' had been accepted, albeit reluctantly in some circles. There was a residue of antagonism directed towards Ireland in the British and US press in 1944, but that was the lot of any neutral power. All the Irish government had to do was to keep a low profile and work towards the establishment of harmonious relations with all the allied powers in the immediate aftermath of the war. Senior officials at Iveagh House, the headquarters of the Irish Department of External Affairs, ought to have been relatively pleased at Ireland's international profile in early 1945. Irish diplomacy had helped to ride out a number of storms; and it was a question of 'steady as she goes', of moving quietly through choppy waters until the end of the wartime journey where land was already in sight.

Having navigated the country successfully through the war, de Valera took a course of action which brought Ireland on to the front pages of many leading newspapers. On 3 May 1945 the *Irish Press* reported under the heading 'People and places' that the taoiseach, who was also minister for external affairs, accompanied by the secretary of the Department of External Affairs, 'called on Dr Hempel, the German minister, last evening, to express his condolences'. That was a reference to the death of Hitler who had committed suicide on 30 April. The *Irish Press* also carried a paragraph, from the Reuter news agency, under the heading 'Flags at half-mast in Lisbon'. It was reported that

Two days mourning for Herr Hitler were ordered by the Portuguese government yesterday. Flags will be flown at half mast on all public buildings, says the decree. The Spanish Embassy and the Japanese legation in Lisbon lowered flags yesterday<sup>6</sup>.

The *Irish Times* was stopped by the censor from publishing an agency piece which was filed as follows:

Eire delegation mourns Hitler. Lisbon, May 3. The Eireann Minister in Lisbon today hoisted the German swastika at half mast over the legation as a sign of mourning for Hitler.

The context in which that inaccurate report was filed is explained later. It was fortunate for the *Irish Times* that it was not allowed to carry the piece because the Associated Press correspondent in Lisbon quickly filed a correction requesting the cancellation of the story<sup>7</sup>. However, the *Irish Times* did carry a longer story than the *Irish Press* on 3 May about de Valera's visit of condolence to the German minister, Eduard Hempel.

6. *Irish Press*, 3 May 1945.

7. Secretary's files, P98, Department of Foreign Affairs, Iveagh House, Dublin; the censored telegrams are on this file together with a note from the chief censor's office.



A Prussian aristocrat and officer in the First World War, Hempel had been in Ireland since 1937 where he had behaved in a highly professional manner and won the esteem of the taoiseach, Walshe and the Dublin diplomatic corps. He was not a Nazi and, unlike his wife, exhibited no sympathy for National Socialism. De Valera had cause to recognise his professionalism during the course of the Second World War when Germany conducted a duplicitous policy towards Ireland. Hempel was never a part of the German effort to establish contact with the IRA. Dublin was a very small city and Hempel was esteemed by many for his dignified professional behaviour. These considerations weighted heavily with de Valera on the evening of 2 May 1945. Under the heading 'Herr Hitler's death - callers at German legation' the *Irish Times* reproduced exactly the same opening paragraph as the *Irish Press* and then continued:

The swastika at the German legation was flown at half-mast at 58 Northumberland Road. An official of the German legation in Dublin last night told an *Irish Times* reporter that they had heard of the death of Herr Hitler on the German radio on the previous night, but had received no official intimation from Berlin. He would not make any statement about the present crisis, but said that the legation had received many messages of sympathy and there had been a large number of callers<sup>8</sup>.

It further indicated that de Valera visited the German legation at 58 Northumberland Road. The headline 'Callers at German legation' would also lead one to that conclusion. However, the laconic first paragraphs in both the *Irish Times* and *Irish Press* are identical and must have been released by a government source and passed by the censor. It is not stated where de Valera visited Hempel, but the term 'last evening' may provide the clue. It is much more likely that de Valera would have gone to the German minister's residence if it was in the late afternoon. Colonel John P. Duggan makes that point in his book, *Neutral Ireland and the Third Reich*<sup>9</sup>. He presents the image of an unnerved German minister: Hempel was 'in a distressed and inconsolable state'. The accuracy of this description of events was denied by Frau Hempel many years later, but, according to Colonel Duggan, she 'put the record straight as to the location of the visit'. De Valera had gone with Walshe to the residence and not to the legation. Colonel Duggan comments: 'Some subsequently saw a typical deviousness in his choice of venue, as if it made it less official'.

There may well be a perfectly innocent reason why de Valera and Walshe went to the residence. It was hardly 'business as usual' at the German legation in Dublin following the death of Hitler. The minister, who was in a distressed state, may have chosen not to go to the office. His professional future was quite unpredictable. Moreover, he may have considered it more appropriate and more formal to receive de Valera officially in his home. There was also the additional advantage of avoiding any undue publicity. With the further possibility of demonstrations outside the legation there is no reason, in my view, to read

8. *Irish Times*, 3 May 1945.

9. J. P. Duggan, *Neutral Ireland*, *op. cit.*, in note 1, pp 241-243.



anything particularly 'de Valeraesque' into the visit to Hempel's home; the German minister is most likely to have chosen the venue himself. The visit was either *official* or *private*; and de Valera never denied that he was making an *official* visit to express his condolences on the death of Hitler. The paragraph in the national press indicated that the minister for external affairs was treating the death of Hitler in the same way as he treated the death of any other leader belonging to a state with which Ireland had diplomatic relations.

The following day, 3 May 1945, Michael McDunphy, secretary to the president, Douglas Hyde, 'called on the German minister [yesterday] to express condolence on behalf of the president'. Exactly the same wording was carried by the *Irish Press*, *Irish Times* and *Irish Independent*<sup>10</sup>. The visit of McDunphy, representing the president, is of considerable significance. De Valera had had an opportunity to think about his action overnight and had decided not to change his course despite the instantaneous negative reaction in the international press and media. McDunphy was not stopped from going to Hempel by de Valera. Was the taoiseach made aware in advance of McDunphy's action? It is probable that the Department of the Taoiseach was so informed and did not raise any objections. The de Valera papers, which are still closed to researchers, may provide some evidence of the debate which went on at Iveagh House and Government Buildings that day, but for the moment one has to rely on oral sources. The assistant secretary of the Department of External Affairs, Frederick Boland, is believed to have 'begged' de Valera not to go<sup>11</sup>. The position adopted by Boland's immediate superior, Joseph Walshe, is less clear. According to Con Cremin, who did not return from his postings in Berlin and Lisbon until 1946, it was his understanding that de Valera was swayed by advice from a number of his cabinet colleagues and one close political friend. Cremin mentioned the tanaiste, Sean T. O'Kelly, specifically as having actively supported the visit to Hempel. He also told me that the editor of the *Irish Press*, Frank Gallagher, was consulted and took the same position as O'Kelly<sup>12</sup>. The minister for the coordination of defensive measures, Frank Aiken, told me that he had fully approved of the visit. It may have been a call of condolence, he said, but there was certainly no sympathy expressed for Hitler. He felt that the British would have taunted neutral Ireland for not fulfilling the letter of the protocol had de Valera not gone to see Hempel<sup>13</sup>.

