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POLITICAL ROLES OF IRISH AMERICAN COMMUNITY: A MODERN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

1. Character and fields of activeness of the Irish Americans

"The Irish were the first heavy migration of non-WASP settlers who seized upon politics as means of making living (...) They did not have the education to go into business at any high level, and they did not have the capital to become farmers (...) The only legitimate route open to them was politics".[1]

The above words were said by George E. Reedy, the author of an interesting study on the contribution to the American politics made by the newcomers from Ireland, Catholics in their majority, and their descendants. These words sum up the importance of describing the political roles played by the Irish immigrant community in the USA. This is particularly noticeable when the massive scale of Irish immigration to the United States of America is combined with the democratic system of government in that statehood and the evolution of its importance in the world.

G.E. Reedy has good reasons to focus his attention on the year 1845 as a starting point of massive Irish immigration to the United States. That was the beginning of the most tragic five years in the history of Ireland caused by the Great Famine. Its direct cause was the potato disease which particularly affected the poor peasant population. At that time Ireland was a British province and was restricted to the potato monoculture in farming, which was the basic, besides the maize, staple food for the majority of its inhabitants. The results of the potato disease were tragic. "It was estimated that in 1845–1851 at least 800,000 Irish people (10 procent of the population) died as a result of hunger and diseases".[2] This is an assessment made by a Polish contemporary

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[1] G.E. Reedy, *From the Ward to the White House: The Irish in American Politics*, Scribner, New York 1991, p. 12.

[2] M. Kula, *Irlandzka wizja ojczyzny*, "Przegląd Polonijny" 1988, part I, XIV, f. 4, p. 36. Almost twice as high number of the people who died of hunger or resulting from it diseases is given by S. Grzybowski, *His-*

historian, Marcin Kula. The painful consequence of the calamity was the emigration of the Irish people. Its scale, unheard of in the history of Ireland but also of other European countries, enhanced the already existing Irish people's reputation as a nation of emigrants. However, the data concerning the general number of the people who left Ireland between the mid-19th century and the 1920s is not precise and range from ca 3.6 to 5 million people.[3] It is thus not surprising that the Great Famine has become a frequent reference point for the students of modern history of Ireland (both before and after the famine) dealing with its demographic, economic, religious and, of course, political aspects.[4] This also concerns the phenomenon of emigration from Ireland. Besides Great Britain and the USA the Irish people also looked for a chance of a better life in Australia, Canada, Argentina and New Zealand in particular.

The consecutive generations of Irish immigrants formed the most politically active ethnic group in the multicultural American society. In the mid-19th and early 20th century this activeness had at least three forms.

The curiosity about American organisations and political institutions was quickly transformed into active participation in these structures. The stage of learning and adapting to the requirements of the structures just as quickly evolved into the phase of frequent and actual influence on their functioning. In particular, this meant controlling by the prominent representatives of the immigrants the process of the struggle for power in the large cities of the east coast. The struggle was conducted by the urban political machines of the two leading American parties and was usually won by the Democrats, ethnically dominated by the Irish.[5]

The activeness at the urban stage was, naturally, connected with the trade union movement. The influence of the Irish immigrants on its development cannot be overestimated. The trade unions became a platform for defending the interests of the Catholic workers doing the least attractive and hardest jobs, especially miners, road, bridge, and canal builders. Let us quote only two facts. It is estimated that out of more than 500 main trade union leaders active in the USA between the 1830s and 1970s

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toria Irlandii, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1977, p. 291. See also a monograph on the Great Famine: C. Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger: Ireland, 1845–1849*, H. Hamilton, New York 1962.

[3] Compare: K.A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*, Oxford University Press, Oxford–New York 1988, p. 349 and *passim*; P. Clancy, *Continuity and Change in Irish Demographic Patterns* [in:] P. Clancy, M. Kelly, J. Wiatr, R. Żółtaniecki (eds.), *Ireland and Poland: Comparative Perspectives*, Department of Sociology, University College Dublin, Dublin 1992, p. 159.

[4] Compare: W.F. Adams, *Ireland and Irish Emigration to the New World from 1815 to the Famine*, Genealogical Publishing Co., Baltimore 1980; S.J. Connolly, *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland, 1780––1845*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 1982; F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1981; O. Macdonagh, *The Irish Famine Emigration to the United States*, "Perspectives in American History" 1976, vol. X; A. Schrier, *Ireland and the American Emigration, 1850–1900*, Russell & Russell, New York 1970; G. O'Tuathaigh, *Ireland before the Famine, 1798–1848*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 2003.

