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IVRLA[1] RESEARCH REPORT: SPEECHES OF SEÁN LEMASS AS TAOISEACH

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1. CONTEXT

Seán Francis Lemass (1899-1971) was an active contributor to Irish national and political life from 1916, when he fought in Dublin's General Post Office in the Easter Rising, until his retirement from the post of Taoiseach in 1966. His life and political career mirror those of the emerging Irish state, starting with armed opposition, moving into an acceptance of constitutional politics, and finally embracing the challenges of political, economic and industrial modernisation.

As a boy of sixteen he was briefly imprisoned after the Rising and some years later he was interned at Ballykinlar Camp during the War of Independence. He was a member of the Four Courts garrison in 1922 and was subsequently interned by the Irish Free State government. Described by one of his biographers as Eamon de Valera's "loyal lieutenant for four decades" (Horgan), Lemass was first elected to Dáil Eireann for Sinn Féin in 1924, representing Dublin South City, although he followed the Sinn Féin abstentionist policy and did not take his seat there. He followed de Valera into the new Fianna Fáil party in 1926 and in 1927, together with other Fianna Fáil deputies, he entered Dáil Eireann, becoming the party's spokesman for industry and commerce. It was in the twin spheres of industry and commence that Lemass was to devote most of his political life. In 1932, he was appointed to the Department of Industry and Commerce in the first Fianna Fáil cabinet and until he became Taoiseach in 1959 he occupied this ministry in every Fianna Fáil government, with the exception of a short period during the Emergency[2] when he became minister in the

[1] The UCD Irish Virtual Research Library and Archive (IVRLA) is a major digitisation project which was undertaken by University College Dublin from 2005 to 2009. Material selected from UCD's extensive resources of archival and rare material was digitised and catalogued before being made available from a single virtual location (http://ivrla.ucd.ie). This digitised material covers a wide range of humanities and social science disciplines and is arranged in curated collections which can be browsed, searched, bookmarked, or downloaded. In addition to the digitisation of existing UCD collections, the IVRLA conducted a series of demonstrator projects. The remit of these projects was to develop additional digital research resources and to present these in the form of an exhibition collection. Some of these projects incorporated existing IVRLA material but many generated new content which was inspired by the potential of digital resources. Consequently, the IVRLA and its demonstrator projects show how digital repositories can provide access to diverse archival research materials as well as challenging the ways in which we consider digital content and generate research in a digital environment. The IVRLA is a component of the UCD Humanities Institute of Ireland and is funded under the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLI) Cycle 3, administered by the Higher Education Authority.

[2] The "Emergency" refers to the state of emergency declared by the Irish government during the Second World War. The term "emergency" was used instead of "war" because Ireland remained neutral during the war.

Department of Supplies. By the beginning of the 1950s Lemass's economic thinking had moved from the protectionist policies of earlier decades to a belief in the need for cooperation with other countries in order to encourage Ireland's economic development and economic independence as a basis for political independence.

In 1959, at a time when many of his contemporaries were retiring from politics, Seán Lemass became Taoiseach. During the following seven years, he made his most significant contribution to changing Ireland's economy, becoming "the managing director of Ireland's economic advance" (*Irish Times*, 12 May 1971). His belief was that Ireland's future lay, not in the old policy of protectionism, but in industrial development, in the development of Irish education to support new economic policies and in finding new markets for export, especially in the new European economic alliances. A recent biographer, echoing earlier commentators, described his careeer as Taoiseach as one which "ushered in the modern world by galvanising the economy, transforming a sclerotic educational system, paving the way for Europe, inititiating an era of good feelings with Northern Ireland and normalising relations with the UK" (Garvin 211).

2. PROJECT OVERVIEW

From his appointment as Taoiseach on 23 June 1959 until his retirement on 10 November 1966 Seán Lemass spoke about his plans and policies in a variety of public venues and to a range of different audiences, thoughout Ireland, Europe and the United States. These public[3] speeches, which articulate his evolving thinking on economic and social policies in Ireland and on changing international relations, are an invaluable resource. They reflect his belief that it was necessary to consolidate the economic foundations supporting Ireland's political institutions and his concept of Ireland as a modern dynamic nation which would "forget the Ireland of Seán Bhean Bhocht" (NAI GIS 1/222). The speeches are not only a record of Seán Lemass's political and economic thinking in his own words, but are also a record of the contemporary changes in Ireland's social and economic policies and, in retrospect, are a record of the sweeping changes in Irish government policy and Irish society in the 1960s.

[3] This project's focus is on the speeches given by Seán Lemass to a wide range of audiences at public meetings, official functions and events. His speeches in Dáil Eireann are excluded because they are not public speeches in this context. The speeches of Lemass in Dáil Eireann are available online at <http://historical-debates.oireachtas.ie>, which contains the full text of the Official Report of the Parliamentary Debates of the Houses of the Oireachtas and includes the Dáil Debates from 21 January 1919 (First Dáil) and the Seanad Debates from 11 December 1922 (First Seanad).

