

THE IRISH DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE, 1959–99. By Ciarán Casey. Pp 255. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration. 2022. €35 hardback.

The Irish Department of Finance, 1959–99 has an inauspicious title, but this eminently readable book contains a wealth of information and insight with implications beyond the department in question. Commissioned by the Irish Department of Finance and published by the Institute of Public Administration, it is the sequel to Ronan Fanning's book on the department from 1922 to 1958. Published in 1978, Fanning's contribution charted the early decades of the Irish Free State: from the revolutionary Dáil's Department of Finance and subsequent handover from Dublin Castle to the years of protectionism and difficult 1950s. Casey picks up the baton, taking us through the challenges facing the next generation of politicians and civil servants and their attempts to overcome them: from the pursuit of Foreign Direct Investment (F.D.I.) and accession to the European Economic Community, through the bleak 1980s and early years of the Celtic Tiger. The book terminates before the 2008 financial crash and subsequent recession, but some foreshadowing provides clues as to their roots. Its structure is chronological, dealing with key themes as they arise and picking them up as they evolve through time.

Taking the reader into the cockpit of the Irish economy, Casey combines analysis of the macro-economic picture with vignettes of those in the driving seat and their deliberations over what course to take. Unique among government departments, Finance was concerned with both its own interest and that of the government at large, making it a particularly worthy object for study. While other departments advocated for their own narrow interests, Casey describes the Department of Finance as 'the superego of government', striving to assert the bigger picture (p. 75). The tension arising from this position, between Finance, other departments and their political masters, is a recurring theme. This was perhaps most evident in the 1980s, when the short-run incentives facing politicians were at odds with prudent management of the economy in the long run. The treatment of this theme is nuanced, however, acknowledging complexity and avoiding simplistic interpretations.

Casey was granted unprecedented access to the Department of Finance's voluminous archives, bringing a number of episodes to light, both consequential and colourful. This is complemented by a significant oral history component, drawing on the author's interviews with former ministers of finance and senior civil servants. Discussion of the implementation of 'equal pay for equal work' in the 1960s and '70s, and discrimination on the basis of sex more generally, will be of interest to historians of gender, women and society in Ireland. Internal departmental discussions on the location of a Roger Casement statue reveal much about contemporary Irish attitudes to sexuality, respectability and national identity. Finance's opposition to Department of Health proposals for a partial smoking ban in 1983 also highlight changes in social attitudes. But the book's major contribution lies in its exploration and evaluation of successive government's economic policies: how they were arrived at and their consequences for the economy.

Rich in analysis, the book has a strong author's voice, with Casey not afraid to pass judgement on, *inter alia*, decisions made by ministers for finance, the culture of the department, its hiring and promotion practices, and their effects on the balance of power within Irish government and fortunes of the wider economy. While much use is made of recent research, reports contemporaneous with the period add depth to the analysis, taking the reader to the time as experienced by the main actors and, thus, avoiding the tyranny of hindsight. Indeed, the extensive bibliography will be of considerable use to scholars of the period. The book also contains numerous charts, adding context and clarity.

Casey's analysis challenges some received wisdom of Irish economic history, much of which has stemmed from myopic comparison with the United Kingdom rather than the wider European context. In this way, the book is in the tradition of Ó Gráda and O'Rourke's work on the same period, but Casey's inclusion of decision-makers in his story brings an added dimension. Ironically, one consequence of this is to diminish the role of certain celebrated politicians and civil servants and share credit more widely. One example of this is Ireland's successes in attracting F.D.I., which Casey argues, 'had many midwives and were devised over many decades' (p. 32). The book also includes discussion

of advice not acted on and missed opportunities, providing a glimpse of alternative economic histories of twentieth-century Ireland with lessons for policymakers as well as academics.

The Irish Department of Finance, 1959–99 should be recommended reading for scholars of the economic and social history of twentieth-century Ireland. Its contribution, in terms of both content and analysis, is sure to stimulate debate.

doi:10.1017/ihs.2023.38

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NORAID AND THE NORTHERN IRISH TROUBLES, 1970–94. By Robert Collins. Pp 221. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2022. €50.

Noraid and the Northern Ireland Troubles charts the turbulent story of militant republican Irish American activists during the Northern Ireland Troubles, where Robert Collins describes the activities of not only Noraid — Irish Northern Aid (I.N.A.) — but of allied and competitor organisations that share the same social and political space. From the introduction of internment to Bloody Sunday, through the hunger strikes to the beginning of the peace process, Collins weaves the history of Noraid around the familiar narrative of the Northern Ireland conflict. In often meticulous detail, the book shows how Noraid depended on events in Northern Ireland to provide it with an impetus, as well as how as political campaigners in their own right they were later active in championing their own interventions too, on top of fundraising for the provisional republican movement.

What becomes clear in Collins's book is the importance of personal viewpoints in this tightly knit and highly charged network of organisations. The author does well personalising the readers' understanding of prominent figures like Michael Flannery and Martin Galvin, especially when it comes to issues of wider association and loyalty in the midst of the various splits that pepper the history of militant Irish republicanism more generally. The episodic narrative works well too, with the turn of emphasis to the MacBride principles changing the tone from earlier discussions of fundraising and a middle period of legal support for those charged with gun running.

Collins poignantly links the issue of plastic baton rounds and I.N.A. via the death of John Downes during a Royal Ulster Constabulary (R.U.C.) attempt to arrest Galvin at a rally in Belfast in August 1984, and in these passages the writing and research elements of this work best come together. However, one is left wondering at times what the purpose was of describing quite so many interminable dinner dances, beyond creating a published record of their mere occurrence. Certainly, the reader does not get the impression that I.N.A. and its associated organisations were mainstream or mass organisations in Collins's account, and he balances well the competing views of them as either a tiny bunch of disgruntled political exiles, or conversely, as the whole of Irish America united by this vanguard of organised Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.) supporters.

In other words, *Noraid and the Northern Ireland Troubles* is not partisan, but it is source led — and honest to these groups' primary sources. However, this kind of subjectivity carries risk; seen from the I.N.A.'s perspective, the death of John Downes (pp 148–54) appears to be judged as more tragic than the death of 29-year-old mother-of-one Joanne Mathers. Mathers was murdered by the I.R.A. while collecting census forms in 1981. Collins might have questioned I.N.A.'s defensive line that Mathers was murdered because the Provisional I.R.A. thought census workers were 'potential informers' (p. 92) and the fact that Mathers was nothing of the sort would not have taken much to clarify.

This loyalty to the sources unfortunately leads to more questions than answers when it comes to Noraid's involvement in supplying weapons and money for weapons, as well as other activity beyond their stated public aims. Often when little else did, allegations of gun-running united both British and Irish government attitudes to Noraid throughout the Troubles. When the F.B.I. found machine guns and a flame thrower in a Brooklyn basement