[5] Compare: B.A. Brownell, W.E. Stickle (eds.), *Bosses and Reformers*, Urban Politics in America, 1880––1920, Houghton Mifflin, Boston 1973; A. Connable, E. Silberfarb, *Tigers of Tammany*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York 1967; S.P. Erie, *Rainbow's End: Irish-Americans and the Dilemmas of Urban Machine Politics, 1840–1985*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1988; E.M. Levine, *The Irish and Irish Politicians: A Study of Cultural and Social Alienation*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1966; F.S. Robinson, *Machine Politics. A Study of Albany's O'Connells*, Transaction Books, New Brunswick 1977.

the Americans of Irish origin made up 1/5.[6] Since 1952 the leader of the largest and oldest federation of trade unions – the American Federation of Labour (AFL) was George Meany, an Irishman by origin.[7] When the AFL and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) merged in 1955, Meany was elected head of this new organisation and was reelected after that without opposition. He kept his post until 1979.[8]

It should be also mentioned that until 1921 Ireland, from which the immigrants came, was not a sovereign country. Thus they offered constant political, financial and military support to the independence organisations in Ireland and the USA. They had a considerable influence on the direction and methods of political emancipation of their country of origin. This was noticeable both in their influence on the political institutions in America and on individual politicians, including the presidents and congressmen as well as in the number and sizes of political organisations with ethnical origins created at their initiative.[9]

The increasing politicisation of the Irish immigrants and their descendants, began in the mid-19th and continued in the 20th century, inspired similar ambitions in other groups settling in the USA, especially the Germans and the Slavs. I understand *politicisation* here as a process of *conscious, intentional and increasingly influential gaining by a given group of immigrants the rank of a subject of broadly understood politics concerning both the country of residence and of origin.* What is meant here is the activeness conducted within the institutions of political government and socio-political organisations functioning in the country of residence, but organisations of two kinds. The first kind inspired the immigrant population to work at various levels of the local system of power, the other kind directly promoted the country of origin or tried to interest influential people, institutions and political organisations in the country of residence in the situation of the country of origin.

The results of the realisation of the above-mentioned political ambitions demonstrated by the immigrants from other countries than Ireland were always smaller than those achieved by the Irish ones. This is not surprising as the Irish immigration has set an unbreakable record in the demographic-cultural sphere. The data, however, are imprecise and varied. It is usually assumed that no less than 38 and no more than 44 million of the US citizens claim to be of Irish origin. In ethnical terms it means that they are the second largest, after the Americans of German origin, ethnic group in the USA.[10] However, it should not be forgotten that today not more than

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[6] D. Montgomery, *The Irish and the American Labor Movement* [in:] D.N. Doyle, O.D. Edwards (eds.), *America and Ireland, 1776–1976: The American Identity and the Irish Connection*, Greenwood Press, Westport 1980, p. 205.

[7] W.V. Shannon, *The American Irish: A Political and Social Portrait*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst 1989, p. 140.

[8] http://www.answers.com/topic/george-meany (date of entry: July 17th, 2010).

[9] Compare: W. D'Arcy, *The Fenian Movement in the United States, 1858–1886*, Russell & Russell, New York 1971; T.N. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism, 1870–1890*, Lippincott, Philadelphia 1966; Ch.C. Tansill, *America and the Fight for Irish Freedom, 1886–1922*, Devin-Adair Co., New York 1957.

[10] W.J. Clinton, *Remarks at the American Ireland Fund Dinner – Weekly Complication of Presidential Documents*, March 22, 1993, p. 440–441. Compare also: M. Hout, J.R. Goldstein, *How 4,5 Million Irish Im-*

6 million of people inhabit both parts of the Irish Island[11] and there are ca 90 million German-speaking people in Europe. The population of immigrants and their descendants which is approximately seven times larger as that living in the country of origin is unparalleled by any migrating European nation. Perhaps Armenians may be mentioned as another example of partly similar scale. However it is still much less comparing to the people of Irish descent and refers to the people of Armenian descent worldwide and not only in the USA.[12] For that reason the dispute as to who in the United States may be considered as a person of Irish origin is valid also today.

The fact that this dispute is taking place is certainly an argument supporting the sceptics who doubt in the physical possibility of existence of such an incredible multiplicity. It is, however, possible to question its scope but not the fact that it exists at all.[13] It has been proved by the successive censuses.

Speaking about political involvement as a "making living" began by the Irish immigrants and continued by their descendants makes sense if we refer to two basic criteria. The first one is the number of the participants in the above-mentioned process of politicisation (*quantitative criterion*) and the second one, its forms and results (*qualitative criterion*).