It does not appear, therefore, that de Valera's visit to Hempel was an impulsive act. It was not carried out without seeking advice from diplomats, civil servants, ministerial colleagues and political advisers; but it would be interesting to know whether the taoiseach consulted either the minister for

10. The *Irish Press* put the notice under the heading 'People and places'. The *Irish Times* used the headline 'Condolence', and the *Irish Independent* 'Herr Hitler's death'.

11. This version of the events leading up to de Valera's visit of condolence was given to me by T. D. Williams, a close friend of Boland. Boland himself was somewhat reluctant to discuss the episode when I spoke to him, but he did confirm that he had been opposed to the visit as did Mrs Boland. Cremin, while stressing that he had not been in the country, told me that he had also heard the same version of events.

12. Con Cremin is my source for this statement.

13. I interviewed Frank Aiken on a number of occasions. He was very emphatic whenever I brought up the subject of the visit of condolence to Hempel. He maintained that de Valera had, irrespective of international reaction, behaved correctly.



agriculture, Jim Ryan, or the secretary of the Department of the Taoiseach, Maurice Moynihan. Both were known for their prudence and their ability to slow down the decision-making process. The death of Hitler was certainly an occasion where in retrospect, further clarification should have been sought before a decision was taken to condole officially with Hempel. The role of the secretary of the Department of External Affairs, Joseph Walshe, in the crucial decision of 2 May remains most difficult to evaluate. I have discovered no written evidence which would give any clue as to his stance. Oral sources have indicated that, on balance, he favoured the visit to Hempel, but that is not definitive proof. However, the following factors could have had a bearing on Walshe's general attitude.

Walshe had adhered in the 1930s strictly to the basic principle that diplomatic relations were between states and not between governments. He appears to have held to that view during the Spanish Civil War when it was clear that Walshe's sympathies would not have been with the Republicans. It should also be remembered that Walshe had in 1944 been involved in a very bitter discussion with the new government of General de Gaulle in France over the accreditation of Sean Murphy, who had represented Ireland at Vichy. Walshe had narrowly won that particular dispute and Murphy had been accepted as the Irish representative in Paris on the principle that diplomatic relations were with states and not with governments. Logically, the Irish government had little choice after the death of Hitler to do anything other than condole with Hempel. That may have been the way that Walshe viewed the situation. The decision may have been further complicated for Walshe by the fact that he was a good friend of Hempel. They had come to know each other very well during the course of the war and had developed a respect for each other. Walshe would also have been aware of Hempel's sense of desolation and feelings of humiliation in the last days of the war. It is impossible, therefore, to separate the personal factors from the more clinical question of protocol when trying to evaluate Walshe's position in the decision-making process. If one were to leave the question of personal friendship aside, Walshe would have attached sufficient importance to the principle underlying the protocol to warrant a decision in favour of paying a visit of condolence to Hempel, whereas de Valera is much more likely to have been influenced by considerations of friendship and his personal esteem for Hempel. The latter factor weighed heavily in de Valera's private correspondence and public statements on this issue.

The Irish minister in Washington, Robert Brennan, was one of de Valera's old friends. He had been one of the diplomats reinstated in the Irish foreign service after de Valera had come to power in 1932. It is not surprising, therefore, that he chose to confide in his former comrade from the period of the Anglo-Irish war and the civil war. The taoiseach wrote to Brennan on Whit Monday 1945:

I have noted that my call on the German minister on the announcement of Hitler's death was played up to the utmost. I expected this. I could have had a diplomatic illness but, as you know, I would scorn that sort of thing... So long as we retained our diplomatic relations with Germany, to have failed to call upon the German representative would have been an act of unpardonable discourtesy to the German nation and to Dr Hempel himself.



During the whole of the war, Dr Hempel's conduct was irreproachable. He was always friendly and invariably correct - in marked contrast with Gray. I certainly was not going to add to his humiliation in the hour of defeat.

De Valera felt that shirking the visit would have set a bad precedent. It was, he thought, of considerable importance that the formal acts of courtesy should be made on occasions such as the death of a head of state and that they should not have attached to them any further special significance, such as connoting approval or disapproval of the politics of the state in question, or of its head. 'It is important that it should never be inferred that these formal acts imply the passing of any judgements good or bad', he concluded<sup>14</sup>. Later in the Dail, de Valera defended his action against taunts from the opposition. He told the House that Hempel was the representative of the German nation. He rejected the opposition notion that the latter was 'a representative of Nazism'<sup>15</sup>. His visit 'implied no question of approval or disapproval or judgement of any kind on the German people of the state represented here'. He added that there was little publicity given to the fact that the Dail had been adjourned on the death of Roosevelt.

Both of these sources are cited deliberately: one was a private response to a friend in whom he could confide; the Dail speech was Iveagh House making a case for his action. Unfortunately it is not clear whether the quotation cited above constitutes the entire Brennan letter. Nevertheless, the extent to which he concentrated upon the personality of Hempel ought not to be read as mere rationalisation. De Valera may well have set his esteem for Hempel above the possible effects which an official visit of condolence might have on Ireland's international standing. That appears a likely interpretation. The fact that de Valera stood virtually alone in adhering to the protocol was only evident to him afterwards. The taoiseach may also have failed to estimate the strength of international revulsion which was directed against him personally for treating Hitler as an average head of state. Hitler was, in the words of *The Times*, the 'world's worst and most dangerous malefactor'<sup>16</sup>.

Within a few hours of the visit, Brennan sent a telegram from Washington at 4.21 p.m. local time (9.21 p.m. Irish time) giving reaction in the United States:

Radio Commentator announced item in bitter and caustic tone. Although similar action by Portugal is reported Chief gets headlines in all papers seen. Particularly because of horror atrocity stories of German prison camps during past months. Anti-German feeling was never so bitter here as now<sup>17</sup>.

14. De Valera to Bob Brennan, quoted in Lord Longford and T. P. O'Neill, *Eamon de Valera* (London, 1970), p. 411.

15. *Irish Times*, 20 May 1945.

16. *The Times* (London), 3 May 1945.

17. Washington to Iveagh House, 3 May 1945 (received on 4 May), Secretary's files, D/FA P98, Iveagh House, Dublin (cited from here on as P98).



That telegram was decoded and read in Iveagh House on 4 May, the same day as the following item appeared in the *Irish News* (Belfast) and other British papers.

