

Gallagher, Eamonn

by Terry Clavin

Gallagher, Eamonn (1926–2009), diplomat and administrator, was born 13 July 1926 in Curley Street, Whiteinch, Glasgow, one of ten children of Edward Gallagher, from Glenswilly, Co. Donegal, and his wife Anne (née Hayes), from Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. Working first as a dock labourer and then a stonemason, his father earned enough to return with his family to Ireland in 1934 and buy a farm at Glencar, near Letterkenny. Eamonn entered the Christian Brothers' novitiate at St Eunan's in Letterkenny, receiving a free secondary education before abandoning his vocation to the religious life and entering the civil service in 1944.

Working variously in the Exchequer, Audit Office, Revenue Commissioners and Department of Health, he also attended evening courses in UCD for a commerce degree, obtained in 1950. In 1949 he joined the Department of External Affairs as third secretary, serving as vice-consul in Boston (1950–51) and consul general on New York (1951–9). He married Dorothy Kelley, an Irish-American, in 1954; they had four daughters. After a two-year stint in Dublin headquarters from 1959, he was appointed first secretary of the Irish embassy in Brussels, involving him in Ireland's unsuccessful application for EEC membership during 1961–2.

In 1963 he was appointed commercial secretary to the embassy in Paris, where he developed an appreciation of wine and art and regularly played chess with Samuel Beckett (qv). A witty bon viveur, Gallagher was gossipy, caustic and disrespectful of authority, balancing these undiplomatic qualities with his vigour and intellect, both much needed on Ireland's somnolent embassy circuit. In autumn 1968 the scandal arising from his marital separation and relationship with another woman provoked his recall to Dublin. Given a menial posting as first secretary in the economics section, he became a fixture in the United Arts Club, a louche drinking den.

When violence erupted in Northern Ireland in August 1969, Gallagher travelled to Belfast on his own initiative and reported his impressions to his superiors. The department was ignorant of northern affairs and bereft of contacts, so Gallagher was transferred to the political section and enjoined to continue his fact-finding missions, becoming the government's main source of intelligence. Liaising with a broad spectrum of nationalist opinion, he was introduced by his Letterkenny-based sister Anna to the new generation of civil-rights leaders emerging in Derry, being most impressed and influenced by John Hume (b. 1937). They formed a lasting friendship, sharing family holidays.

Marked by northern nationalism's mood of embattled exhilaration, the abundance, analytical scope and historical sweep of Gallagher's dispatches will forever tempt scholars into exaggerating his influence and insight. His persuasively argued

prescriptions were broadly shared within the Department of External Affairs (from 1971, Foreign Affairs), but he fleshed out the departmental consensus and furthered its implementation. Abetted throughout his career by a sharp political mind, Gallagher was soon reporting directly to, and speechwriting for, the minister for external affairs, Patrick Hillery (qv), and the taoiseach, Jack Lynch (qv).

In the fevered circumstances of late 1969, Gallagher urged the Irish government to disavow military intervention, moderate its anti-partition rhetoric, and pose as the focus for northern nationalists' loyalty by pressing the British government to redress their grievances. Predicting that ending discrimination would curtail nationalist emigration and bring about Irish unification within twenty years through altered demographics, he stressed the importance of restoring peace to expedite reform. Lynch and Hillery concurred, but failed to prevent cabinet colleagues from embroiling the government in a conspiracy to support northern militants. Gallagher avoided contact with the embryonic paramilitary groups believed to be receiving Irish-government funds.

Meanwhile, in early 1970 he was promoted a counsellor, given charge of a newly established northern desk, and appointed to the inter-departmental unit for Northern Ireland, which coordinated northern policy. As such, he pushed proposals to woo unionists by liberalising Irish law in relation to divorce and contraceptives. An Anglo-Irish section with responsibility for the north and for relations with Britain was not established until 1972, a lack that allowed Gallagher to circumvent the civil-service hierarchy and substantially shape northern policy. Foreign Affairs officials resented his meteoric rise and forceful manner, and were concerned that his role was improperly political and high profile.