The interrelations between the two criteria can be the best illustrated by presenting the process of politicisation of the Irish ethnic group in space and time.

The Irish settlers belong to so-called "old immigration". This is a conventional notion but often mentioned by the sociologists due to its usefulness. This group of immigrants also comprises the English and German settlers.[14]

The emigration from Ireland was the most intensive in 1840–1880. This perceptibly influences the research preferences of the English-speaking specialists in social sciences dealing with this migration. The comparative historical-sociological analysis at the background of the second half of the 19th century has the greatest number of students. As a result the historical character of the Irish community in the USA and similarly perceived process of its politicisation are often the starting point for the discussion on the shape of this process in the 20th century. This was particularly evident after 1921, i.e., the time when the main part of the area of Ireland, composed

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migrants became 40 Million Irish Americans: Demographic and Subjective Aspects of the Ethnic Composition of White Americans, "American Sociological Review", February 1994; W. Issel, *Social Change in the United State, 1945–1983*, Schocken Books, New York 1985, p. 9.

[11] http://eturystyka.org/content/category/83/47/ (date of entry: July 17th, 2010).

[12] http://www.armeniadiaspora.com/population.html (date of entry: July 18th, 2010).

[13] According to Ms Kieran Clifford from the Washington Bureau of the Sinn Féin Party – an organisation considered for many years as a political attachment to the Irish Republican Army (IRA) such a large number of people of Irish origin may result from the common view that it is enough to have 1/8th of Irish blood to be considered as an American of Irish origin. The author talked to Ms Clifford on July 14th, 1995, in the seat of the Bureau.

[14] Compare: T.J. Archdeacon, *Becoming American: An Ethnic History*, Free Press, Collier Macmillan, New York–London 1983, p. 27–56; P. San Juan Cafferty, B. Chiswick, A.M. Greeley, T.A. Sullivan, *The Dilemma of American Immigration: Beyond the Golden Door*, Transaction Books, New Brunswick 1983, p. 65–68; A. Hrdlička, *The Old Americans: A Physiological Profile*, Arno Press, New York 1970, p. 1, 4–5, 8 and further.

of 26 southern counties, gained the status of a British dominium.[15] At that very time the Irish Americans (IA) participating in the American political life began to change their motivation, ambitions, message and forms used to spread it.

Firstly, the fact that Ireland became a dominion considerably decreased the scope and size of influence of the anti-British nationalistic orientation among the IA. Those who adhered to it did not change only the rhetoric they used. This was often noticeable when the conflict in Northern Ireland began, i.e., from the late 1960s although not only then. Secondly, there was a gradual decrease in the IA's involvement in the activities of the party machines in large cities. This was mainly caused by the increased affluence of this ethnic group, which resulted in its growing ambition to make their mark at the highest levels of power, especially in both chambers of the Congress and in the presidential elections. The representatives of the Irish community were gradually replaced at various levels of political battle for the cities by the immigrants from Italy and the Slavs.[16] The latter fact was not only due to the change of the IA's political preferences. As they became more and more affluent they gradually moved away, according to the local custom, from the centres of large cities and settled in their close neighbourhood. There began to form agglomerations inhabited by those who were financially successful and originated from various groups of former immigrants. This process, called suburbanisation, played an important part in abandoning the old and shaping new political ambitions of the Irish ethnic group, visible also in other, similar communities in the USA.[17] The Anglo-Saxons discovered it earlier and the Slavs, slightly later. The new kind of the IA's political ambitions was also caused by two social processes, usually difficult to reconcile, which the immigrants undergo: assimilation and cultural pluralism. On the one hand they were more susceptible to the former process than other immigrants coming to the USA as they had contact with the English language earlier on. Thanks to this it was easier for them to understand the American legal system and gave them the possibility to act in many spheres. It should be remembered that language and law are the basic factors facilitating assimilation.[18] On the other hand the activeness and domination of the IA in the sphere of culture, especially religion and the customs connected with it such as, e.g.,

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[15] Compare: D. Keogh, *Twentieth-Century Ireland: Nation and State*, Gill & Macmillan, Dublin 1994, p. 2 and further; W. Konarski, *System konstytucyjny Irlandii*, Wyd. Sejmowe, Warszawa 2005, p. 16 and further; J.A. Murphy, *Ireland in the Twentieth Century*, Gill & Macmillan, Dublin 1981, p. 36.

[16] Compare: P.A. Bean, *The Irish, the Italians and Machine Politics: A Case Study. Utica, New York, 1870–1960*, "Journal of Urban History", February 1994; G.E. Reedy, *From the Ward...*, p. 147–148.