'The switch-over from war to peace of our labour forces and industrial capacity is now imminent and will increasingly take shape'. Mr Hugh Dalton, president of the Board of Trade, told the Painters Research Association at a lunch at the Savoy, London yesterday. 'If I were Mr de Valera - thank God I am not - I would open my remarks by condoling with you on the passing of a painter', Mr Dalton said amid laughter. 'I think, however, you would regard it more appropriate to drink to the future disencumbrance of this foul brute who began as a painter, but who degenerated in later life, and who is now in physical life degenerating further'<sup>18</sup>.

This was the beginning of a veritable deluge of criticism from abroad. Ireland had rarely in the past received such attention from the world press. De Valera made front page headlines in the United States and in Europe. Censorship spared the Irish the pain or the pleasure, depending on one's personal point of view of reading what was being written about the taoiseach.

On the morning of 4 May, as news of the strong reaction from abroad was filtering into Iveagh House, telegrams were sent out to all heads of mission to find out what exactly other governments had done in the same circumstances. At 12.10 p.m. a telegram (*dearg* code) was sent to Berne:

Did Swiss government take any measures condolence or official mourning on Hitler's death? Please telegraph immediately<sup>19</sup>.

At 3.50 p.m. on 4 May a *dearg* code telegram was sent to Kerney in Madrid:

Please telegraph immediately whether Spanish government took any measures coldolence or official mourning Hitler's death<sup>20</sup>.

The responses were quite disconcerting for Iveagh House and they confirmed some of the worst fears of officials like Boland. The Swiss, for example, had pursued a course of action which common sense dictated the Irish should also have taken. The veteran diplomat, Francis Cremins, reported on 4 May (received in Dublin on the fifth) that he had spoken earlier that day with the head of the Foreign Affairs Division of the Political Department. The latter had stated that the Swiss had received no official notification of Hitler's death. He referred

18. *News Letter*, 4 May 1945.

19. Iveagh House to Cremins, Berne, 4 May 1945 (*dearg* code), P98.

20. Iveagh House to Kerney, Madrid 4 May 1945 (*dearg* code), P98.



to the different versions of the manner of his death. The Swiss had done nothing regarding the presentation of condolences. There was no flag flying outside the German embassy in Berne<sup>21</sup>.

The Irish could have pursued the same course of 'inaction' if only de Valera had waited. Meanwhile, Frederick Gleaner reported from Berne on 3 May 1945 for the *Daily Express* that neither the Swiss government nor the German legation was flying flags at half mast. This report supported what Cremins had told Dublin about the Swiss attitude towards a message of condolence, but there was the further speculation that 'even if they [the Swiss government] did know [officially about the death of Hitler], they would not send such a message'.

Iveagh House had then to await telegrams from the two Irish diplomats in the Iberian Peninsula. There was little hope of any comfort from that quarter as both Spain and Portugal were dictatorships. However, it is quite fortunate for Ireland that the international press was spared most of the details of what had occurred in Madrid and Lisbon. It would have made a bad situation worse. The Irish minister in Madrid, Leopold Kerney, read of the 'presumed death of Hitler in the Spanish press on 2 May'. He reported to Dublin that Hitler's position as head of a state with which Ireland maintained diplomatic relations 'appeared to warrant a somewhat similar attitude on my part to that observed on a recent comparable occasion'. That was probably a reference to the recent death of F. D. Roosevelt. Kerney decided on 2 May to take counsel from the Swiss minister in Madrid. The Irish envoy was told on the phone by the Swiss diplomat that he had been in touch with both the papal nuncio and his foreign office and that it was better to await confirmation of the death of Hitler before deciding upon a course of action. The Swiss envoy thought that a personal visit to the German embassy would be a matter of courtesy as between accredited heads of mission. However, he had a reservation about such a course because there was no ambassador, only a chargé d'affaires. On 3 May, at 12.14 p.m., Kerney received a telephone call from the Swiss minister to say that he was calling at the Spanish foreign office to find out whether the news of Hitler's death was definite.

Less than an hour later, the Swiss envoy called to say that it had been decided that the 'proper course would be to leave cards at the embassy, but to do so personally. He informed Kerney that the Spanish foreign minister intended to make a personal call upon the German charge d'affaires at 5.00 p.m. But the Swiss envoy was of the opinion that it was not necessary for either himself or Kerney to do likewise. Kerney went to the embassy at 1.15 p.m. on 3 May:

At the entrance there were large numbers of sympathisers waiting their turn to sign their names at one or other of the three tables prepared for the purpose; as I entered the embassy I was recognised by a messenger who asked me if I wished to see Freiherr von der Hayden-Rynsch, *Chargé d'Affaires ad interim*; I was at once ushered into latter's office; I expressed sympathy and made this applicable also to the German people as a whole,

21. Cremins to Iveagh House, 4 May 1945 (dearg code), P98; Cremins also sent a translation of an article in *Berner Tagblatt*, 6 May 1945, on the de Valera visit. There were also notices in other Swiss papers: *Liberte*, 3 and 4 May 1945; *Courier de Berne*, 3 May 1945, P98.



stating that Ireland's sympathies always went out to those who suffered; he told me that 'de Valera had called on the German minister that morning (though I suppose the visit was really made the previous day); I asked him how he knew, and he said the news came in a Reuter despatch, tapping a closed despatch box on his desk.

It is not clear whether the Swiss envoy managed to leave his card without being entertained by the German charge. It is probable that he did. However, Kerney was unwise to have allowed himself to be caught in such a situation. The *official* visit by the Irish envoy - it was regarded as such - resulted in an interesting set of letters to the legation in Madrid. The German chargé wrote on 4 May:

I would not like to refrain from assuring Your Excellency how much I have been moved by this proof of condolence, for which allow me to express my deepest gratitude. I know the admiration always felt by the Führer for Ireland and her history and I am sure that his death for the liberty of his people will also be understood by the Irish people.

The Kerney visit was a matter of some comment in Francoist circles in Madrid. The Conde de Mayalde, Jose Finat, who had been Spanish ambassador in Berlin, wrote with appreciation for the 'stance' of the Irish after the news of the de Valera visit had reached Madrid on the evening of 3 May. The EFE news agency had reported that 'the head of the government, de Valera, had personally called on the German minister to express his sympathy for the death of Hitler'. Finat wrote:

The sympathy which both as Spaniard and as Catholic I have always felt for the noble people that you represent has continually increased during the war because of the Christian and dignified attitude of its government. Today, in presence of the noble ['caballeroso'] gesture of Mr de Valera, president of Ireland [sic], I desire to manifest to Your Excellency my admiration and respect.

On 5 May Kerney received a 'manuscript letter' from Ramon Serrano Suner, a former Spanish foreign minister and strong supporter of the Axis throughout the war. He wrote with embarrassing warmth about de Valera:

The brave, Christian and human attitude of President de Valera moves me to write you these lines to express to you my admiration for your country and to assure you again of my friendship<sup>22</sup>.