After dismissing the hardliners in his cabinet in May 1970, Lynch embraced Gallagher's strategy of pursuing Irish unity peacefully but assertively and of cooperating closely with Hume. Pivotal in dealings with London and the British embassy in Dublin, Gallagher demanded concessions in return for security cooperation and tried to exploit British fears of Lynch's ousting by extreme nationalists. He encouraged the formation in August 1970 of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), a Northern Ireland party, dominated by Hume, that united the disparate northern opposition, provided a constitutional alternative to the IRA, and benefited from the Irish government's financial support.

Heavy-handed British security measures boosted Gallagher's credibility, and, following the politically disastrous introduction of internment measures in Northern Ireland in August 1971, he induced Lynch to toughen his position by supporting the SDLP's civil disobedience campaign, taking the British government to the European court of human rights over the treatment of internees, and calling for a power-sharing administration between unionists and nationalists. He convinced Lynch to attend two summit meetings with British Prime Minister Ted Heath in September 1971, believing that their very occurrence represented Britain's acknowledgement that the

Irish republic had a legitimate interest in Northern Ireland. Around this time, tensions between Lynch and Hillery meant northern policy was taken out of Hillery's hands, and Gallagher reported to Lynch over his aggrieved minister's head.

Gallagher's arguing from the head and heart made him formidable, but led to lapses in judgement whenever the chimera of Irish unity presented. Certainly, in advocating the inclusion of a strong all-Ireland dimension in any northern power-sharing administration, he underestimated the likelihood and efficacy of unionist resistance. He did not have to deal with the consequences of this miscalculation; he had been boasting of his dominance over Lynch, who, on hearing of this, abruptly dropped him in mid 1972. A dismayed Gallagher applied for a transfer and in November 1972 was promoted to chargé d'affaires within the economic division.

His prospects appeared bleak, but he recovered rapidly thanks to the challenges posed by Ireland's EEC membership, given the insufficiency of Foreign Affairs' resources and staff. Among a handful of Irish officials capable of holding their own on the European stage, he thrived under the dynamic ministry from 1973 of Garret FitzGerald (1926–2011), earning promotion as assistant secretary in charge of economics (October 1973) and then as assistant secretary of the department (November 1974).

Contributing prominently to Ireland's much-lauded presidency of the EEC (January–June 1975), Gallagher excelled as the EEC's representative at the preparatory talks held in April between the oil producing and consuming nations, preventing the acrimonious collapse of the talks by engineering an abandonment that left open the possibility of resumed discussions. The French objected, but Gallagher retired defiantly to bed, prompting face-saving claims that he had collapsed from exhaustion. In June 1975 he led the EEC delegation at the Euro–Arab dialogue, skilfully eliding controversies surrounding the presence of Palestinian Liberation Organisation representatives in the Arab delegation and a recent trade deal between the EEC and Israel.

At the request of the EEC's commissioner for external affairs, Sir Christopher Soames, Gallagher was in January 1976 released to work for the European Commission in Brussels as Soames's special adviser with the assurance of shortly becoming director general for external affairs. After leading trade negotiations with the USA and Canada, he was in July 1976 appointed deputy director general, exercising primary responsibility for fisheries negotiations with non-EEC countries. Following the rapid establishment worldwide of 200-nautical-mile national fishing zones – previously, waters over six miles from a coast were considered open – Gallagher supervised the creation in 1976–7 of an EEC zone from which external trawlers were largely expelled.

The European Commission's new president, Roy Jenkins, frustrated Gallagher's ascension to the director generalship of External Affairs, instead offering him the

newly established Fisheries department in February 1977. Gallagher accepted after extracting assurances of adequate resources and staff. Despite his personal incompatibility with the puritanical commissioner for agriculture and fisheries, Finn Olav Gundelach, they formed an effective working relationship, being much praised for their efforts to overcome an interminable deadlock over the creation of a common fisheries policy (CFP).

Under the new norm of 200-mile national zones, Britain and Ireland held the overwhelming majority of the EEC's fishing grounds, which stiffened their opposition to the principle that all member states enjoy total access to each other's waters and their determination to enlarge their proposed CFP quotas and the six to twelve-mile national zones they had been granted for ten years upon their joining the EEC in 1973. Although a keen angler who spent his holidays trawling off Donegal, Gallagher was dismissive of Ireland's claims and of commercial fishing generally, vainly urging member states to focus on more important matters.