[17] M.D. Winsberg, *The Suburbanization of the Irish in Boston, Chicago and New York*, "Éire Ireland. A Journal of Irish Studies", Fall 1986. See also: M.C. Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*, University of California Press, Los Angeles 1990, p. 5. The phenomenon of suburbanisation with respect to other than the Irish ethnic group was discussed by Barbara Ferman during her lecture for the participants of the Summer Institute of American Political System delivered at the Temple University Conference Centre in Sugarloaf by Philadelphia on August 4th, 1995.

[18] This was stressed by professor John Kingdon from the University of Michigan at his lecture delivered for the participants of the Summer Institute mentioned above held at the American University in Washington, DC on July 6th, 1995.

St. Patrick's parades, and also in the professional sphere (the Irish immigrants were policemen and firemen) were unquestionable.[19]

The entry of this community to the world of politics did not threaten the coherence of the state in which it lived. It only revealed the level of politicisation of this ethnic group at the background of the other ones and as a result specified the content and meaning of political values important for its ethnic identity.

This politicised identity was also expressed by the attitudes and behaviours of other ethnic groups making up the American society and this is where we have to do with the political dimension of the cultural pluralism. It should be, however, remembered that it was the Irish immigrants to the United States who created the model of politicisation of an ethnic group in the 19th century. In the 20th century it was continued by the Americans of Irish origin who intentionally and comprehensively manifested their politicised ethnicity, which has been a source of inspiration of other ethnic communities, however, with varying results.

2. Political roles of Irish Americans in the second half of the 19th century

Most of the modern students of the process of politicisation of the Irish immigrants in the second half of the 19th century have no problems in defining the basic platform at which the phenomenon occurred. George E. Reedy said that the majority of the Irish people came to the USA "(…) in search of freedom or of the right to practice their own religion or to take advantage of economic opportunities for which they *were* already prepared". That is why he concludes: "The Irish (…) came here because they wanted a square meal".[20] And they could earn it only in the cities, first on the east coast, such as New York, Boston or Baltimore, and later on also in the Midwest (mid-north), especially in Chicago. The influx of the poor Irish population gradually changed these towns into metropolises where the predominant population were workers. For the political parties this created unheard of possibilities of increasing their electorate and gaining political power in towns. This began a several ten year long period of domination of Irish immigrants and their descendants in the political party machines, which gave them control of the cities, especially within the Democratic Party. It should be remembered that the majority of Irish immigrants believed that this party represented their interests but, as the most of the researchers believe, directly due to the economic and social status of that group and not for ideological

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[19] The tradition of St. Patrick's parades dates back to 1737. See: J.D. Crimmins, *St. Patrick's Day: Its Celebretion in New York and other American Places, 1737–1845*, The author, New York 1902. In the late 19th century the policemen and firemen in the majority of big American towns were mainly Americans of Irish origin. Compare: T. Sowell, *Ethnic America: A History*, Basic Bools, New York 1981, p. 31; E.M. Levine, *The Irish and Irish Politicians…*, p. 120–125.

[20] For both quotations see: G.E. Reedy, *From the Ward…*, p. 12.

reasons. This is confirmed by G.E. Reedy again who said that Irish politicians in the cities did not deal with "(...) the so-called substantive issues but a lot about the plight of people who were hard up".[21] If this is combined with the traditional (and exaggerated in fact) depreciation of the role of ideology in the functioning of the American party system, it is clearly visible that the motive force of the urban machines were mainly economic interests rather than the ideological ones. This is succinctly stated by Daniel J. Boorstin, who says: "The political machine meant politics deprived of ideology".[22]

Also other authors, specialists in studies on that community, believe that concentration on the activities of urban machines of the Democratic Party was characteristic for the immigrants from Ireland. This belief was expressed by Andrew M. Greeley, Lawrence McCaffrey, and William Shannon.[23] Their opinions are supported by the existence of a close relation between the outlays, i.e., starting the political game, and effects, understood as gaining control over the cities. Such behavioural interpretation of the immigrants' participation in politics seems attractive as it confirms some of the hypotheses, but it is only the one, too much exploited, side of the coin. The process of immigrants' politicisation seems to be more complex as they came from a non-sovereign territory. Moreover, their mass arrival to America resulted, along with the formation of political organisations, in xenophobic attitudes of the Protestant Americans. For that reason the immigrants' anti-British nationalism could not disappear in the new environment; on the contrary, it underwent petrifaction. This was helped by the various forms of nativism, i.e., ethnically determined political xenophobia of the Americans of Anglo-Saxon origin towards the new arrivals.[24] It is thus not surprising that one of the basic lines of defence of ethnic identity of the Irish immigrants had to be their nationalism directly resulting from their Catholicism. This was a Catholicism of unwanted immigrants, and it was the more important as it helped to suffer the bitter beginnings in the new, strange and reluctant environment. And, for that very reason, it was reassuring, integrative, and, as a result, had a socially conservative influence. This was often used by the party machines in the cities.[25] The political traditions based on the Catholic values and derived from Ireland were confronted with the American realities of the 19th century by Thomas N. Brown. He distinguished two