22. Kerney to Secretary, 7 May 1945, P98.



Salazar's Portugal proved almost as potentially embarrassing for Dublin as Spain. The charge d'affaires in Lisbon, P. O'Byrne, reported to Dublin that the news of Hitler's death 'in action' had been picked up on the radio on 2 May. Salazar immediately ordered all flags on public buildings to be flown at half-mast. The following day, 3 May, was a national holiday to celebrate the discovery of Brazil. Flags on all public buildings, therefore, went back to the top of the mast only to be lowered again the following day. Reference has already been made to the Associated Press report from Lisbon which the *Irish Times* had been prevented from publishing by the censor; there it had been stated that the swastika had been flown at half-mast over the Irish legation. The report had been 'killed' later by AP. While it was true that the swastika flew at half-mast over the Irish legation, it was not true that it was put there by the Irish charge. The details of what actually happened are quite interesting. The premises of the Irish legation, passport and shipping office were on the ground floor of a large building:

The building in which our present premises are situated (on the ground floor) consists of two upper stories, the second of which has been occupied for the past five years by a German organisation supposed to be engaged in the insurance business (but quite obviously in other more important activities). Thus, the only flags that flew on 2nd, 3rd, and 4th floors from this building (right over the legation) were the Swastika [sic] at half-mast and alongside it a Portuguese flag similarly displayed. As the existence of the German office seems not to have been generally known and as the only nameplates on the entrance to the building are those of the Irish Legation (Passport and Shipping Office), it was generally supposed that the whole building was ours and consequently the delegation, which had never before during three years displayed a flag here, had produced a German one especially in sign of mourning for Hitler<sup>23</sup>.

O'Byrne spent most of 3 May answering queries from the press and irate members of the Irish community resident in Portugal. One Irishman threatened to 'throw up' his nationality if he learned that the swastika story was true. The Irish charge tried to placate his callers. He was interviewed by journalists from Reuter and from the *Daily Express*. O'Byrne explained the situation and they went away understanding the Irish situation. However, it was extremely difficult to 'kill' a good story. Despite the retraction by PA over the wires, various newspapers, including the *New York Herald Tribune*, carried the inaccurate report on 4 May. Associated Press also reported that the Portuguese government had sent representatives to the German legation in Lisbon 'to communicate its official sorrow at the death of the "German chief of State"'. There was also a report, on 7 May, in the Lisbon paper *Voz*, that the German legation had had a Mass celebrated for Hitler where a Fr Wuerzer 'spoke in praise of the Fuhrer as the soul of the fight against Bolshevism'. O'Byrne referred in his report of 11 May to religious commemorative ceremonies carried out on the instructions of the German mission in Lisbon. Unlike Kerney, O'Byrne did not visit the German

23. O'Byrne to Secretary, 11 May 1945, P98.



minister. He simply sent his card expressing the condolence of the Irish legation 'in compliance with the formal procedure'. O'Byrne, unlike Kerney, did not receive a reply.

At Iveagh House, Walshe and Boland had been made aware very quickly of the fact that Spain and Portugal were the only countries in Western Europe where condolence calls had been made. The Irish government had gone to great lengths to distance itself from the rightist 'Catholic bloc' during the war. There was no comfort to be drawn, therefore, from the fact that the authoritarian governments of Franco and Salazar had been more nuanced than the Irish in their handling of the delicate diplomatic question of condolence on the death of Hitler. The Swiss had provided the Irish with a model for action, but de Valera had acted with uncharacteristic speed and had to suffer being attacked as a pro-Axis fellow traveller.

De Valera, who had been born in the United States and had spent so much of his public career there in the 1920s, must have been particularly upset by the deluge of criticism which descended upon him from that country. He may have received private praise from Serrano Suner in Spain, but there was no voice of any importance to take his side in America. Brennan had warned Dublin on 3 May by telegram that feelings were running high. The Irish envoy could not have anticipated the universal condemnation which was to follow.

The *New York Times* had a front page box on 3 May headed 'De Valera proffers sympathy to Reich'. The *Herald Tribune*, on page 3, carried a two-column heading 'De Valera at German legation offers condolences on Hitler'. The *Washington Post* had a front-page headline 'De Valera expressed condolence for Hitler'. Another paper's front-page headline read 'De Valera extends sympathy to Nazis'. The next day, 4 May, the *New York Times* editorial was entitled: 'Mr de Valera's regrets' and stated:

In making a personal call at the German legation in Dublin 'to express condolences for Adolf Hitler's death', it is possible that President Eamon de Valera was merely following what he believed to be the protocol required of a neutral State. Considering the character and the record of the man for whose death he was expressing grief, there is obviously something wrong with the protocol, the neutrality of Mr de Valera<sup>24</sup>.

The *New York Herald Tribune's* headline on 4 May read: 'Neutrality gone mad'. The paper commented:

In this time of the breaking of nations when the stream of history becomes a rushing millrace, there is much to arrest the attention of the world. But, despite all preoccupation with greater events, there is still time for a glance and a gasp at the spectacle of the prime minister of Eire marching solemnly to the German legation to present his government's condolences on the death of Adolf Hitler while the pious Dr Salazar places the flags of Portugal at half-mast to mourn the passing of the enemy of the human race.

24. *New York Times*, 4 May 1945.



This is neutrality surely, it is neutrality gone mad - neutrality carried into a diplomatic jungle where good and evil alike vanish in the red-tape thickets: where conscience flounders helplessly in sloughs of protocol, and there is no sustenance for the spirit but mouldy forms and dessicated ceremonies. The fighting nations have learned to expect little from those states that kept aloof in the great crisis of mankind and held up a mirror to their own moral excellence for abstaining from this vulgar brawl which was shaping the destiny of the world. The people who have suffered so much have made distinctions among the neutrals and excuses for their various stands. But, if Mr de Valera and Dr Salazar believe that their tears for the late unlamented Adolf Hitler - whether those tears are sincere or of the diplomatic crocodile variety - will either be forgiven or forgotten, they are more naive than men in their position have any right to be. Obviously, for all the colourless connotations of the word, neutrality can go rancid when it is kept too long<sup>25</sup>.

On 5 May, the *Washington Post* wrote an editorial entitled 'Moral myopia' and attacked the visit, linking Ireland and authoritarian Portugal:

Hitler's death caused the Portuguese government to order two days of mourning and Prime Minister de Valera of Eire to make a personal condolence call at the German embassy in Dublin. These are entirely proper observances in connection with the decease of the head of a friendly state. Equivalent honors were accorded the late President Roosevelt. Neither the right of the Portuguese and Irish governments to act with such impartiality nor the 'correctness' of their conduct can be called into question. Yet we have an indication here of why diplomatic usages have fallen into such disrepute.

