

Administration, vol. 66, no. 4 (2018), pp. 103–108
doi: 10.2478/admin-2018-0036

Envoy Extraordinary: Professor Smiddy of Cork

Eda Sagarra (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration; 2018; ISBN: 978-1-910393-22-2; 200 pp; €20)

Envoy Extraordinary is the biography of Dr Timothy A. Smiddy, the first Irish envoy to the US following the creation of the Free State. This biography seeks to address the dearth of current literature surrounding public servants of the Free State and the contributions they made to the formation of Irish national policy. *Envoy Extraordinary* is researched and written by Eda Sagarra, granddaughter of Smiddy, who has published widely on German literature and social history and latterly on aspects of the early history of the Irish State. Sagarra's familial perspective contributes recollections from Smiddy's daughters and Sagarra's own personal memories of an apparently very private man who left behind few autobiographical sources. Few personal papers of Smiddy's have survived to be recorded, while his official correspondence and memoranda reflect little of his character.

The familial recollections provide charming anecdotal evidence to the text, which is exhaustively researched and referenced. Sagarra examines records in local and national collections, including Cork City Archive records of the business affairs of Smiddy's father, Academic Council minutes and office files from Smiddy's career at University College Cork (UCC), and official correspondence and memoranda from Smiddy's career as envoy extraordinary and later as unofficial advisor to Éamon de Valera. Also referenced is a substantial collection of family memorabilia collected by Smiddy's eldest daughter, Pearl, including about 200 letters from over 50 years of family correspondence, press cuttings from the family's time in Washington, D.C., and some family photos.

The thorough research conducted by Sagarra was in pursuit of revealing 'Smiddy's motivation during his career and whether his

contribution can be described as an enduring one'. She concludes over the course of the biography that Smiddy had an essentially practical view of state policy that was influenced by his father's business and agricultural background, as well as his two years training for priesthood. In unpacking the philosophy that governed Smiddy's actions in later chapters, Sagarra concludes that Smiddy was a 'social philosopher, Catholic, democrat and nationalist'.

Chapter One outlines Smiddy's early childhood with the aim of considering how it would influence his later contributions. Cork during Smiddy's childhood was described as a 'commercial rather than industrial' city, and his father was a successful farmer-victualler, such that Smiddy enjoyed the benefits of education and access to the cultural environment of art, literature, music and science. He was educated, at his mother's wishes, at a seminary school. Having matriculated in the Royal University (now the National University of Ireland), he transferred to a full seminary in Paris. However, he left his priestly studies after two years. Sagarra notes the 'scandal' that leaving the seminary would have caused at the time and considers this historical context to be the reason why Smiddy spent a year living in Germany. This year abroad contributed to his fluency in the language and provided him with an international perspective. His return from abroad landed him a job as a timber merchant's work manager, where he met his wife, Lilian O'Connell.

In Chapter Two Sagarra builds on the first chapter by demonstrating how Smiddy's upbringing influenced his contributions to UCC. Sagarra cites Smiddy's combined academic background with prestigious institutions and practical business experience, along with his above mentioned language fluency and international perspective, as the reason why Smiddy, a man with no formal qualification in economics, became Cork's first professor of the same. Throughout his career Smiddy held that a university training in economics and business was desirous to highlight how commerce influences politics. Given its primacy to the Irish economy, agriculture was also included by Smiddy in his commerce programmes. His insistence on the need for a more practical, business-minded education for Ireland's economy led to the establishment within UCC of the first chair of dairy science in Ireland. By all accounts, Smiddy was an enthusiastic lecturer with great ambition for his pupils and a recruiter of students from other disciplines. His students were fond enough of him that 'at the annual assembly for the announcement of the degrees, one of the features would be loud calls for "Tadhg" – the Irish equivalent of

Timothy'. Furthermore, Smiddy pioneered Cork's adult and worker education programme, believing that Ireland's rural development suffered from the lack of education of those employed in the agricultural sector. It was clear from his lectures and publications that Smiddy was a clear advocate of maximising 'Ireland's natural resources through rational analysis and pragmatic policies'. He was also a clear advocate of the rights of women when it came to the education of his daughters.

Chapter Three highlights the circumstances under which Smiddy became an envoy extraordinary to the US following the creation of the Free State. Smiddy was engaged early in his career in local-level civic outreach to address low productivity in agriculture and poor education levels. The author considers these activities to be in the tradition of Irish patriotism. Furthermore, he was the signatory of an appeal to the British government, protesting against arrests and arguing against Irish conscription. His economics experience was used in his capacity as expert advisor to Michael Collins, particularly on the issue of the Free State's financial liabilities to England. The theories upon which Smiddy's advice was based were later used in the debate around the origins of Ireland's Central Bank.

Although Smiddy's precise role in the War of Independence and creation of the Free State is unclear, it is evident that Smiddy was considered politically neutral, while a great many qualified personnel, including Seán T. O'Kelly, Harry Boland, Art O'Brien and Seán Nunan, were anti-Treaty. It was necessary at the time of Smiddy's appointment to the foreign service for its members to be absolutely loyal to the current government, in order to demonstrate to foreign powers that Ireland was capable of governing itself. Thus, Smiddy was named 'Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary' to the US. He was tasked by Michael Collins and later W. T. Cosgrave with gaining official recognition for the Irish Free State, influencing US immigration legislation and mitigating the effects of anti-treaty activities in the US on the stability of the new government. In his capacity as a politically neutral envoy, Smiddy was criticised throughout his tenure by the anti-Treaty side for cooperating with Britain and informing on Republican gunrunning in the US.