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[21] *Ibidem*. See also: A.M. Greeley, *The American Achievement: A Report from Great Ireland* [in:] D.N. Doyle, O.D. Edwards (eds.), *America and Ireland, 1776–1976...*, p. 236, but he also mentions the Irish independence revolts, which underlined the importance of the nationalistic doctrine.

[22] D.J. Boorstin, *Amerykanie: fenomen demokracji*, tłum. J. Kozak, Bellona, Warszawa 1995 (Polish edition of the book originally issued in 1973 an titled: *The Americans: The Democratic Experience*), p. 260.

[23] Compare: A.M. Greeley, *The American Achievement...*, p. 235–236; L.J. McCaffrey, *Textures of Irish America*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse 1992, p. 89–102; W.V. Shannon, *The American Irish...*, p. 60––67 and further.

[24] Compare: T.J. Archdeacon, *Becoming American...*, p. 57–84; D.T. Knobel, *Paddy and the Republic: Ethnicity and Nationality in Antebellum America*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown 1988, *passim*; L.J. McCaffrey, *The Irish Diaspora in America*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1976, p. 85–106; I. Rusinowa, *Z dziejów amerykańskich partii politycznych*, Egross, Warszawa 1994, p. 67–71 and *passim*.

[25] G.C. Kinloch, *Irish – American Politics: Protestant and Catholic* [in:] J.S. Roucek, B. Eisenberg (eds.), *America's Ethnic Politics*, Greenwood Press, Westport 1982; L.J. McCaffrey, *Textures of Irish...*, *passim*.

main attitudes in the Irish political tradition, which influenced the Irish community in the USA: *the rebels* and *Irish-American politicians*.[26] The former, chronologically earlier, as it went back to the American War of Independence, was closely connected with the activities, especially military ones, towards the independence of Ireland. The *rebel* acted according to the ideological criteria, that is, as Brown believes, nationalism with anti-British overtones. A person like that oriented his activities mostly towards Ireland, was radical in his ideas and actions. The situation was opposite in the *Irish American politician*. He focused on gathering support of the voters in order to gain and keep the power in the city-metropolis and at the same time protect the existing social order. As a result the *politician* is conservative, but able to make compromises should the need arise. Even though he stresses the rebel tradition, Brown agrees that the urban machines were the main platforms of politicisation of the Irish immigrants in the USA. His view, however, seems to be too categorical. On the one hand it connects the *rebels* only with Ireland and on the other one, it does not create a category of politicians from Ireland, which would be useful for making comparisons. It should be remembered that the leading organisations fighting for independence, not necessarily using the military means, had their equivalents in the USA or even were formed there.[27] In turn, the politicians who mainly worked towards political emancipation of Ireland within the existing British Empire, were in constant touch both with Irish nationalistic organisations in the USA and with the *Irish American politicians*. Charles Stewart Parnell, the leader of the Irish faction in the British House of Commons, which demanded that Ireland was granted the Home Rule within the United Kingdom, to a great extent owed his power and standing to the support from the other side of the Atlantic.[28] The huge propaganda success of his visit in the USA in 1880 was achieved thanks to the nationalistic milieus in America and also those connected with the urban machines.

Not aiming at depreciating Brown's ideas it should be said that the then politicisation of the Irish immigrants only apparently helped to determine the areas where it occurred. On the one hand both notions overlapped, at least until the time when Ireland gained the status of a British dominium. On the other one, the particular importance of the Irish independence organisations in the USA lay in the fact that they reflected the power of the nationalistic ideology which motivated the immigrants to get involved in current political activities. Thus they underlined their determination to overtake the urban machines.

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[26] T.N. Brown, *The Political Irish: Politicians and Rebels* [in:] D.N. Doyle, O.D. Edwards (eds.), *America and Ireland, 1776–1976...*, p. 134 and further.

