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Ireland's Helping Hand to Europe Combatting Hunger from Normandy to Tirana, 1945–1950

By Jérôme aan de Wiel

An unknown episode of post-1945 European history.

Post-war Marshall Plan aid to Europe and indeed Ireland is well documented, but practically nothing is known about simultaneous Irish aid to Europe. This book provides a full record of the aid – mainly food but also clothes, blankets, medicines, etc. – that Ireland donated to continental Europe, including France, the Netherlands, Hungary, the Balkans, Italy, and zones of occupied Germany.

Starting with Ireland's neutral wartime record, often wrongly presented as pro-German when Ireland in fact unofficially favoured the western Allies, Jerome aan de Wiel explains why Éamon de Valera's government sent humanitarian aid to the devastated continent. His book analyses the logistics of collection and distribution of supplies sent abroad as far as the Greek islands.

Despite some alleged Cold-War hijacking of Irish relief – and this humanitarianism was not above the politics of that East-West confrontation – it became mostly a story of hope, generosity and European Christian solidarity. Rich archival records from Ireland and the European beneficiary countries, as well as contemporary local and national newspapers across Europe, allow the author to measure and describe not only the official but also the popular response to Irish relief schemes. This work is illustrated with contemporary photographs and some key graphs and tables that show the extent of the aid programme.

About the author

Jérôme aan de Wiel is lecturer in History and European Studies at University College Cork, Ireland. His research focuses on twentieth-century European history and Irish history, notably on the First World War, Cold War and post-war (WW2) periods.

“How did Irish relief efforts between 1945 and 1950 function? This rich, textured, and original account reveals the organisation of the operation in Ireland, its distribution in and then the reaction of war-stricken European communities from north to south and east to west. It establishes a new framework of relations between Ireland and the European continent placing it in the context of the international history of relief and humanitarianism. Based on many hitherto unseen foreign language primary sources, there is no other study of this type set against the background of Irish foreign relations, World War Two, and the emerging Cold War, while combining high politics, diplomacy, religion, civil society, and personal stories. This highly readable account opens up the scope of the Irish relief effort between 1945–50 providing new areas for scholars to pursue in the future.”

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