The editorial continued

The neutrality which these governments practised throughout the course of the war was dictated by expediency; they wished to escape payment of the price by which other peoples purchased their freedom and their immunity. Now, however, the war in Europe has been won; the neutrals need no longer fear Hitler or his Reich. Can it be that the moral myopia they imposed upon themselves in the face of danger has now blinded them to all ethical values? Or is it merely that a preoccupation with protocol has atrophied their emotions?

In sober truth, there could be no real neutrality in this war. Its meaning probed too deeply into the foundations of men's lives. What William James referred to as a 'forced option' confronted men everywhere. They had to act, at some point, as though they were for fascism or against it. And the manner of their acting when the option was forced upon them, whatever their pretense of detachment, is the revelation of their stand. Even in death,

25. *New York Tribune*, 4 May 1945.



Hitler forced a choice upon the neutral governments. By their response, they have judged themselves and that judgment in the case of Eire and Portugal is a condemnation in the eyes of all free people.

Examples of the reaction to the visit among some Irish Americans can be found in the following letters from Teresa S. Fitzpatrick, the circulation manager of the *Atlantic Monthly*. She wrote:

At the time you and your countrymen decided to keep Ireland neutral, I knew that you had given the matter grave thought and were acting in the best interest of the country. I cannot believe, however, that you, a Roman Catholic, a humanitarian, a man who, like all of Ireland, respects the sacredness of a woman's person above all, could have expressed regret at the death of a man who violated every code of decency.

I am not writing this idly, nor wish to be disrespectful or rude. You, as the head of the country I love so much, enjoy my constant prayers. If this statement is not true, may I hope that you will answer this letter so that I, in turn, can speak in your name to the many people of my acquaintance who have spoken to me in this matter?<sup>26</sup>

Angela D. Walsh from New York wrote on 3 May to de Valera:

Diplomatic niceties to the representative of a fiend and of a nation of fiends. That there has been little mention other than this in New York City, with the exception of a brief announcement over the radio, speaks well for the tolerance - and control - of the American people.

I am horrified, ashamed, humiliated, by your offering your sympathy to the German people on the death of a murderer of millions; not only soldiers, but women and children, patients in hospitals. You, who are the head of a Catholic country, have now shown allegiance to a devil. My name is WALSH and, when I read that a Joseph WALSH accompanied you, I wanted to take the first steps to have my name changed. Joseph WALSH has brought dishonor to the House of Walsh.

She reminded de Valera of the situation in Europe which had been seen in the recently shown pictures:

Have you seen the motion pictures of the victims of German concentration camps, de Valera? Have you seen the crematoriums? Have you seen the bodies of little children murdered by Nazi hands? Have you seen the flourishing cabbages - cabbages for German food - flourishing because of the fertilizer, human remains of citizens from almost completely Catholic countries like Poland? These were citizens of conquered countries - and EIRE might easily have been a conquered country, neutrality or no neutrality. Have you seen the living dead, de Valera? Skin stretched over bone,

26. Teresa S. Fitzpatrick to de Valera, 11 May 1945 P.98.



and too weak to walk? Have you seen the hard, merciless expressions on the *women* of the SS troops? These same women capable of breeding a race of devils to make a hell on earth. Have you seen the beautiful examples of Nazi skill - lampshades made of tattooed human flesh?

Angela Walsh was virulent in her criticism:

So de Valera offers condolences on the death of a man worse than Judas Iscariot. Judas Iscariot did not believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. But, after the death of Christ on the Cross, Judas Iscariot was penitent - and hanged himself. Just what are you doing for - and to - EIRE, de Valera? We in the United States thought you were a man of vision; a leader; a man capable of developing EIRE, of having that country take an important place in the world of the future. But, what in the past decade have you accomplished for EIRE?<sup>27</sup>

The legation in Washington, and the Irish consulates in other major cities, must have received a huge volume of correspondence on the visit. The extent of the protests was reflected in a telegram sent on 5 May to the legation which reported:

Among general public, incident has attracted more attention than anything else arising from our neutrality. There is considerable adverse criticism among Irish and some defenders. The President of American-Irish Historical Society was asked to call meeting to condemn action of Taoiseach but request was refused.

I know how to answer all this by pointing out, among other things, that German Representative here attended inauguration of President in 1941 on invitation of Secretary of State after Poland, Denmark, Norway, Luxembourg, Holland, Belgium, France had been overrun, but I am not sure it is wise to have controversy at the present moment and think that I should wait for a few days, subject to your opinion<sup>28</sup>.

On 15 May 1945, Washington reported on a debate in the Massachusetts House of Representatives, where a resolution had been tabled calling on Congress to grant neutral nations representation at the United Nations peace talks. Rep. Henry L. Shattuck of Boston, who had endowed the chair of Celtic Studies at Harvard University, proposed an amendment to exclude from the peace talks neutral nations which had sent messages of condolence to the German people on the death of Hitler. The amendment was rejected, but it did reflect the acrimony felt in Boston at de Valera's visit to the German legation<sup>29</sup>.

27. Angela D. Walsh to de Valera, 3 May 1945, P.98.

28. P98.

29. Washington to secretary, 15 May 1945, P.98; see reports in *Boston Traveller*, 9 May 1945.



Sean Nunan, Counsellor at the Washington embassy, sent batches of press clippings to Dublin: 'As you will see, they are, practically without exception, extremely critical - as well as uninformed'. Nunan referred to the Irish in New York who

had to endure so much criticism that they grew tired of it and began to defend the taoiseach's action. It may interest the taoiseach to know that Judge Owen Bohan told the consul general that if he were reporting on the reception of the action among Irish circles in New York he would like him to say that he personally was 'shocked' by it<sup>30</sup>.

Some of de Valera's closest friends in the United States had joined the chorus of criticism against him. The major east coast newspapers had carried condemnatory editorials. Irish Americans suffered harassment and intimidation as a consequence of the visit to Hempel. While it was possible for the legation to keep a low public profile in the US, the same strategy could not be adopted at the diplomatic level. Explanations were being sought. There are two 'intercepted' US government telegrams on file in the Department of Foreign Affairs. It is possible that the US minister, David Gray, could have given them to Joseph Walshe, but it is much more likely that the Irish government was so worried about the possible American reaction to the Hempel visit that it was decided to interdict cable traffic. It would appear that the State Department, having heard about the de Valera visit, wired Gray on 3 May. It was signed 'Grew acting' and it stated:

Today's press carried UP despatch datelined Dublin May 2 stating De Valera called personally on German Minister to express condolence on Hitler's death. Please confirm.

The same day Gray was in a position to respond. His telegram read as follows:

Pursuant to instructions in your number 80 enclaire received May 4 I called Mr Walshe permanent secretary External Affairs by telephone and inquired if the press report that Mr de Valera had called personally on German minister to offer condolences on occasion of Hitler's reported death were true. He replied that it was true<sup>31</sup>.

