

Barry Whelan, *Ireland's Revolutionary Diplomat: A Biography of Leopold Kerney*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 2019, 356 pp.

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The cover of this elegantly-produced book is well chosen and aptly captures the thesis which Dr Barry Whelan cogently argues in the text. The Irish Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary Leopold Kerney is photographed in court dress clutching his top hat, at the ceremony on 10 April 1939 where he was about to present his credentials to the new *de facto* ruler of Spain, General Francisco Franco. Flanking Kerney, two unidentified diplomats stand with arms raised in the fascist salute. Besides providing an arresting image, this photograph illustrates the central thesis of this well-researched book – from the time he began his professional career in 1919 as a Dáil Éireann envoy until his retirement after World War II, Kerney remained throughout his life – in the words of the author – “Dev’s republican diplomat” (9).

Throughout this work, Dr Whelan argues that the Taoiseach and Minister for External Affairs between 1932 and 1948, Eamon de Valera, “defended his loyal colleague despite the scheming of civil servants” (9). Kerney, it is true, did not have a very easy professional time. He remained on the republican side (to use that hackneyed phrase) during the civil war, and kept faith with de Valera during the remainder of the 1920s. On becoming President of the Executive Council and his own Minister for External Affairs, de Valera, took firm control of his twin portfolios. Kerney, a “diplomat by accident” at the time of the War of Independence, was – together with a few other republican loyalists like Art O’Brien - reinstated in the diplomatic service on the recommendation of an official commission. That decision was not popular on the opposition benches and in 1933 a former Minister for External Affairs, Desmond Fitzgerald, attacked Kerney’s appointment in the Dáil as the commercial attaché to Paris. He described it as an “unnecessary office” and the appointee as having acted treacherously to the state in 1923. For good measure, he threw the ultimate 1930s’ insult at Kerney – that he was a communist sympathiser (101-102).

De Valera was not put off by those robust allegations and when a residential mission was opened in Madrid in 1935, Kerney presented his credentials to the President of the Second Spanish Republic, Niceto Alcalá Zamora on 3 September. Kerney and de Valera had more to worry about than the histrionics of even one of the most distinguished members of the opposition. Dr Whelan referred to “the scheming of civil servants,” which I have quoted above. He argues convincingly that the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, Joseph Walshe, had opposed Kerney’s appointment to Spain and that, for a variety of reasons, he did not ever have confidence in Kerney’s professionalism and his judgment over the following decade.

Because of the way the Irish diplomatic service was composed in the 1930s and 1940s, Dr Whelan argues that “Kerney was simply not one of the ‘lads’ and never would be” (98). Although a Catholic, but not a particularly pious one, he had converted from Protestantism, had attended ‘Protestant’ Trinity College and had been an unrepentant anti-Treatyite throughout the 1920s. The author paints a portrait of the Department of Foreign Affairs at the time as being presided over by Joseph Walshe, an ex-Jesuit scholastic, and ultra-conservative Catholic. Dr Whelan argues that “many in the department, like Joseph Walshe, were former students of Jesuit-run colleges, which

were on the pathway to career advancement and networking for the wealthier elites of independent Ireland” (98). I feel that that is a statement which needs to be supported by empirical evidence. The cadets who joined in 1935 were as follows: Cornelius Cremin was educated in St. Brendan’s diocesan college Killarney and at University College Cork; Denis Devlin studied with the Jesuits in Belvedere College and later attended the Dublin Diocesan Seminary, Clonliffe, and University College Dublin; and William Warnock was educated at the High School, Dublin and at Trinity College Dublin. However, Dr Whelan’s substantial point is well made; Walshe kept Kerney in his cross-hairs throughout his diplomatic career in Spain. On the basis of the evidence to date, it is more likely that the secretary of the Department of External Affairs objected more to the fact that Kerney was one of the reinstated than that he was a convert to Catholicism, not ostentatiously religious and a Trinity Graduate. Dr Whelan chronicles the endless rows over expenses, professional time wasted on petty issues by both parties. But one does not have to be paranoid etc....

The author purposefully sets out to do battle with “successive leading historians, many of whom have passed damning judgments on Kerney” and acknowledges that “restoring the reputation of any historical figure is no easy task” (8). This is a very valuable study if, at times, unnecessarily defensive of the main protagonist. The author had the advantage of having access to the Kerney family papers besides the National Archives of Ireland and the personal papers of leading actors together with holdings in Spain. While rereading the text I was reminded constantly that there was no requirement for him to be defensive about his subject. The biography of Kerney’s professional life is a story worth telling in itself without having to carry the self-imposed burden of ‘restoring’ his reputation.

This monograph is a strong piece of research and an original contribution to the growing number of Irish diplomat biographies. Based on an examination of new primary source material, Dr Whelan’s book is as impressive as it is original. While I knew that Kerney had contracted polio in 1936, this book explains the seriousness of his illness coming as it did at a critical time in Spanish history – just before the outbreak of civil war. He was fortunate to be able to return to Ireland where he then suffered the loss of his brother. His own recovery was further complicated by the contraction of sinusitis. Walshe wrote to him: “Dear Mr Kerney. The Minister was very sorry indeed to learn of your sudden illness. We all hope that you will make a rapid recovery to complete health” (118). For the remainder of the civil war, Kerney, once he recovered, was based – together with other diplomats – in the Golf Hotel, in San Juan de Luz, on the French side of the border but not far from Burgos, the headquarters of General Franco, and the seat of his government. Dr Whelan argues that Kerney was opposed to an early recognition of the general as head of the Spanish government and that he cautioned de Valera to take his time doing so. He points out that de Valera had withstood pressure from the opposition in the Dáil to declare on the side of Franco.

