

Ian Mitchell's Ireland-related  
**BOOK WARNINGS**

49 – *Ireland in International Relations*  
(*St Patrick's Day*, 2020)

---

**A HISTORY OF IRELAND IN  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**Author:** Owen McGee

**Publisher:** [Irish Academic Press](#), 2020  
(available on *Amazon*, [click on cover image for link](#))

**Descriptor:** Amateurish and prejudiced account of Ireland's relations with Great Britain, and its more recent attempts to act independently on the European stage.

**RusRoL relevance:** *Shows that the polemical and uninformative Soviet approach to history was not a purely Russian phenomenon. The curse of intellectual STATUS assertion also affects Ireland today. Mikhail Pokrovsky could hardly have been more partisan, though he would have been more accurate with his facts and plausible with his arguments.*

---

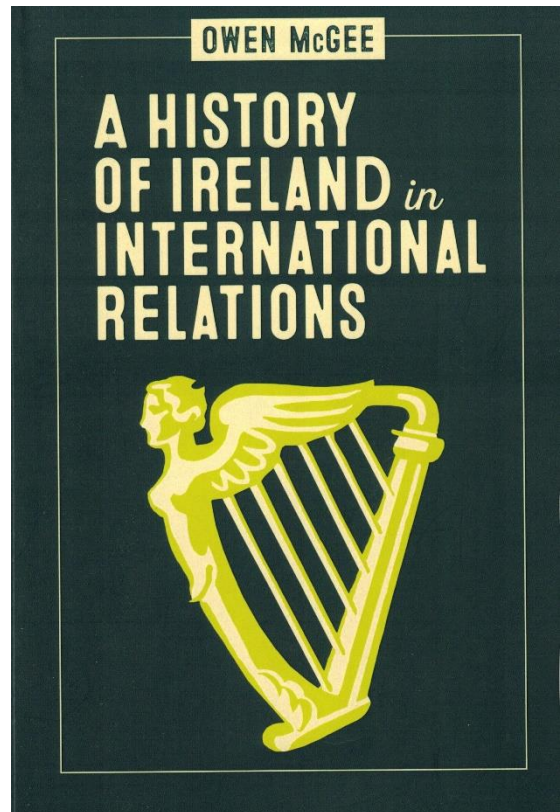
**“The essential context of the British government’s decision to hold a referendum to leave the EU was not a concern about migration or even trade in goods but rather a purely foreign policy desire to enable Britain to better deal with America’s desire to reform the World Bank system that underpinned both the WTO and the financing of NATO.”** (p. 321)

---

**Reason to read:** To understand the vacuity and self-referential myopia into which Irish Anglophobia can sink when the wrong writer tackles even so important and interesting a topic as Irish international relations.

***Main talking points:***

1. For a book published less than a month ago, it is revealing to read the endless repetition of the word “imperial” when associated with the institutions of the British state. Thus, we do not only get the “British imperial parliament” (p. 18) in the late eighteenth century and again in 1907 (p. 27) both of which are merely derogatory, but also “the British Imperial Treasury” (p. 84) in the 1920s—the capitalisation suggests an official institution—which never in fact existed. In the run-up to the Second World War, we are told that General Alan Brooke was “chief of staff of the



British imperial army” (p. 123). I take the lack of capitalisation to indicate that the word in that case is intended to be an adjective rather than part of a proper name. The implication is that fighting the Second World War was another “imperial” act on the part of Great Britain—of which more below. In 1945, McGee refers again to the “British imperial treasury” (p. 130) when leading up to this astounding assertion: “The significant degree to which British industries had already been nationalised was a major reason why Marxist rhetoric, or *an affected fascination with the USSR*, was relatively prevalent in Britain.” (p. 130 – emphasis added) Where does Mr McGee get the idea that British, post-war fascination with the USSR was “affected”? Soon afterwards we are told that “John Maynard Keynes of the British imperial treasury” (actually he was working for the Bank of England) gave inspiration to the creation of an Irish Central Bank. That, the reader is left to assume, was part of a cunning British imperial plan to isolate, neuter, neutralise, undermine, humiliate, isolate, mock, tax, rip-off, ruin and lord it over the poor, non-violent, peace-loving Irish who have done nothing whatsoever to deserve the fate that cruel Britannia has thrust down their unthirsty throats. Three pages later, we are told that “A crisis in Ireland’s balance of trade figures at this time was often perceived in Dublin to have been a situation that was deliberately manipulated by Britain in order to cripple the Irish state.” (p. 140) When referring to the 1970s, Mr McGee writes of “British imperial banking markets” (p. 316) and even “British imperial journalists” (p. 305)!