These public speeches of Seán Lemass as Taoiseach have never before been brought together in one collection. Up until now, their texts and the contemporary newspaper reports have been scatttered through a variety of sources. The purpose of this project was to establish a comprehensive research resource of all of these speeches. For the first time, a record of the public speeches of Seán Lemass during the period when he was Taoiseach has been collected into a single searchable source. A distinction has been drawn between the speeches given by him in his role as Taoiseach and the specifically party political statements given in his concurrent responsibility as President of his party, Fianna Fáil. This project focuses on his speeches as Taoiseach. However, some of the more public party speeches, for example speeches at annual Fianna Fáil Ard Fheiseanna, by-election meetings and similar occasions, are included where aspects of public, not just party, policy are raised.

3. DETAILED OUTPUT

Sources

The principal archival resources used for this project were the Government Information Service (GIS) files in the National Archives of Ireland (NAI). The GIS is the government unit which facilitates communication with the national and international media and general public by the government, the Taoiseach and government departments of state. Seán Lemass was Taoiseach from June 1959 until November 1966 and the relevant GIS files for this period are NAI GIS 1/216-222. The material in these archival files is arranged chronologically and contain not only the texts of speeches made by Lemass but also the newspaper reports of these speeches, generally from the *Irish Time*s, *Irish Press* and *Irish Independent*. Occasionally there are cuttings from newspapers included without an accompanying copy of the speech, often when the report relates to a media interview, for example his press conference in Dublin on 14 October 1962 on the progress of Ireland's application for membership of the EEC, after his return from meetings in Brussels, Paris and Rome (NAI GIS 1/216). There are also texts of speeches included without any newspaper reports, most particularly in 1965 when the Dublin newspapers were on strike from 2 July until 12 September.

All the items in these files have been listed, with one exception. This is GIS 1/218, which is devoted exclusively to Lemass's visit to the United States, from Lemass's departure from Dublin on 11 October 1963 to his return to a welcome, with full military honours, from Eamon de Valera and the entire cabinet on 21 October. There are no texts of any of the

speeches made by Sean Lemass during his US trip in this file, which consists of newspaper cuttings from the Irish, British and some American papers reporting on the visit. The subsequent file, NAI GIS 1/219, holds the text of the speeches given by Lemass in the U.S. and also, to a great extent, duplicates the newspaper reports of the American visit contained in GIS 1/218. For this reason, and to avoid unnecessary duplication of entries, most of the material in GIS 1/218 has been incorporated into the listings for GIS 1/219, with appropriate annotations.

However, there are some significant gaps in the GIS files in the National Archives of Ireland. Although Sean Lemass was nominated as Taoiseach on 22 June 1959, the first item in the earliest of the GIS files, GIS 1/216, is for 10 October 1961, a gap of over two years. This, together with one other significant gap, from 17 March 1964 until 25 March 1965, has been completed by using the online *Irish Times*. For the period when the Dublin newspapers were on strike, the microfilm files of the *Cork Examiner* and the Irish Newspapers Archives database have been consulted. In all cases the primary source for each item included in the spreadsheet has been indicated.

Context and Content of Speeches

Before the catalogue could be compiled, it was necessary to decide what type of information should be included. Apart from the basic cataloguing information such as date, sources and so on, it was also decided to include specific categories on venue, occasion, and a summary of topics covered. This information allows the resource to give a sense of the diversity of places, audiences, and subjects addressed within Lemass's public speeches.

The venue provides a very useful geographical context and is an indication of Lemass's determination to disseminate his programme of economic development and progress to as wide an audience as possible. Seán Lemass spoke at a variety of meetings in Ireland, Britain, Europe and the United States. Not all of these were high profile locations. He spoke at many functions in hotels, colleges and factories throughout Ireland as well as at more formal meetings at home and in international venues. On occasion, new policies are referred to at some of the smaller events at which Lemass spoke. For example, it was in June 1960 at Ballyglen, Co. Wicklow, at the unveiling of a plaque to the Lacey brothers (who were shot in 1798), that Lemass first emphasised that "the historic task of this generation" was to build indestructible economic foundations for political freedom (*Irish Times*, 20 June 1960).

In his progamme to stimulate change and persuade the Irish people that the old protectionist policies should be reviewed, that new economic links must be established and

that Ireland must reassess its attitudes if it was to achieve true economic independence, Lemass took his message of a wide range of audiences. He spoke at the opening of factories, at school centenaries, conferences, at student societies, annual meetings of Muintir na Tíre,[4] Junior Chambers of Commerce, exhibitions and trade fairs, as well as more formal political occasions. Therefore, the inclusion of this information provides an indication of how hard Lemass worked to communicate his new policies and thinking to a wide spectrum of listeners.

Seán Lemass spoke on a variety of subjects to the different audiences in a range of venues. This is one of the most critical categories in the catalogue. Each entry contains a short summary of the content of the address. Sometimes these speeches were tailored to the audience to whom he spoke but they often indicated new or developing policies. Almost immediately after his appointment as Taoiseach, Lemass began to signal a new national direction in his speeches. As early as 28 June 1959 he spoke about new economic challenges and the need for an expansion of Irish industry. The following day, at his first press conference as Taoiseach, he announced the establishment of a panel of industrial and financial experts at the Department of Finance, and also indicated a possible rapprochement with Northern Ireland through economic co-operation (*Irish Times*, 29 and 30 June 1959). His advocacy of Ireland's membership of the EEC can be traced through 1961 and 1962 and after early 1963, when Ireland's application was rejected, there is a continuing emphasis on economic planning and development.