Chapter Four highlights the accomplishments made by Smiddy in his time as envoy extraordinary to the US. He orchestrated several counter-campaigns around anti-Irish press in the US at the time, aided commercial regulations between the US and the Free State, advised the Free State on applicable US economic infrastructure practices,

provided input on US implementation of immigration quotas, and was notable for his popularity as a speaker and a diplomat. Smiddy was also instrumental in litigating a US court case regarding the rights of the Free State to Dáil loans and, although he lost the case, Smiddy prevented anti-Treaty acquisition of the funds, which would have prolonged the civil war. However, Smiddy's greatest success was in bolstering American belief in Irish self-governance, as the US became the first state with which Ireland established independent foreign relations, representing a 'disintegration' of British control.

Chapters Five and Six outline Smiddy's limited success as high commissioner in London and later as a member of the Tariff Commission. Smiddy did not consider himself capable of success in London comparable to his success in the US. Subsequently, he had great difficulty making inroads with London high society and was frustrated by the changes taking place in the style of diplomacy post World War One, wherein governments became more inclined to deal with one another directly rather than with diplomats.

In his subsequent employment with the Irish Tariff Commission, Smiddy was a great advocate for the development of rural Ireland, and was considered unusually pragmatic and politically neutral for his time. However, the Tax Commission was undermined by the need for protectionist policy in the 1930s, so Smiddy was unable to influence policy to a lasting degree.

From 1932 to 1945, as described in Chapter Seven, Smiddy was an unofficial economic advisor to Éamon de Valera. As he did throughout his career, Smiddy strongly advocated for the diversification of agriculture and support for education in Ireland to increase economic productivity. While Smiddy's influence over agricultural policy was limited, the author evidences a significant volume of written advice supplied to de Valera by Smiddy during his time as unofficial advisor. Specifically, Smiddy was consulted on issues of funding social investment and stimulating native industry, to which Smiddy advised a measured protectionist policy. He identified areas of import substitution and emphasised the need to fund social investment from existing revenue rather than borrowing from external sources. Smiddy also prepared over 200 pages of memoranda for de Valera regarding monetary policy, and this advice was unique due to Smiddy's international experience.

In addition to his capacity as advisor to de Valera, Smiddy was a contributor to the shaping of monetary and banking policy in several ways, as noted in Chapter Eight. He was chair of the Fiscal Inquiry

Commission of 1923. He was also one of eight members of the Currency Commission, which ultimately decided to create the Irish pound and maintain it at parity with the English pound. Furthermore, at the creation of Irish Central Bank in 1942, Smiddy was appointed one of its two service directors, a position he held up until the age of eighty-one. Smiddy had been advising de Valera about the creation of the Central Bank as early as 1932, sending a series of memoranda notable for their succinctness, international perspective and practical awareness of Ireland's economic context. While Smiddy's economic proposals were ultimately limited by de Valera's reliance on 'departmental experts,' he can be said to have had significant influence on economic policy at the time, and is referred to by a source cited by the author as a 'forgotten economist' of his time.

Chapter Nine discusses Smiddy's contributions as chairman of the Commission of Inquiry into Irish Agriculture. Consistent with the concern he expressed for education and low agricultural productivity for much of his career, Smiddy investigated education and research, costs, credit facilities, and production and marketing issues. In pursuit of this research, Smiddy visited many types of farmers in the six Munster counties. In letters to his daughter Pearl, he recalls, 'I was twice out at fairs at 5 am talking to famers until 12 pm'. This, among other anecdotes, reflects his enthusiasm for the project. In 1943 Smiddy was again selected to chair the Commission to Inquire into the Agricultural Industry in the post-war context. For this commission Smiddy did mostly theoretical work, publishing a 220-page final report several weeks after he retired from the civil service. While Smiddy's policy analysis was unfortunately not implemented, a political consensus was reached between the government and the opposition on the objectives of Irish agricultural policy. As in the author's other discussions of Smiddy's legacy, she concludes that his advice on agriculture was expert and practical rather than partisan, and that his analysis 'fed into the institutional memory and may have helped shape policy direction in the post-de Valera years'.

The final chapter of Smiddy's biography outlines his continued enthusiasm and contribution to Ireland's economy. While he was obliged to retire from the civil service in 1940, aged sixty-five, he continued in his capacity as unofficial advisor to de Valera. Smiddy also became chairman of the board of Arklow Pottery in 1947, which flourished under his chairmanship through his eighties. Smiddy eventually retired in 1959 after a varied sixty-year career and died on 9 February 1962.

In the epilogue the author considers the endurance of Smiddy's legacy as a civil servant. She concludes that his institutional contributions at UCC and his relationship building with the US during a key period in Free State development are areas where he may have had lasting influence. While Sagarra notes that his economic and agricultural policy recommendations were not implemented during his lifetime, they may be viewed as a success in their contribution to the 'institutional memory' of the Irish public service, and would appear in later policy developments. Overall, *Envoy Extraordinary* is the compelling narrative of an eccentric and formidable individual who not only lived in remarkable times but made remarkable contributions to the same.

Jeanne Magnetti