2. Mr McGee has a bizarre ignorance of many established historical facts. For example, we are told of the US “*annexation* of Alaska” (p. 24 – emphasis added), and that in 1940 Winston Churchill “was *elected* as British Prime Minister” (p. 121 – emphasis added). Mr McGee also appears to think that “*all* Irishmen had been inclined to share de Valera’s [neutral] stance during the war.” (p. 122 – emphasis added). Nowhere does he mention the hundreds of thousands of Irishmen who courageously and entirely voluntarily put themselves in harm’s way in the British armed forces during the War. (see Churchill’s good joke about that in [C20 – Churchill and Ireland](#), “Smile(s)”) Nationalistic public puffery is one thing; denigrating the heroism of some of your own people is quite another one—and a deeply unpleasant one at that. Even more extraordinarily, McGee states baldly that “the war ended in *April* 1945” (p. 126 – emphasis added)
3. There is a revealing sloppiness with figures too, of which this is an example: “... since the Second World War, during which America had seen its gross national product rise from \$886 million to a staggering \$135 billion.” (p. 166) So, in four years, US GDP increased by more than 14,000%, which represents an *annual* growth rate of nearly 300%! Another example is in connection with a “no deal” Brexit: “The WTO itself estimated that if Britain traded only under WTO rules it could result in a loss to Britain’s gross domestic product of up to 90 trillion dollars within fifteen years.” (p. 322) Since British GDP is about \$2.6 trillion, over fifteen years that would, on an unchanged basis, total about \$40 trillion. How can a total of 40 billion fall by 90 billion? In any case, the *world* GDP is only \$85 trillion! This kind of sloppiness is sadly typical of the way this book has been put together.
4. And then there is the bile poured over David Trimble. “Trimble believed that the only purpose of the peace process must be the restoration of the historic Stormont assembly that had been

disbanded in 1972.” (p. 274) The *only* purpose? “To Trimble’s mind, America’s capacity to be democratic was dependent upon its willingness to support the UUP [Ulster Unionist Party] in ensuring that Northern Ireland henceforth became the island of Ireland’s sole ‘gateway to Europe’ on behalf of the United Kingdom.” (p. 280) And, finally, taking *palm d’or* for mean-spiritedness, we read this: “In October 1998, John Hume was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo... David Trimble was awarded a prize as well, although [his] reputation was sufficient to ensure that, henceforth, both Trimble’s London Tory biographers and the Ulster unionist community itself began to turn against him, as if he was a cowardly compromiser with an enemy.” (p. 280-1)

5. Finally, there are many examples of loopily Anglophobic “analysis”. For example, we are told that the incoming Blair government in 1997 introduced devolution in the UK “so that English representation in the Westminster parliament could work in conjunction with the Bank of England in influencing British monetary policy without undue Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish influence. This was also done to assist the Bank of England in its preparations for maintaining the existing competitive advantage of sterling as the principle currency traded in foreign exchange markets worldwide, alongside the US dollar and the Japanese yen, before the European Central Bank and its envisioned Euro could be formed as a rival currency in 1998. This was why Blair was adamant that May 1998 must be made the absolute deadline for reaching a political agreement on Northern Ireland.” (p. 278) Where on earth did Mr McGee get the idea that devolution was part of a British, neo-imperialist, *financial* conspiracy? I also invite the reader to examine the internal logic of that passage. It seems to me that the author slithers from one arguable proposition to the next without making plain his argument about any one of them. It amounts to a catalogue of innuendo, denigration and sniping, all undisciplined by the proof of any of the points individually. It is more a collection of negative opinions—many of them from the press!—than a connected argument intended to establish a tenable proposition. I draw attention to this as it represents McGee’s style throughout much of this book.

