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## Letters ...

Catholic Physicians' Guild

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# Letters...



## Letter from Ireland, 1984

When writing an annual news letter, one must not neglect a famous occasion in the press of more specialized matters. Of course I mean the visit of President Ronald Reagan to the homeland of his grandparents in Co. Tipperary in summer, 1984. The whole affair was a great success — a simple and dignified acknowledgment of his roots and origins. However the local people would have preferred to have got a little closer to him, but he was well protected by a posse of bodyguards. When President John Kennedy was here in 1964 he was able to walk apparently unprotected among the people on many occasions, but of course subsequent events have shown how necessary all this protection has become. One can hardly call this progress.

Neither can we say that the great upsurge in the use of addictive drugs which has taken place in Ireland in the past 10 years is a form of progress. It is more a levelling of international standards. In those days there was a little disquiet in the capital, Dublin, because drugs were so easy to obtain on the streets. The rest of the country was considered almost untouched except perhaps for a little marijuana usage, but in five short years the change in Dublin, Cork, and other cities was such that a study showed that 40% of the children had sampled addictive drugs, with even 10-14 year olds now dependent on heroin and cocaine. An intensive campaign to

inform parents of the signs of drug addiction coupled with increased funding for the Anti-Drug Division of the Police is already producing promising results.

At the present time, over 20% of our work force is unemployed, with many major industries becoming victims to the world-wide recession. Recently this country has relied too much on employment given by subsidiaries of these great Multinationals who, of course, in the present climate have reduced their overseas commitments and have tended to claw back and support the home firm. Since the 1960s when there was an industrial boom in this country, there has been a steady drift of farm workers to the cities. This group has been much affected by the present unemployment situation and, having no city roots and living in high-rise flats, they have no recourse to cope with the stress of city life. They are thus easy prey to the tranquilizer and the drug pusher. The great publicity given to President Reagan's visit seems to have fuelled the fires of home country nostalgia in the Irish-American. These generous people were easily persuaded to subscribe to projects which, superficially, seemed to help the Irish in general, but more especially, the victims of the Loyalist versus Nationalist struggles in the North of Ireland. In fact, the great proportion of these monies went not only to purchase arms and munitions, but also to foment disruption in general in all parts of the country. One offshoot of this latter activity was the development of vigilante groups in the depressed areas with the avowed object of hunting out drug-pushers. This was a public relations exercise by the I.R.A. and their sympathizers, suggestions that there was insufficient police protection for the poor and unemployed and consequently pushing the division with the better off.

The Irish Republic joined the European Economic Community over 10 years ago, and since then, we have realised that many changes would have to be made if we were to come into

line with the other peoples of Europe. Let it be said that many advantages came our way in the field of international commerce and co-operation and subsidy. The price we pay is to leave our isolated position on the West Coast of Europe and join the Europeans in their customs and moral standards. One such problem was the provision of contraceptives, but I wrote about that last year. We have, however, balked at making abortion available. This has not altered the problem of up to 8000 Irish women going abroad each year for this purpose. Now the legislation to permit the sale of contraceptives by medical prescription only was, of course, flouted in public and in private, and even those who were in public service were not above saying what a ridiculous provision this was. However we face pressure groups who are demanding new legislation to allow the sale of contraceptives to all over 18 years of age and the lowering of the age of marriage. The consequences of this form of legisla-

tion have been evident in many other countries for many years.

However, lest I give the impression that we progress downhill rapidly, not only in religion and morals, but also in medical care, let me hasten to relate that intensive efforts are being made to bring our medical care standards up to those of the richer countries, and will continue. We keep the good news until last. As you know, the Irish Medical Association had a break-away opposition group called the Irish Medical Union for over 20 years. It had always been hoped that these organizations would unite again, as they were both serving the medical profession. This was finally achieved in 1984, and they will now be known as the Irish Medical Organization. Long may it survive and be successful in its plan and in its example of unity to the whole country.

— Dr. Robert O'Donoghue  
Cork

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