The US minister in Dublin, David Gray, conferred with his British counterpart, Sir John Maffey, on the morning of 5 May regarding what he considered to be a 'studied affront to United Nations by Irish government in conspicuous condolence visits' made by de Valera, Walshe and McDunphy. Gray noted that nobody representing the president had called to the US legation upon the death of Roosevelt. Both Gray and Maffey, according to the US

30. Sean Nunan to secretary, 8 June 1945. P.98; the criticism of de Valera in the Canadian Press was equally strong.

31. See P.98



diplomat, believed that the visits of condolence were a gesture inspired in part by their proposals for obtaining possession of the German legation through the friendly cooperation of the Irish government.

Strictly off the record Gray wrote to Washington that Maffey feared his government might take unilateral action and order his withdrawal at once. Maffey, according to Gray, felt that the joint withdrawal of all United Nations' diplomatic representatives from Dublin would be the most effective form of protest. Gray warned Washington against any action which might enhance de Valera's reputation. The US envoy favoured, if possible, a joint withdrawal of diplomats. That would 'doubtless put him [de Valera] in wrong with the majority of his people if it were done in dignified spirit of regret and without recrimination'. Gray felt that as long as de Valera remained in power in Ireland, Washington could 'expect no concessions or cooperation'. Gray reported that Washington ought to consider also whether the joint withdrawal of missions might increase de Valera's prestige by giving him grounds to plead persecution. He advised both the president and the secretary of state to consider the matter carefully and seek the advice of a number of well known Irish-Americans<sup>32</sup>.

The State Department replied to Gray on 16 May acknowledging that Washington had expected some action from the Irish government on the occasion of Hitler's death, but it had been hoped that protocol requirements would have been restricted to a minimum. Washington, therefore, considered that the personal calls made by de Valera and Dumphreys (sic) were 'most unfortunate even though greater courtesies were shown at time of President Roosevelt's death, namely adjournment of Dail and resolutions of condolence passed by Dail and Seanad'.

The telegram went on to deplore the visit (the words *and will not be readily forgotten* are crossed out). The State Department regarded it of less importance than Ireland's 'persistent refusal to range itself on side of United Nations and thereby avoid unnecessary loss of Allied lives'. The State Department confirmed that Gray's possible withdrawal had been discussed with the president 'who agrees with us that this incident does not provide a sound basis for such action or for giving support to any proposal looking toward joint withdrawal of United

32. David Gray to State Department, 5 May 1945, RG84 Security Segregated Records, Ireland, State Department, 711.41/5-545, NARA, Washington; Gray sent a letter marked 'personal' to Walshe on 22 June 1945. He complained about the McDunphy visit of condolence to Hempel on the grounds that that had not been done when Roosevelt had died. The president had sent a note of sympathy to Washington. Gray asked: 'If it were considered appropriate to send a message to the foreign government, the head of which was deceased, why would the secretary to the president not have followed the same procedure in the case of Hitler?' Gray said that he had said nothing about the matter because he thought that the new president, Sean T. O'Kelly, would pick a new secretary but, as McDunphy was to stay on, he felt that he had to 'informally take the matter up' with Walshe. The secretary simply decided not to send a reply. On 3 July, Gray wrote to Walshe regarding the work carried out by the Board of Works on the legation. He enquired at the end of the letter: 'How about the other matter which we discussed and regarding which I left you a letter?' The Department declined to follow it up and a minute on the letter stated that Gray did not take up the matter again. However, on 7 December 1948 McDunphy phoned the department to request a copy of the Gray letter of 22 June 1945. It was minuted that 'McDunphy has a file dealing with this incident which he would like to make complete by the inclusion of this communication'. Presumably a copy of the letter was sent over to the Phoenix Park. It would be of interest to see that presidential file.



Nations diplomatic representatives'. It was considered that no change would seem necessary to US policy of 'leaving Ireland severely alone' as previously explained by the secretary of state to Gray in a letter of 6 January 1945<sup>33</sup>.

It is interesting that the possible withdrawal of Gray had been discussed with the president. However, it would appear that at no time did the Department of State favour such a move. The decision to discuss the matter with Truman may well have arisen because Gray, who was accustomed to dealing directly with Roosevelt by letter, might have attempted to use the 'back door' to get to Truman. Telling Gray that his suggestion had been discussed with the president was a way of burying an unwelcome policy proposal. The British minister, Sir John Maffey, may also have been trying to prevent London from making a decision to have him withdrawn. It was not a course of action that he particularly favoured but, having had numerous differences of opinion with Churchill during the war on Irish policy options, he was alarmed at the prospect of his being recalled to London. For that reason, he may have enlisted the support of Gray, whom he discouraged from advocating a simple policy of joint withdrawal of allied diplomats from Dublin as a protest. Churchill would have received strong support from the media for the idea of withdrawing Maffey.

The British and Commonwealth press were very vigorous in condemning de Valera. The *Sunday Express* headlined 'Herr de Valera annoys Canada' and quoted the *Toronto Telegram*: 'de Valera has demonstrated that had the war gone differently he might have been another Laval. To retain a high commissioner at Dublin is as derogatory to Canada's honour as it is to maintain an Ambassador at Vichy.' The *Yorkshire Post* felt that Eire had taken refuge in neutrality 'which penalised the friends of liberty and abetted its enemies. It is an ignominious history to which this last gesture is a fitting climax.'

The visit provoked an exchange of correspondence for nearly a month in *The Times*. One contributor described de Valera as a 'totalitarian termite'<sup>34</sup>. Few agreed with George Bernard Shaw that the taoiseach had come out of the war 'as champion of the Christian chivalry we are all pretending to admire. Let us recognise a noble heart even if sometimes we must question its worldly wisdom'<sup>35</sup>. A short letter to *The Times* from Basil Williams probably summed up the reaction of most people, including many Irish:

There would no doubt be justification for de Valera's visit of sympathy to the German representative in Dublin in ordinary circumstances but in view of the horrible cruelties and slow murders ordered by Hitler condolences of a Christian government seem singularly out of place<sup>36</sup>.

33. State Department to Gray, 16 May 1945, RG 84, State Department Records, Ireland Confidential Report Records, 711.41D/5-545, NARA, Washington.

34. *The Times*, 17 May 1945, letter from Edward Marsh.

35. *The Times*, letter from George Bernard Shaw, 18 May 1945.

36. *The Times*, 21 May 1945.



