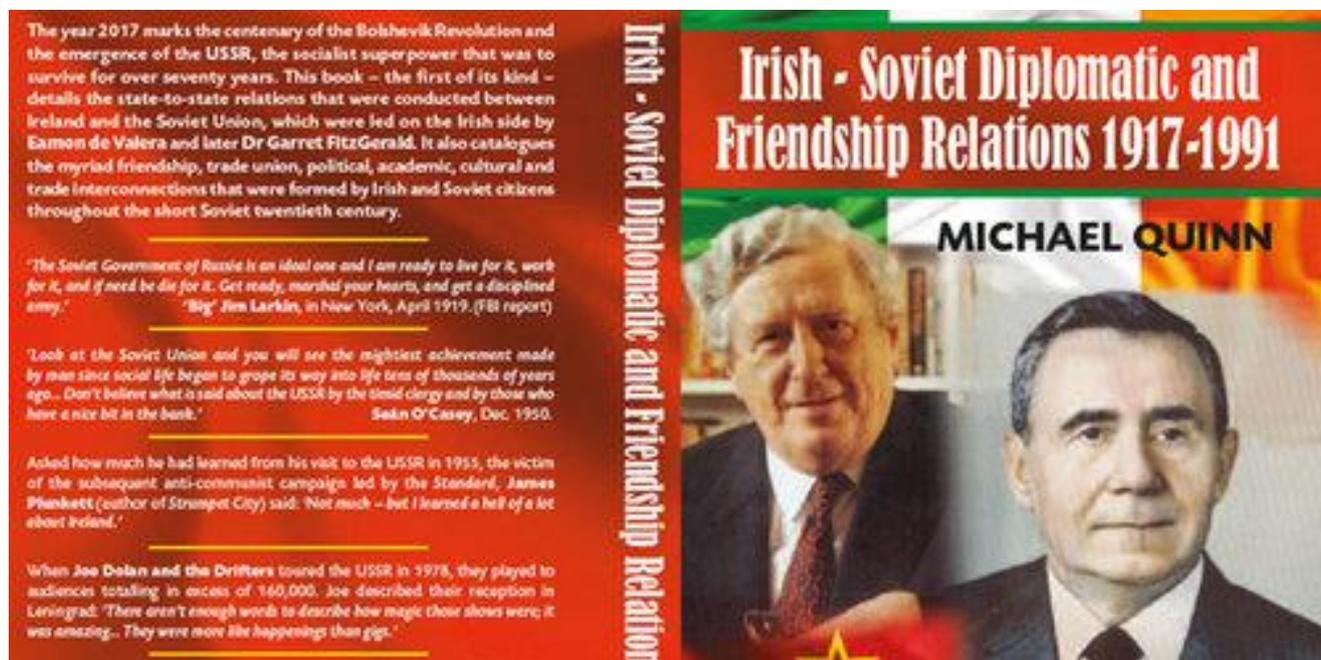


# Irish-Soviet Diplomatic and Friendship Relations

By Michael Quinn



Reviewed by Dr. Jack McGinley

This is the fourth and biggest title published by Umiskin Press following on from *Dear Madam: The letters and mails of Dermot Sweeney*; Matt Merrigan's *Eggs & Rashers* and the Jack Mc Ginley edited *Cluskey: The Conscience of Labour* launched by the then Labour Party leader Joan Burton in the summer of 2015.

Michael Quinn has beavered meticulously in transferring a dissertation into a highly readable book and has added some valuable extra insights and wonderful vignettes.

The list of political actors on the Irish side is of course a veritable smorgasbord of the great and the good starting with de Valera, who shared the Soviet view of peace and security in Europe, through to Frank Aiken, a big player on the world stage, Liam Cosgrave with his 'three principles', Dr. Patrick Hillery who at the height of the early Northern Ireland troubles attempted to get United Nations peace keeping troops for, the northern part of the island of Ireland, as his biographer John Walsh describes 'by raising the unpleasant vista of Soviet co-operation with the Irish government on the issue of the north in various international bodies'.

Garret FitzGerald's period in Foreign Affairs rather than the expected Finance portfolio saw him go to Moscow and meet President Podgorny, his opposite number Andrei Gromyko, and conclude successful negotiations on extending and improving relations, developing trade, and highlighted areas of common agreement in the areas of pursuit of world peace, disarmament, opposition to colonialism, abhorrence of apartheid in South Africa and issues of common cause at the United Nations.

On the Soviet side Andrei Gromyko is of course the giant having had longevity of service on behalf of his country in a number of ministries as well as being President. Other names to feature include the two Bolshevik envoys, Ludwig Martens and Santeri Nuoverta, as well as then Foreign Minister of the

USSR, Maxim Litvinov, Ambassador Anatoli Kaplin with his wife, Gali, including coverage of his untimely death and coverage of the many tributes paid to him by politicians and trade unionists.

My favourite piece in the book is the visit of Dimitri Shostakovich to our shores at the invitation of Provost Mc Connell (TCD) to receive an Honorary Degree, and in particular his visit to Howth to the home and gardens of my former academic colleague Professor Brian Boydell, a man who did so much to put music on the map in Ireland and Trinity. The episode of engaging in a one- to -one with Shostakovich without the prying ears of his security detail, Filatov, with the distraction of a game of croquet, and their conversation about freedom of expression is also very enlightening, as is Boydell's description of the event as 'an unforgettable day'.

One of the features which comes out of the book is the wealth of wisdom and diplomacy in the Departments of External Affairs, later Foreign Affairs, the skill of the civil servants and the engagement in the League of Nations and afterwards the United Nations. The piece on the Representation of the China Votes 1957-1971 including advice from his advisor, Conor Cruise O'Brien is also interesting. One can almost feel the pride of Frank Aiken in going to the USSR to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, the first country to do so and of Garret FitzGerald's strength of mind negotiating with his seasoned counterparts from the USSR around the size of staffing in the respective embassies following meetings in Helsinki and finally at the United Nations in New York.

The realm of Irish friendship societies, both North and South, covering Irish Friends of Soviet Russia (1928-1937); The Irish-USSR Society (1945-1966) The Soviet Friendship Societies of Northern Ireland (1955-1991), and The Ireland-USSR Society (1966-1992), and their personalities are covered in chapter's nine to twelve.

Elsewhere there is mention of Roddy Connolly, James Larkin Senior, and Young Jim Larkin, in relation to contacts with the Comintern and various machinations in terms of building a mass communist movement and party in Ireland affiliated to the Comintern's rules and strictures

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