But I do remember reading Kerney’s report from Salamanca around St. Patrick’s Day 1937 where he recommended recognition. As I can’t check the file because of lockdown, I don’t wish to be emphatic or dogmatic. But I thought that Kerney was converted early on to the view that the Franco side would win out. Here in the section on civil war, it would have been very helpful to have consulted the journals of the Rector of the Irish College, Alexander J. McCabe, who had useful observations to make on Kerney.

The chapter devoted to Frank Ryan provides an even-handed coverage of what turned out for Kerney to be one of his most testing diplomatic challenges, faced as he was by competing interests in the case. De Valera took a strong personal interest in getting Ryan released. The Spanish archives provide additional information on the case, the charges made against him and the reasons for his sentencing to death. Perhaps Walshe and the head of military intelligence, G2, Col. Dan Bryan, may have been all too ready to accept the British Intelligence version of what Kerney was allegedly doing in Madrid and the nature of his contacts with German Intelligence? Dr Whelan makes interesting observations on that fraught time in Kerney's professional life during the action he took in the early 1950s against Desmond Williams, Professor History, UCD. This was a painfully sad episode for both parties.

After his retirement, de Valera hand-picked Kerney to lead a trade mission to Argentina in 1947. The primary – but secret – purpose of his visit was to conclude discussions on the establishment of residential diplomatic relations between the two countries. As I have been researching this area, I find it very interesting to read Kerney's report (in his personal papers). It contrasts strongly to what Irish diplomats serving in Buenos Aires subsequently felt about the success or failure of his mission. The trade side, despite some difficulties, yielded very positive results. Kerney felt that he had overcome the final hurdle in establishing diplomatic relations with the government of General Juan Domingo Perón. That was perhaps overstated. After further negotiations in Washington DC between the ambassadors of both Ireland and Argentina, an Irish envoy arrived in Buenos Aires in December 1947 and an Argentine diplomat in Dublin in 1948.

Kerney is quoted in this book as saying that de Valera gave him personal instructions to speak vigorously on the question of Irish Partition. During his stay in the Argentine capital, Dr Whelan writes that Kerney 'began to get slightly tired of the folksy repetition of "God Save Ireland" and other hyperbolic Irish customs that went on into the early hours of the morning' (234). His report states that he "disliked hearing criticism of the Protestant delegates on the mission and observing the rabidly anti-English attitude of the diaspora, and he bit his tongue on the more than one occasion when guests referred to the Taoiseach as "that b*****d de Valera" (234). But what Kerney did not know was that his speech to 200 guests in the Plaza Hotel on partition and neutrality was so controversial that it alienated many Irish Argentines – a number later refusing to turn up to the reception to receive the Irish chargé, Matthew Murphy, in December 1947.

While I am overwhelmingly positive in my assessment of this original piece of research, I would like to have seen greater use of Spanish primary and secondary sources, evidence of the consultation of Irish ecclesiastical archives and of the journals of Fr. McCabe.

I hope that in future work Dr Whelan will amplify this study and delve more deeply into a number of key areas that he has opened up so interestingly and arrestingly in the text.

This book ought to be required reading for all students studying Irish diplomatic history.

Harry Dunleavy, *Irish Immigration to Latin America*, New Jersey, Newman Springs Publishing, 2019, 255 pp.

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The text *Irish Immigration to Latin America*, written by Harry Dunleavy, professor of mathematics and former officer of American ships, is an important contribution to the studies of Irish migration to Latin America. The book takes a tour of eleven Latin American countries: Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Panama, Bolivia, Peru, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina, and Chile. It is an easy-to-read, accessible book that combines anecdotal experiences of the author, historical information, and brief biographies of prominent Irish figures in Latin American societies.

Through his book, Dunleavy highlights the participation and contribution of the Irish in the various political, economic, and cultural settings of the host countries. In this way, the author points to a constant Irish presence throughout various historical periods in Latin American societies, ranging from the stage of conquest and colonization to the start of republican life. Equally important is the incorporation of the lives of Irish descendants, who come to participate in different spheres of Latin American societies.

Dunleavy's book shows that the Irish migrant arrives in Latin America with arms, religion, an adventurous opportunism, and the intention of becoming integrated into the new country. To this end, Dunleavy compiles the lives and work of prominent Irish figures, such as Viceroy Ambrosio O'Higgins (1720-1791) in Peru, General Francis Burdett O'Connor (1791–1871) in Bolivia, Father Anthony Fahy (1805–1871) and Admiral William Brown (1777–1857) in Argentina, and Eliza A. Lynch (1833–1886) in Paraguay, among many others. In this sense, this book serves as an important reference source for readers who seek information pertaining to a specific subject of Irish immigration in Latin America.

Nevertheless, *Irish Immigration to Latin America* suffers from a few deficiencies. First, the text lacks a conclusion, which could have made it more cohesive overall. It is precisely in the conclusion that the author has the opportunity to present and synthesize the final results of the research and demonstrate the importance of the work in the studies of the Irish diaspora in Latin America. This bibliographical shortcoming ultimately reduces the academic value of this book. Furthermore, although the author has been thorough in his research, it is not fully documented in his references, and the author's citation methods lack consistency. Any researcher wanting to use Dunleavy's text as a bibliographic source may find it difficult to adequately do so because of this lack of organization. Finally, the author's own anecdotal experiences, though generally of value, often appear in places that interrupt the flow of the text and can distract readers when important historical events are being presented.

In short, *Irish Immigration to Latin America* is a valuable contribution to the research and compilation of information, historical events, biographies, and places linked to Irish memory in Latin America.