But no matter how bitter many felt personally at Westminster there was no official rebuke administered from Downing Street save for the answer in the Commons on 8 May by the under secretary of state for dominions affairs, Emerys-Evans, on 8 May. Denying that there had been any communication between the two governments on the matter, he told two backbenchers:

'No Sir, Mr de Valera can safely be left to realise for himself the universal feeling of indignation which his action has aroused in this country and throughout the united nations.<sup>37</sup>

The Irish high commissioner in London, John Dulanty, wrote to Walshe on 15 May 1945 stating that he had had lunch at short notice with 'a mutual friend', who 'showed a rather violent reaction to the visit of the taoiseach and yourself to Herr Hempel'. He was appalled at what struck him as 'the diplomatic lack of wisdom of the Irish government's action in regard to the death of Hitler'. The case was outlined thus:

Whether neutrality was a good or a bad thing, whether Hitler was an agreeable or disagreeable character, or even whether it was a good thing or not for Ireland that the United Kingdom had won the war, were questions not relevant to his present point. His point, which he put vehemently, was that England *had* won the war, that she now had it in her power to make conditions more easy or more difficult for Ireland in the future and that, consequently, it should be one of the first objects of the Irish government to please English opinion so far as it was consistent with its own interests.

Dulanty duly explained the Irish position. Ireland had been neutral during the war. Dublin was simply following diplomatic practice and 'our dignity required Ireland in the last act to conform to the protocol'. He pointed out that Hitler the man, as distinct from the head of a state, whatever his real character, never arose: 'Our friend's own experience, I should have thought, would have shown him repeatedly that what was morally indefensible nearly always turned out to be politically inept.' The reply was that in the case in point there was no moral issue at all and no principle that mattered a damn:

Protocol was not principle. It was made for man, not man for it. Nor could he see that any question of dignity arose. Even if it did, the practical advantages of doing what our Government had done would have seemed to him so immense that he would have brushed aside any question of national 'amour propre'.

The point has been made above about the abysmal ignorance of Irish affairs in Britain, but the latest incident had given the press a 'champion opportunity

37. DO 35, 1228, WX101/180; and *British parliamentary debates*, 8 May 1945, Vol. 410, no. 74.



to heap abuse and sneers on Mr de Valera'. Salazar, he said, had flown Portuguese flags at half mast but he had also made a speech praising the English. Dulanty's informant

could understand a policy which, so long as Germany was unbeaten, avoided offending her. But Germany was now beaten. The German State was in dissolution and it was not unlikely that any government of Germany during the future would curse the memory of Hitler. The effect of paying compliments on his death would, unless vigorous counteraction were taken, be to antagonise not only England and America and most of Europe, but antagonise German opinion as well<sup>38</sup>.

The wisdom of that advice to Dulanty was not lost on the high commissioner, who probably felt the same as most people in Iveagh House who opposed the visit. Dulanty had a communication from the secretary of the British Union of Fascists, who wrote to congratulate de Valera. The content was extremely embarrassing:

The British Union of Fascists, which is still in existence, although it had to go underground for the time being, have instructed me to write to your Excellency, and to express their deep appreciation of the news that the secretary to the president of Eire has called on the German minister in Dublin to express condolence on behalf of the president on the death of Adolf Hitler. The British Union of Fascists begs of your Excellency to convey its gratitude to the government of Eire for thus honouring the memory of the greatest German in history.

The British Union of Fascists felt that de Valera would be interested to hear that the organisation 'had wonderful news from our comrades in Norway'. They had learned that the 'Fuehrer is not dead' but had left with some leading Nazis in a submarine. Dulanty minuted tritely, on 11 May, 'No comment!'<sup>39</sup> The letter was sent back to Iveagh House where it was put on file!

In the end neither the British nor the Americans took strong action. There was little need. The international press made the arguments most forcefully. The Irish diaspora in the United States, generally quite sympathetic to the 'Chief', showed signs of total incomprehension on that occasion. Naturally there was cause to be concerned about Ireland's acceptability among the allied powers in the postwar world. The transition was likely to have been much smoother without the visit of condolence. However, Iveagh House's troubles were not over completely by the end of that first week in May.

38. Dulanty to secretary, 15 May 1945, p. 98.

39. Secretary of the British Union of Fascists (no name or address) to Dulanty, May 1945, D/FA P12/14 (2). The leader of the British fascists, Oswald Mosley, lived in Galway for a brief period after the war.



At the height of the storm over the legation visit the German foreign minister, Graf Schwerin von Krosigk, announced on 7 May 1945 the unconditional surrender of all Reich fighting forces: the European war which had lasted 1094 days - 526 days longer than World War One - was finally over. As news of the surrender broke, London, New York, Paris and many other cities began quite spontaneously to celebrate the advent of peace. Dubliners, too, thronged the streets of the capital sharing in the general victory festivities. The neutrality policy of the government had not prevented between 70,000 and 80,000 Irishmen from fighting on the side of the allies<sup>40</sup>.

Shortly after the B.B.C. announcement at 2.00 p.m. of the then unconfirmed reports of a German surrender, some fifty Trinity College students appeared on the university roof and staged an impromptu celebration; they waved the Union Jack and sang 'God save the king', the French national anthem and 'It's a long way to Tipperary'. A little later, the Union Jack, the Russian flag, the Stars and Stripes and the Tricolour of Ireland were hoisted on the main flagpole. A section of the onlookers took exception to the positioning of the Irish flag at the bottom of the pole and an effort was made to change the flag. The attackers were driven back by the gardai with batons drawn. Tempers had been raised by the news that a group of Trinity students had burned the tricolour in protest. Later a section of the mob attacked a well-known hotel in the capital shouting 'Give us the West Britons'. The windows of a nearly fashionable restaurant, Jammets, were smashed by a group singing 'The Soldiers Song'<sup>41</sup>. The mob was joined later by about sixty youths carrying Irish and Vatican flags. In a report of the incident to the Italian government, the newly arrived minister, Count Baron G. Vitaliano Confalonieri wrote: 'During the demonstration many of the participants wore swastika badges in their button-holes and a few Nazi flags were waved around'<sup>42</sup>. Newspaper reports of the incident make no mention of swastikas and it is doubtful if they were very much in evidence. The entire incident was very distasteful. Both British and American envoys were called into the Ministry of External Affairs, where they received an apology from the secretary. The incident was widely reported abroad and did little to improve the image of the country.

With the trauma of the German legation visit very much to the fore, Walshe found it necessary to try and smooth over another embarrassing problem. This time it was the Italian minister, Confalonieri, who was directly involved. On 7 May, the *Irish Independent* carried a notice of 'a political manifestation which some Italians and Irish sympathisers meant to make by having a Mass celebrated for the repose of the soul of Benito Mussolini'<sup>43</sup>. Confalonieri complained that while the local censor passed the above item of news 'it was not even thought advisable to let the communique of the Italian government drawing the attention of the public to the execution of hostages and the crimes committed in Northern

40. N. Mansergh, 'Ireland, the republic outside the commonwealth', *International Affairs*, vol. 28, no. 3, July 1952, p. 186. There is considerable confusion and controversy over the exact number of those who fought in the British forces during the war.

41. *Irish Times*, 8 May 1945.