The Irish position was undermined by its small fishing fleet and the benefits Ireland otherwise received from EEC membership. Gallagher maintained the pressure, in summer 1977 shepherding through the European court of justice the commission's successful case against Ireland's unilateral introduction of discriminatory conservation measures. The Irish government submitted in early 1978, but Britain was unyielding, leading to a public spat in October when Gallagher condemned the British fisheries minister, John Silkin.

Gundelach died in January 1981 and was succeeded by Giorgios Contogeorgis, who had little interest in fisheries, permitting Gallagher free rein. (Contogeorgis's replacement, António Cardoso e Cunha (1986–8), proved similarly pliant.) Gallagher first concentrated on successfully securing agreement for reforms to the fish intervention system, thus preventing the excesses associated with the EEC's agricultural intervention mechanisms. Meanwhile, the CFP talks had settled into an Anglo–French standoff, so from late 1981 he oversaw discreet bilateral meetings between British and French officials that bore fruit in mid 1982 as the imminent EEC entry of Spain's vast fishing fleet concentrated minds. Following spectacular last-ditch resistance from Denmark – during which Danish parliamentarians irked Gallagher by branding him a British stooge – the CFP was finally agreed in January 1983.

Modest national zones were thereby delineated and a catch limit was to be set annually for distribution among member states according to fixed formulas agreed for each species in each area. The only Irish official to make an impression in Brussels during this period, Gallagher was hailed as the architect of the EEC's first common policy since the common agricultural policy in 1962. Thereafter he was preoccupied with preserving the CFP amid rows concerning the reopened North Sea herring fishery during 1983–4 and revisions required by Spain's and Portugal's membership of the EEC from 1986.

In fact, the CFP was secure, as few wished to reprise an excruciating negotiating experience. More could have been done to address its weaknesses with regard to conservation – principally, the lack of enforcement mechanisms, the failure to implement a meaningful fleet decommissioning programme, and the fact that the division of quotas per species obliged trawlers operating in mixed fisheries to discard large quantities of dead fish. The system was more conducive to apportioning than to conserving resources, but suited Gallagher, placing him at the heart of the ensuing horse-trading.

Serially brokering environmentally imprudent compromises, he antagonised subordinates by disregarding their scientific advice and increasing catch limits to quell disputes, ultimately discrediting both himself and the CFP when North Sea fish stocks collapsed in the late 1980s. Gallagher was sidelined in 1989, his new commissioner, Manuel Marín, unwilling to brook an over-mighty director general. Gallagher sought alternate employment, and was in 1990 appointed the EEC's representative at the UN, also acting as special adviser to the commission's president, Jacques Delors.

Retiring in 1991, Gallagher returned to Brussels where he was active in the Irish Institute of European Affairs and was unofficial head of the Irish émigré community centred on the Wild Geese pub. During Ireland's presidency of the EU in 1996, he chaired a special committee that failed to resolve an impasse over funding for EU infrastructural projects. In June 1992 he was appointed to the Opsahl commission, an independent public inquiry established to examine the submissions of citizens relating to every aspect of life in Northern Ireland. He robustly defended the commission's suggestion that the British government negotiate with Sinn Féin.

Never forgetting his Glasgow origins, he championed Scottish independence, being active in the Brussels branch of the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) and collaborating with Neil MacCormick, the party's MEP (1999–2004). His assertion that an independent Scotland would be allowed EU membership was much cited by SNP politicians. Latterly, he opposed the EU project in conjunction with John Temple Lang, another prominent former EU official. Identifying the European Commission as the critical counterweight to the larger states, they argued against the Nice and Lisbon treaties for reducing the commission's independence and for denying small member states a permanent seat on the commission.

Gallagher enjoyed poker and was an enthusiastic, albeit mediocre, golfer. In the late 1980s he befriended future Ryder Cup player and captain Paul McGinley, then working in Brussels, and arranged a grant for him to study and play golf in America. Gallagher died of cancer at his home in Brussels on 25 May 2009, survived by Nora O'Brien, his partner of over thirty years. His ashes were interred in Temple Douglas cemetery near Letterkenny.

