



The Arms Crisis of 1970

On May 6th 1970, Taoiseach Jack Lynch sensationally dismissed Charles Haughey, who was then Minister for Finance, from the Cabinet. He also dismissed the Minister for Agriculture Neil Blaney.

Later that month, criminal charges were issued by the Attorney General against Charles Haughey as well as Neil Blaney, Captain James Kelly, John Kelly and Albert Luykx. They were accused of assisting a plan to illegally import arms for the IRA. (The charges against Neil Blaney were later withdrawn). All four defendants were subsequently acquitted by the jury.

What is now established beyond doubt is that the plan to import arms had the approval of the Government, including Taoiseach Jack Lynch and the Minister for Defence Jim Gibbons. The Defence Forces had organised for the arms to be stored in a monastery in Co. Cavan and they were only to be used to defend Northern Nationalists in the event of another pogrom or a doomsday situation.

At the time, the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland were being subjected to shootings and killings and were being burned out of their houses. Nationalists established Northern Defence Committees following the outbreak of the Troubles in August 1969 and came to Dublin to seek help from the Irish Government.

Charles Haughey never spoke about the Arms Trial subsequently. However, two documents were filed among his private papers following his death in 2006.

“One is a handwritten memo, dated September 1978. It clarifies the view of former Justice Department Secretary, Peter Berry, that he told then Taoiseach Jack Lynch of the arms importation plan in November 1969. Lynch always insisted he only learned of the arms plot in May 1970, when he sacked Haughey and Blaney who were subsequently charged.”

“The second document is from July 1979 based on a conversation Charles Haughey had with General Secretary Seán Mac Eoin, who had been army Chief of Staff at the time of the 1970 Arms Crisis. Mac Eoin told Haughey he had checked army records and gave details of a verbal directive given to army officers by then Defence Minister, Jim Gibbons, on February 6th, 1970.”

(John Downing, Irish Independent, October 27th 2020. <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/my-father-had-nine-lives-and-lived-life-to-the-full-sean-haughey-on-family-politics-and-the-arms-crisis-39671991.html>)

In 2020, on the 50th anniversary of the Arms Crisis, two new thoroughly researched books on this dramatic episode in Irish History were published.

- (1) The Arms Crisis of 1970 – The plot that never was – Michael Heney. (Apollo/ Head of Zeus Ltd.)
- (2) Deception and Lies – The Hidden History of the Arms Crisis 1970. (Mercer Press).

Both books challenge the conventional narrative of the Arms Crisis. They conclude that there never was a plot and that the covert plan to import arms was authorised by the Irish Government.