[27] Compare: J.B. Bell, *The Secret Army. A History of the I.R.A., 1916–1970*, Sphere, London 1972, p. 18; W. Konarski, *Nieprzejednani. Rzecz o Irlandzkiej Armii Republikańskiej*, Agencja Wydawnicza Tor, Warszawa 1991, p. 13 and further. Such view was also expressed in a conversation with the author by Sean Cronin, an American correspondent of the leading Irish journal "The Irish Times" and the chief of staff of the IRA in 1958–1960. The meeting with Cronin took place on July 27th, 1995, in Washington.

[28] Compare: G. Bidwell, *Niekoronowany król Irlandii: Życiorys Karola Stewarta Parnella*, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1975, p. 133 and further; T.N. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism...*, *passim*.

The increased power of the latter was not only the outcome of the immigrants' political ambitions fostered by their socio-economic deprivation. Their determination to appear at the political stage was also connected with the inferiority complex "imported" from Ireland. This complex was first created and developed by the English and then maintained by the Anglo-Saxon nativist movement in the USA. As a result the politicisation of the above complex became the immigrants' nationalism which occurred in two forms. Those, who cultivated their earlier anti-British nationalism could keep doing so also in America. Those, who, aspiring to the *square meal*, were ready to resign both from their anti-Britishness and fears of the new environment, could not do so because of the aggressive nativism of the earlier arrivals. In terms of the doctrine it spurred the immigrants to participate in shaping the political outlook of the large towns. Taking power away from the Yankees, as the Anglo-Saxon Protestants were called, was thus motivated not only by the values connected with the current financial status, inferior for the majority of the immigrants. So, what cemented the Irish ideologically was not only the anti-British nationalism.[29] It was also *anti-Anglo-Saxon ethno-nationalism*. It should be acknowledged, however, that its motive force became gradually weaker from the moment when the immigrants gained control over large cities. Maintaining this control was no longer a means of proving their value and possibilities to the world. More and more often it became a goal in itself, attractive and worth maintaining even at a price of a big effort. Despite that the bosses of party machines were linked with the anti-British nationalists by a shared element of the outlook on life, i.e., Catholicism. It was stressed, in connection with own purposes, by both sides. For that very reason it had to have a political character. This made cooperation of the two orientations possible, and the benefit, in the more distant or closer perspective, went to Ireland itself. Even if the bosses appreciated mainly the mobilising value of the myth created in the country of origin and measured by the results of the elections, then the nationalists, extreme in their adoration of it, forgot that time does not stand still. Indeed, for them Ireland, remembered from the times before the Great Famine, was a mythical and not real entity.[30]

3. Irish Americans during the period of Ireland's partition since 1921

The remark about the political character of the Irish immigrants' Catholicism has a supra-epochal and cross-generational dimension. It has been said that Catholicism was the main component of the ethno-cultural identity of the majority first of the

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[29] For L.J. McCaffrey "(...) much of Irish-American nationalism was more a search for respectability in the United States and a hatred for England than a love of Ireland". By these words he refers to the opinion of judge Daniel F. Cohalan, one of the IA leaders in the 1920's. See: L.J. McCaffrey, *The Irish Diaspora*..., p. 137. He also does not see the connection between nationalism and the struggle for power in the cities.

[30] J.A. Murphy, *The Influence of America on Irish Nationalism* [in:] D.N. Doyle, O.D. Edwards (eds.), *America and Ireland, 1776–1976*..., p. 113.

emigrants from Ireland and then the Irish Americans. The pronounced decrease of the number of people emigrating from Ireland to the USA in the early 1920s did not result in any negative consequences concerning the number of believers in that religion within the Irish ethnic group. Indeed, it is rather an ethnic group than only immigrants although the emigration from Ireland has never stopped completely.[31] As it has been noted above, the loyalty of this group to the country of residence is unquestionable. However, its politicisation was still there, as a continuation of the process began in the 19th century. However, caused by higher aspirations, it took place at different levels.

Thus there arises a pertinent question: can it be claimed that it is still taking place and on what grounds? From the early 1922 more than ¾ of the area of the Isle of Ireland had a status of a sovereign state, under the name of Irish Free State, a British Dominion of Ireland.[32] Owing to ¼ of the island's area which is still a British province, Northern Ireland, the anti-British nationalism still exists. However, it is not as dynamic as it used to be. The answer to the above question seems to be quite easy if we combine the cross-generational dimension of Catholicism with its role of a foundation for the world-view for the two above-presented platforms of politicisation of the immigrants and their descendants.[33] It cannot be neglected also with respect to the trade unions.

Paradoxically, till 1921 when Ireland gained sovereignty, it was easier to realise the integrative function of Catholicism among the immigrants. This was caused especially by the lack of free homeland and the syndrome of unwanted newcomers, mentioned above. This increased the inferiority complex but resulted in activeness and not apathy, especially in politics but also in other fields.

