

## U.S. BREXIT DILEMMA: BELFAST TREATY

When asked why Americans know little about Britain's plan to leave Europe's economic union (EU), I usually explain there is none. The UK was sold fear and imperial nostalgia the way Goebbels sold the Third Reich. The **Wall Street Journal**, depicts a grim period of economic challenge if not economic decline for the "Sceptered Isle." If England's plight is difficult, Ireland's could be disastrous. As if BREXIT implications weren't enough, the 1998 Belfast Treaty or Good Friday accord which ended the armed conflict is in peril. Both nations may be calling on America for help but for different reasons.

The island of Ireland is home to Europe's most enduring monument to religious hatred, a border carved by British bayonets and anti-Catholic bigotry. It separates six counties from the Irish Republic's 26 counties. Britain's Conservatives have ignored key obligations of the Belfast Treaty which has strained relations. BREXIT talks between the EU's Michel Barnier and Britain's David Davis ended recently with the EU annoyed the UK delegation was not prepared to address Ireland's trade/border issues.

Unfortunately an election forced the Conservatives to hurriedly conclude a Confidence and Supply Parliamentary pact to secure the 10 votes of Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). The DUP has a unique history of Catholic persecution and refuses to be accountable for loyalist collaboration with security forces in the murders of hundreds of Catholics. The pact with the DUP clearly contradicts both the spirit and letter of the Belfast Treaty. British PM May assured Leo Varadkar, the Irish leader, that the Conservative-DUP pact "...should not in any way impact on the Belfast Treaty."

Surely he realizes that England has prepared legislation to grant amnesty to all British soldiers involved in killings in NI and to scrap the European Convention of Human Rights! Both would contravene the powers of the NI Assembly. Britain's failure to fulfill the legacy provisions of the Good Friday agreement is egregious. Some victims in the North have waited as long as 46 years for an inquest into their loved ones death. This from a nation claiming to respect the rule of law!!

The UK's BREXIT Trade Representative, Liam Fox, has played his own part ignoring the Treaty's legacy provisions. As Minister of Defense, he denied Ireland's request for full disclosure of the British Army role in the deadliest day of the 30 year conflict; the no warning bombings of Dublin and Monaghan Towns. With typical British hubris he recently promoted U. S. support for a post-BREXIT trade deal in Wall Street Journal by citing British and American shared values of democracy and the rule of law. Undermining the N. Ireland Assembly and ignoring Belfast Treaty obligations are hardly ways for the British to secure a favorable trade deal with America!

The EU is Ireland's first defense against the effects of BREXIT but with 27 member nations consensus may be difficult however sympathetic the circumstances. Enter President Trump by his own admission a great negotiator. He has assured the British Prime Minister of "a great" trade deal to aid the UK's exit from the EU. But a good trade deal with one ally should not be at the expense of another. That's the dilemma. Can the President give a favorable trade deal to England that ignores the Belfast Treaty violations or BREXIT's damage to Ireland's economy? Here's a thought. The President and Congress just added sanctions on Iran for "...default of the spirit of the Iran nuclear accord." Similarly, the U. S. could cite the UK violations of the Belfast Treaty and threats to Ireland's economy, and stipulate contingent requirements of relief before approving any US-UK trade deals. Isn't that what America's values and good negotiating are all about?

### Michael J. Cummings

*Michael J. Cummings, a native of Springfield, Mass., is a graduate of St. Anselm's College (B. A., 1968) and New York University (M. P. A., 1970) and a former member of the National Boards of the Irish American Unity Conference (1996-2013), the Ancient Order of Hibernians (2001-2008), and the Irish Northern Aid Committee (1988-1996). He served six National AOH Presidents, 5 IAUC National Presidents and two National Chairmen of INA primarily in public relations capacities. He is the only person to serve on the national policy making bodies of all three major Irish American organizations. He also served on the Commission on Peace and Justice of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany. He served 36 years with the State of New York including as Assistant Deputy Comptroller.*

*Cummings has appeared on American, English and Irish television and radio and his commentary and letters and those of the Presidents have appeared in major American, Irish-American, and Catholic print media. He is a frequent columnist for the weekly IRISH ECHO newspaper*