42. Count Confalonieri to the Italian minister of foreign affairs, 10 May 1945, telegram number 364/100, in *Political file, Ireland and Italy, 1945* (Italian Department of Foreign Affairs).

43. Confalonieri to Walshe, 11 May 1945, Political Affairs file.



Italy [by the Germans] to be published'<sup>44</sup>. Walshe condemned the idea of a Mass for Mussolini and promised to look into the matter. He later reported to Confalonieri that the ecclesiastical authorities had no knowledge of the Mass, which was celebrated in good faith by a Franciscan priest. The organiser of the demonstration was a cafe owner, the holder of a British passport who had been prominent in the Dublin 'Fascio' since 1926. The incident was potentially quite embarrassing but the foreign press did not pick up the news.

Some other charitable souls in Dublin organised that Mass be said on 3 June 1945 in the Church of the Visitation, Fairview, for 'the repose of the soul of Herr Hitler and the welfare of the German nation'. The circular, which was unsigned, came into the possession of the Department of External Affairs. It may have been intercepted by Military Intelligence (G2), photocopied and sent on its way. Joseph Walshe minuted on 30 May 1945: 'Informed Fr O'Connell the A.B.'s secretary about this matter. He told me he would inform his G. immediately.' Dr McQuaid took immediate action. On 1 June, Boland minuted: 'His Grace told Secy. that he had stopped the Mass'.

The Irish left appear to have been far less troublesome on that occasion for the authorities than the right. Censorship has made it very difficult to evaluate from public sources whether there was any response from that quarter to de Valera's visit. However, there is one source which indicated that an unidentified 'Communitic group' was considering holding a meeting in Dublin on 4 May at 8.00 p.m. in Cathal Brugha Street. Colonel Dan Bryan wrote a 'secret and personal' note to Walshe the same day that the purpose of the meeting was to 'protest the visit of the taoiseach to the German minister for the purpose of conveying sympathy in regard to the death of Herr Hitler'. He added:

There appears to be some difference of opinion in the group as to the advisability of holding the meeting and I am not aware whether a definite decision has been reached in the matter. I understand that this group is also contemplating holding some kind of victory meeting, possibly under the auspices of a body such as the International Brigade Association, which has only a nominal existence.

I hope to be in a position to furnish you with further data in this general connection at a later stage. I may mention that the information is highly confidential.

It is quite likely that that group did take part in the victory celebrations in Dublin. But G2, army intelligence, was very well informed about their actions. There is nothing further on file about the activities of this group.

44. Confalonieri to Walshe, 11 May 1945, *Political Affairs File*.



## CONCLUSION

Both de Valera's visit to Hempel and the demonstrations in Dublin reinforced many of the stereotypical views of neutral Ireland. International opprobrium had been heaped on Eamon de Valera for his visit of condolence. The official visit strengthened for many abroad the image of a narrow-minded nationalist clinging to his Celtic ideology at a moment in world history when the United Nations had saved democracy from fascism and nazism. The visit must also be set against the backdrop of the film and pictorial evidence of the extermination and concentration camps which were being liberated in those weeks. De Valera's action appeared all the more callous in that light. For many years many members of the international Jewish community were to associate the name of de Valera with the action of his visit to Hempel. Young Jews learned of his name for the first time in that controversial context, which is particularly regrettable in view of de Valera's personal friendship with the Chief Rabbi of Palestine, Herzog, and his active diplomatic support - particularly through the Vatican - for initiatives to save Jews during the war. (This is the subject of a separate investigation, which I hope to publish in the near future: while the research is far from complete, preliminary findings clear de Valera of any charge of being anti-Semitic, but a detached study of Irish refugee policy is unlikely to erase the damage done to his reputation by his visit to the German legation in May 1945<sup>45</sup>.) Manifestations of crude nationalism in the streets of Dublin, involving an attack on Trinity College and a number of city-centre restaurants, further strengthened the perceptions abroad that Irish neutrality was in reality a mask for pro-Axis sentiment<sup>46</sup>.

In 1988, over forty years after the event, the Irish foreign minister, Mr Brian Lenihan, suggests that the visit might be viewed in the following light:

The terms 'idealism' and 'realism' do not tell us, for example, whether a given decision is marked by moral integrity, a consideration which I believe was fundamental to de Valera's thinking. Dev's visit to the German legation on 2 May 1945, may be questioned, as Dr Keogh questions it, on a certain view of political realism, in a world in which Germans and Germany were at their lowest ebb.

Perhaps one day we will all come to see the two world wars as a great European tragedy, and de Valera's observance of protocol in the case of the German ambassador, Dr Hempel, will be understood as a far-sighted recognition of the inextinguishable rights of the German people, as of any other people, even at their darkest moment<sup>47</sup>.

45. Dermot Keogh, 'Herzog, de Valera and Jewish refugees in Ireland of the 1930s and 1940s', *Remembering for the future* (Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1988), vol. 1, pp 395-403; Dermot Keogh, 'Ireland and the Jews', unpublished manuscript, p. 220; Dermot Keogh 'The constitutional revolution: an analysis of the making of the Constitution', in Frank Litton (ed.), 'The Constitution of Ireland 1937-1987', *Administration*, vol. 35, no. 4, pp 4-85.

46. Dermot Keogh, *Ireland and Europe, 1919-1948*, *op. cit.* in note 2, epilogue.

47. Brian Lenihan, review of Dermot Keogh, *Ireland and Europe, 1919-1948 op. cit.* in note 2, *Sunday Press*, 6 November 1988.



I must, however, state that I go further in my book than the above passage suggests. It is certainly implied that the de Valera visit to Hempel was also indefensible on moral grounds.

The following restrained comment in a letter to *The Times* (London) on 21 May 1945 captured very well the dilemma that many faced as a result of the official visit of condolence by de Valera to Hempel:

There would no doubt be justification for de Valera's visit of sympathy to the German representative in Dublin in ordinary circumstances but in view of the horrible cruelties and slow murders ordered by Hitler condolences of a Christian government seem singularly out of place<sup>48</sup>.

•What befell Hempel and his family? In the days following the visit by de Valera, the German minister presided over the burning of documents in the legation. One item which survived, according to the historian Carol Carter, was a receipt for a contribution to Hitler's 'winter relief fund' by a prominent businessman in Dublin. Hempel handed the keys of the legation over to Walshe. The German envoy was prepared to return home but wished for his family to remain in Ireland. In fact, he was granted permission to stay in the country with his wife and four children. Mrs Hempel's mother and sister also joined them. He earned a living as a salesman. His enterprising wife opened a home bakery and the family survived. In 1950, Hempel was invited to go back into the German foreign service. He retired to a farm in the Black Forest in 1952. He died in 1972<sup>49</sup>.

48. *The Times*, 21 May 1945.

49. Carol Carter, *The shamrock and the swastika*, *op.cit.*, in note 1, p. 82.