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Papers of Dr P. J. Hillery (UCD Archives); NAI, departmental records (2000/6/660; 2000/6/662; 2001/6/513; 2001/6/517; 2001/6/549; 2001/8/15; 2003/13/16; 2002/8/481; 2001/8/483–4; 2003/17/269); *Ir. Press*, 2 June 1950; 8 Sept 1961; 16 Apr., 1 July 1975; 10, 11 Mar., 4 Aug. 1977; 12 June 1982; 22 Jan. 1990; 30 June 1993; *Ir. Times*, 24 Mar. 1970; 10 Nov. 1972; 19 Oct. 1973; 6 Dec. 1975; 3 Jan., 6 Sept. 1976; 20 Jan., 4, 5 Feb. 1977; 15 Mar., 10 Oct., 11 Nov. 1978; 4, 20 Dec. 1982; 26 Jan. 1983; 16 July, 20 Sept. 1996; 1 Jan., 28 May 2002; 17 Apr. 2003; 26, 30 May 2009; *Donegal Democrat*, 3 July 1971; 5 June 2009; 20 Jan. 2013; *Hibernia*, 16 July, 27 Aug. 1971; 25 Aug. 1972; 18 Mar. 1977 (profile); *Economist*, 18 Mar. 1972; 1 Mar. 1986; 16 Dec. 1989; Wikileaks (references to Eamon [sic]/Eamonn Gallagher), 24 Dec. 1974; 25 Feb. 1975; 7 Oct. 1976; 29 Apr. 1977; *Sunday Independent*, 22, 29 June 1975; 7 Jan. 2001; 5 Jan. 2003; 31 May 2009; *Business and Finance*, 27 Jan. 1977; *Ir. Independent*, 4 Feb. 1977; 11 Oct. 1978; 8 Nov. 2008; *Magill* (Oct. 1977; Jan. 1983); *Financial Times*, 22 June, 4 Dec. 1978; 4 Oct. 1983; 21 Dec. 1984; 8 May 1986; 30 May, 15 Dec. 1989; John Peck, *Dublin from Downing Street* (1978); *Success* (Mar. 1983); Michael Leigh, *European integration and the common fisheries policy* (1983); Maureen Cairnduff (ed.), *Who's who in Ireland: the influential 1,000* (1984); Mark Wise, *The common fisheries policy of the European Community* (1984); John Farnell and James Elles, *In search of a common fisheries policy* (1984); Mike Holden, *The common fisheries policy* (1994); John Temple Lang and Eamonn Gallagher, *The role of the Commission and qualified majority voting*, Institute of European Affairs, occasional paper 7 (1995); *Herald* (Glasgow), 9 Sept. 1996; Michael Kennedy, *Division and consensus: the politics of cross-border relations in Ireland, 1925–1969* (2000); Paul Arthur, *Special relationships: Britain, Ireland and the Northern Ireland problem* (2000); Ronan Fanning, 'Playing it cool: the response of the British and Irish governments to the crisis in Northern Ireland, 1968–9', *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, xii (2001), 57–85; Thomas Hennessey, *Northern Ireland: the origins of the troubles* (2005); id., *The evolution of the troubles, 1970–72* (2007); Dermot Keogh, *Jack Lynch: a biography* (2008); John Walsh, *Patrick Hillery: the official biography* (2008); *Herald Scotland*, 28 May 2009; *Times*, 17 June 2009; Michael Tracy, *A European life: from war to peace: memoirs* (2010); Garret FitzGerald, *Just Garret: tales from the political frontline* (2010); P. J. McLoughlin, *John Hume and the revision of Irish nationalism* (2010); William Beattie Smith, *The British state and the Northern Ireland crisis 1969–73* (2011); Stephen Kelly, *Fianna Fáil, partition and Northern Ireland, 1926–71* (2013); Edward Fahy, *Overkill!: the euphoric rush to industrialise Ireland's sea fisheries...* (2013); Sarah Campbell, 'New nationalism?: the SDLP and the creation of a socialist and labour party in Northern Ireland, 1969–75', *IHS*, xxxviii, no. 151 (May 2013), 422–38; Eric Bussière et al (ed.), *The European Commission, 1973–86: history and memories of an institution* (2014); Iain Carter, *Showdown: the inside story of the Gleneagles Ryder Cup* (2014); interview (Apr. 2015) with Charles Lysaght (Dept. of Foreign Affairs official)

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