After 1921 there suddenly appeared a European point of reference, i.e., the Irish state, and the former unwanted immigrants proved to be people capable of success in the world of finance, science, and culture. However, even though they still ruled in towns, they did not get rid of their inferiority complex, visible especially in politics, however not only there.

The political power elite at the highest level remained outside the reach of the American Catholics of Irish origin. In order to get there one had to choose the opportunistic or the ambitious way: either join the political game without revealing one's denomination or do the opposite and be prepared for many bitter defeats. The second solution identified the prospective (if distant) success with getting rid of the complex. Already in the 1920s for many Irish Americans the greatest success meant only one: a Catholic from their group winning the US presidency. From the very beginning

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[31] As a result of the decrease of the scale of Irish immigration to the USA it was treated, i.a., mainly as a historical phenomenon, see: J.P. Dolan, *Introduction*, "Journal of American Ethnic History", Fall 1990, *passim*.

[32] W. Konarski, *System konstytucyjny...*, p. 17.

[33] L.J. McCaffrey believes that Catholicism, politics and nationalism are the main elements of the ethnicity of the Irish Americans and in his opinion Catholicism is the most important. See: L.J. McCaffrey, *Textures of Irish...*, p. 47.

only the more ambitious variant was taken into consideration. Poorly prepared and conducted, it began with a false start, i.e., the failed presidential campaign of Alfred Emanuel Smith, a governor of the New York state, in 1928.[34] From then on it was evident that if the change were to come, it would be after many years of hard work as well as that the fear of the increase of the Catholics' role in politics was growing. Therefore success happened as many as 32 years later in the form of John Fitzgerald Kennedy's election as the US president.

Before it took place the Irish community in the USA persistently strove to realise its aim by participating in the structures of broadly understood political power. The expression: in the structures of power in the USA shows that the search for avenues of influence on this platform of political involvement dominated the interest of this ethnic group. In the course of time it also proved that the anti-British nationalism became a statistical margin of the political preferences of Irish Americans. There were two exceptions: the period of the 2nd World War and last three decades of the 20th century. Besides them the ideology of free, united, republican Ireland had a small although active support. This was also due to the fact that the division of Ireland into the independent South and the British province, Northern Ireland, made in 1921 with the blessing of London, for many years did not create a military conflict of a pathological character. However, this was to end. For more than 30 years from the autumn of 1968 the physical violence became predominant. The Good Friday Agreement made on April 10th, 1998, on the one hand ended the military conflict and, on the other one, regulated the legal and systemic status of Northern Ireland, which remained a British province. It should be stressed that during the next nine years there were continuous perturbations connected with creating a strong government composed of the representatives of the two communities: the Protestant and the Catholic one. It was announced ultimately to be formed on March 26th, 2007 and began to act on May 8, the same year.[35]

The Irish community was not indifferent to the conflict in Northern Ireland. More precisely, its interest in the course of the conflict had an unprecedented scale in comparison to the 70 years before its outbreak. It became a widespread practice to organise collections for the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and other organisations involved in military and political defence of the Catholics in Northern Ireland. It also became important to create groups and associations denouncing the British policy with respect to that province and trying to influence the US government in this matter or to give the annual parades on St. Patrick's Day a clearly nationalistic and anti-British tone.[36]

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[34] W.V. Shannon, *The American Irish*..., p. 175 and further.

[35] On the conflict's beginning, evolution and political & governmental aftermath see: W. Konarski, *Irlandia Północna: rodowód i ewolucja stosunków międzyetnicznych oraz ustroju politycznego* [in]: H. Szczerbiński (ed.), *Problemy narodowościowe w Europie i ich wpływ na stosunki międzynarodowe na przełomie XX i XXI wieku*, Wydawnictwo WSCiL, Warszawa 2009. On the government as above see also "The Irish Times", March 10 & May 9, 2007.

[36] See J. Adams, *The Financing of Terror: How the Groups That Are Terrorizing the World Get the Money to Do It*, Simon and Schuster, New York 1986, *passim*.