***Incidental interest:*** None.

***Thought(s) provoked:*** The Irish anti-British intellectual world is as weak in book-length arguments as Fintan O’Toole—otherwise Tintin O’Foole—has shown it to be in the media in connection with Brexit. Whenever Britain is involved, they tend to lapse into self-delusion, self-congratulation and self-righteousness.

***Negative issue(s):*** McGee’s treatment of the Second World War will be offensive to many of those Irishmen who did what they could to defend civilisation from barbarism while Popes Eamon Dev and Pius XII sat on their hands refusing to make a moral commitment against Nazism in one of the few wars ever fought for genuine principle. But that is too large a subject to go into here, and the clichés have been repeated *ad nauseam* by Anglophobes of all hues. But when self-righteous posturing combines with linguistic weakness, the results can be baffling. Can anyone say for sure what is meant by the sentence below. It appears in the context of the Irish armed forces’ continuing inability, even today, to defend the Republic against any other country, as was seen last week when Russian nuclear bombers had to be

chased out of Irish Atlantic airspace by fighter jets of the Royal Imperial London Tory Banker-Shopkeeper Unionist Winstonian Brexit Swing-Low-Sweet-Chariot World-Cup-'66 Air Force). McGee writes: “It would appear that the confinement of the activities of the Irish navy and air corps to purely coast guard services from 1945 onwards was an almost incomprehensible sense of patriotism to those educated under the UK’s system of state education within Northern Ireland.” (p. 319-20, *sic*) Anyone prepared to guess what that means? I can’t. All we know is that the Irish “air corps” cannot even do serious coastguard work.

**Surprising points:** None.

**Style:** Mr McGee can write simple English, though without the slightest hint of Irish wit or inspiration. But when he moves beyond that, his prose is apt to break down. For example: “While this would not prevent Ireland from supporting the UN *cursor* of Iraq for invading Kuwait...” (p. 246 – emphasis added) And on global warming: “... a much more relevant question was a purely *logistical* one; namely, the potentially great difference between the theory and practice of climate change programmes.” (p. 308 – emphasis added) How the science of organised movement relates to climate change theory and practice, only the Blarney Stone can tell. There is also the irritating tendency to insert “Be that as it may...” all over the place before going off at an unrelated tangent. I could go on...

**Publishing quality:** The Irish Academic Press has let itself down badly with this extraordinarily inept publication. It is not an *academic* study; it is closer to a saloon-bar polemic. Worse still, it has not been edited with any care, or some of the weird mistakes noted in 2 and 3 above would have been picked up and corrected.

**Smile(s):** “Ireland’s own little masterplan for contributing to a post-war peace settlement ever since summer 1944 was to launch a European relief aid programme.” (p. 127) This was at a time when Ireland was so poor that it was exporting the bulk of its young people to England because it could not afford to employ them. ([Clair Wills’s excellent book](#) on this subject is not quoted anywhere by McGee.) What could ragged, impoverished Ireland realistically have contributed to the re-establishment of the European economy, and to the continent’s defence against a Soviet Army of 15 million men? A few cartloads of unemployed potato-lifters from Connemara, perhaps, and some potcheen. Nice try, Eamon, but no Marshall Plan or NATO.

**Author:** I know nothing about him. I wrote to him asking where he teaches or works but was not favoured with the courtesy of a reply.

**Link(s):** None, thank goodness.

**Overall recommendation level:** ATROCIOUS BOOK – despite the interesting subject

---

**About the reviewer:** Ian Mitchell is the author of four books, including [\*Isles of the West\*](#) and [\*The Justice Factory\*](#). He is writing a comparative study of Russian and Western constitutional history to be called *Russia and the Rule of Law*—hence the “RusRoL Relevance” section at the top. He can be contacted at: [ian@ianmitchellonline.co.uk](mailto:ian@ianmitchellonline.co.uk).

For other reviews in this series, see [Ian Mitchell's Book Recommendations](#).