Apart from social and economic issues for which he is probably best remembered, Lemass addressed an impressive variety of topics in his public addresses as Taoiseach. He spoke of new approaches to education and training, rural re-development and revised approaches to agricultural production and marketing and the development of tourism. For several years before his meeting with the Northern Ireland premier, Terence O'Neill (a meeting he described as "significant" although commenting that "It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive" (*Irish Times*, 15 Jan. 1965)), he referred to possible ways to establish new links with the Northern Ireland state and acknowledged that the government "recognise that the Government and Parliament there [Northern Ireland] exist with the support of the majority in the Six County area – artificial though that area is" (NAI GIS 1/217). On other occasions he referred to the spiritual damage caused by the Civil War in Ireland and, in 1966, emphasised that Ireland must live in the future and "not permit old controversies to be stirred up again" (NAI GIS 1/221). On the international stage, Lemass established strong working

[4] Founded in 1937, Muintir na Tíre is a national voluntary organisation dedicated to promoting the process of community development in Ireland.

relationships with the United States, especially with the Irish-American community, developed and improved Anglo-Irish relations, emphasised long-established links with Ireland on his visits to European countries and he was very clear about Ireland's commitment to the ideals of the United Nations.

Catalogue

From the archival sources mentioned above a chronological listing of almost 400 speeches given by Seán Lemass whilst he held the office of Taoiseach (June 1959-November 1966) has been collected, complied and arranged chronologically. For each entry information has been arranged under the following headings to make the material of greater use for researchers.

1. Source: either the NAI GIS file and number or the *Irish Time*s.
2. Notes: this field includes information on additional source locations, e.g. NAI GIS 1/218, the reasons why there are no newspaper reports noted or other information which might be of use to the researcher.
3. Date: the date on which the speech was given
4. Venue: the location at which the speech was given.
5. Occasion: the event or reason for the gathering.
6. Topics: the main subjects covered in the speech.
7. Newspaper reports: the majority of the GIS files contain reports of speeches from all three Dublin daily newspapers. As these reflect different political viewpoints and opinions, all of these references are included, where available.

The catalogue has been arranged chronologically by the speech date.

Given the short timescale of this project and the IVRLA requirement that the output be in digital form, priority was given to creating the catalogue in a searchable research tool to which the data could be entered quickly and easily. For this reason it was decided to compile the catalogue in Microsoft Excel; the format is simple, it is easy for the researcher to consult and the data can also be sorted, manipulated and edited to a certain extent. In addition, users can use the "Find" facility to search for particular key words or topics relevant to their research. This format also allows for the possibility of an easy transfer of the information to a more flexible and searchable database in the future.

These speeches document the thinking of a man who remained a committed nationalist but was able to move on, condemning the IRA violence of the late 1950s, acknowledging the

contributions of others to the cause of Irish freedom and, by 1966, emphasising that Ireland must live in the future not the past. Seán Lemass has been identified with

> the rising tide of Irish economic growth in the 1960s, at once the cause and symbol of the new Ireland developing into prosperity and modernisation ... he sought to bring Ireland to terms with the reality of the modern world; he bent all his energetic pragmatism to that task (Farrell 119).

This collection of the speeches made during his time as Taoiseach provides a research tool, giving a guide for the first time, in Lemass's own words, as to how his policies developed from 1959, and documenting that energetic pragmatism.

4. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This project is a first step. It provides an invaluable research tool for biographers, political scientists and historians of the period to Lemass's thinking and the evolution and implementation of his policies. However, its focus is on the final part of the career of a very remarkable man. Building on it, a more complete record of Seán Lemass, his political career and his contribution to the development of the Irish state is possible, by adding, for example, speeches given in the Dáil as well as the earlier files of the Government Information Service relating to his time as Minister for Industry and Commerce.

This project has produced a comprehensive finding aid, including short summaries of Lemass's public speeches during a time when the old policies of protectionism were reversed, foreign investment in Ireland was encouraged and economic links with Europe established. Ideally this finding aid would be matched by full texts of these important speeches, each of which could be digitised, catalogued and available online. Alternatively (or additionally), the project could be expanded to include other important political figures and hence create a major scholarly resource for Irish history and politics. Although no specific funding is available at present, it is hoped that this will soon change. This project has shown that by focusing on the provision of research resources, drawing on existing researcher expertise, and being linked with an existing online resource, it is possible to create a significant resource in a short timeframe and make it freely available to scholars and the public. It is most appropriate that Lemass's public speeches, through the sort of technological development that he would no doubt have encouraged, find themselves once again in the public domain. It is hoped that this will create the impetus for further research on Lemass as well as the expansion of this and similar projects.

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1/218: 11-20 Oct. 1963
1/219: 27 Sept. 1963-27 July 1964
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