The larger than before revitalisation of the nationalistic attitudes among the Irish Americans was caused not only by the acceleration of conflict in Northern Ireland. Its sources are directly connected first with the election and then death of president John Fitzgerald Kennedy in November 1963 and assassination of his brother, Robert, in June 1968.[37] This connection, surprising at the first glance, is not difficult to explain. The times when J.F Kennedy was a president still are for many Americans a symbol of freshness, positive change and dynamics in politics and for the Irish Americans a proof of their growing status in comparison to the other ethnic groups which compose the US society. J.F. Kennedy – an American of Irish origin and the first president – a Catholic – was for the majority of Irish Americans a warranty of overcoming the political inferiority complex. He was also a proof that persistent work on promoting a politician identifiable with an ethnic group may give many reasons for pride. Of course there is a great deal of exaggeration in Kennedy's legend. Some people claim that being a son of Joseph Kennedy, a millionaire – and one having not a very good opinion – and a Harvard graduate, he was more Anglo-Saxon-Protestant in his image than many others who were of such origin in fact. But it was John F. Kennedy who turned out to be the peak of the political influence of the Irish population in the top circles of power. His tragic death showed that finding another such personality exceeded the possibilities of this ethnic group. The short term phenomenon of Robert Kennedy does not contradict this claim. He was an almost certain winner of the 1968 elections, largely basing his chances for success on his deceased brother's charisma. Had he become president it would not have had any greater influence on shaping new areas of politicisation of the Irish Americans. However, it would be an attempt at getting closer to the level reached as a result of the election of John Fitzgerald, once again increasing the psychological comfort of the Americans with Irish roots. However, soon after Robert's assassination people did not think in such terms. The death of another representative of the Kennedy's clan was a sad event in itself.

For many Irish Americans political participation in the structures of power in the USA lost its meaning. People abandoned their ambitions and resigned themselves to reflecting on the past, escaping to the world of sentiments. However, not everyone yielded to apathy. Let us note that Robert Kennedy was murdered in June, 1968, and physical violence in Northern Ireland began in early October of that year. Suddenly people remembered the mother country and the fact that the unfulfilled hopes of electing another Catholic of Irish origin should be realised elsewhere. It is hard to imagine a stronger motive of political activeness for an ethnic group than a conflict in the country of their origin. In the case of the Irish Americans this motive was very important. However, the determination in pursuing it would have been certainly weaker if not for the fate of the Kennedy brothers as well as the third one, Edward

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[37] The importance of the several generations of the Kennedy clan in the US politics has been discussed in many works. Compare a few of them: B. Gibson, T. Schwarz, *The Kennedys: The Third Generation*, Thunder's Mouth Press, New York 1993; D. Horowitz, P. Collier, *The Kennedys: An American Drama*, New York 1984: W. Shannon, *The American Irish...*, p. 392–438; A.F. Żmuda, *Legenda klanu Kennedych*, Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1985.

called Ted, which showed what the results are of the inability to bear the responsibility for continuing the family political tradition. John, called Jack, created it, Robert, called Bob, had a chance to maintain it and Edward... was scared.[38] Third time lucky? Edward was able to be only, or may be as much as, a senior of the Kennedy's clan and an informal leader of the representatives of the Irish community in the US Congress, often called in the press "the Irish lobby". For the malicious he was an example of lack of political courage, for the kind, an unlucky politician who missed his chance. Paradoxically, his political style became the most apt confirmation of the weakening tradition of the Irish Americans' influence on the political and systemic structures in the USA. This style was also the reason why his repeated appeals to the Irish organisations in America not to support the radical Catholic groups in Northern Ireland usually did not have any effect.[39] Edward Kennedy, who died on August 25th, 2009, had only the status of a symbol of the earlier aspirations of the Irish ethnic group, not of its decreasing political standing. What is important, on the intra-American scale, this group does not reveal any particular determination to strengthen its political identity. Similar processes are taking place among other ethnic white immigrants' communities, e.g. the Polish one.[40] Yet for many years the connections with politics were the characteristic feature of the Irish immigrants. Therefore, their nostalgia for the times of the urban party machines, struggle for influence in the Congress and finally for a victory in presidential elections has some grounds. And that is why for the majority of them the phenomenon of politicisation is now based on sentiments and for the minority, on noisy rhetoric. The above presented issues are thus closely connected with the claim that the Irish Americans were special in their interest in the broadly understood political activeness. The logical conclusion of such a view is the author's belief that the roles fulfilled by the Irish Americans in politics were richer in content and events than of the other ethnic groups making up the American society. They were richer as the numerous manifestations of their political activeness were mutually interdependent variants of the process of their politicisation in general.

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[38] See the review of his autobiography: http://politicalbiographies.suite101.com/article.cfm/true_compass_a_memoir_by_edward_m_kennedy (date of entry: July 9th, 2010).

[39] W. Konarski, *Nieprzejednani...*, p. 310.

[40] J.S. Pula, *Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community*, Twayne Publishers, New York 1995, p. 135 and *passim*.