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The Irish Arts Center: A case study in ethnic revival

Malone, Donal John, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1988

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**THE IRISH ARTS CENTER:
A CASE STUDY IN ETHNIC REVIVAL**

by

DONAL MALONE

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York**

1988

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

THE IRISH ARTS CENTER: A CASE STUDY IN ETHNIC REVIVAL

by

Donal Malone

Advisor: Professor Stephen Steinberg

This is a case study of ethnic revival, focused on the Irish Arts Center. Founded in New York City in 1972, the Center's main purpose was to revive Irish identity in America through the arts. Although begun by a small group of activists, the Center evolved into a formidable arts organization with approximately 45 core members and a budget approaching \$200,000. At its zenith the Center sponsored a large number of free cultural programs for the general public, as well as an Off-off-Broadway theatre that received much critical acclaim. This study attempts to document the history of the Irish Arts Center, and through this case study, to assess the nature and significance of the ethnic resurgence that began in the late 1960's and, according to some analysts, reversed the tide of assimilation.

The research was initiated in 1983, and was based primarily on participant observation. This was supplemented with extensive open-ended interviews with current and past members, including several of the founders. The organization's records and publications provided further data.

For several years the Center prospered, relying on income derived from cultural activities and the efforts of members who worked as volunteers. This early success, however, proved hard to sustain, and the organization went into decline, losing the support of its members and becoming dependent on government grants.

Two sets of factors account for the Center's decline: 1) internal organizational contradictions, and 2) societal obstacles to ethnic revitalization. Specifically, the Center's insistence on operating as a communitarian democracy, and its stubborn resistance to professionalization and bureaucratization, undermined the organization's effectiveness. Eventually, it was unable to adequately support its ambitious program of activities. Aside from these internal factors, the Center's difficulty in sustaining its original idealism and activism had to do with the fact that its members were widely dispersed, and only segmentally attached to Irish culture and community. In this respect the Center stands in sharp contrast to the traditional Irish community that was cemented together by overlapping institutions of family, church, pub, and neighborhood and fraternal associations, not to speak of the spontaneous and intimate encounters associated with sharing a common residential space. Thus, in both its success and failure, the Irish Arts Center points up the obstacles to revitalizing ethnicity under the conditions of modern urban life.

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This work would not have been possible without the help of many people. I would like to give a special thanks to the members of the Irish Arts Center for sharing with me their experiences in the organization. Theirs was no small achievement. In particular, I am grateful to Nye Heron, Sandy Boyer, and Pat Franz for their unique insights as members and administrators.

I would also like to thank the chairman of my dissertation committee, Professor Stephen Steinberg, whose book, The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity and Class in America, served as the inspiration for this work. He provided the intellectual framework for this study and his ideas and suggestions, as well as encouragement and support throughout, have been invaluable. To Professor Arthur J. Vidich, I express my deep gratitude for his assistance in revising my work and giving it some cohesion and shape. His insights on the Arts Center and overall analysis were also indispensable. My appreciation also to Professor William Kornblum for his valuable comments and support of my work.

I owe a great debt to the late Joseph Bensman. Professor Bensman provided some of the basic ideas on which the dissertation is based. His analysis of the issues that confronted the Irish Arts Center and their larger meaning informed my discussion of them.

Beyond this, I am very grateful to Professor Bensman for his splendid classroom lectures and generosity in sharing his time and ideas with me over the years. He was not only a great teacher, scholar, and gifted intellectual, but a model to live by.

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INTRODUCTION

This study is a description and analysis of the Irish Arts Center, founded in 1972 by a small group of Irish political activists. The founders had two related objectives: to revive Irish identity in America through the arts, and to mobilize support for the nationalist cause in Northern Ireland.

Although their idealistic goals were perhaps unattainable from the outset, the organizers of the Irish Arts Center and their supporters did succeed in creating a viable organization with an elaborate program of cultural activities that provided some skills and promoted the Irish arts among the public at large. The Arts Center grew from an small core of activists with few resources into a full-fledged formal organization with a dues-paying membership, paid staff, and a budget of nearly \$200,000 a year. However, the idealism and activism that marked its early years were hard to sustain, and today the Arts Center is in decline and its future is in doubt. Few members participate in the organization, and a small paid staff oversees a diminishing program of activities.

This examination of the Irish Arts Center is an attempt to understand the internal dynamics that prevented the organization from achieving its original goals. This study is also an ethnographic account of one organization's attempt to forge a new identity and, as such, provides a case study of the way in which some Irish Americans have chosen to deal with a declining ethnic culture. As a result,

this work raises questions concerning the future of ethnicity for Irish Americans and, by extension, for other ethnic Americans as well. As a first step, however, it is necessary to place the Irish Arts Center in historical context by examining the larger forces that gave rise to the organization and influenced its development.

The Revolt Against Modernity

In the 1960's a countercultural movement emerged in the United States, in which many young people rebelled against the alienating effects of modern bureaucratic society. They rejected the values and lifestyles of their parents as sterile and materialistic, and embarked on a search for alternative ways of living. In their quest, some experimented with drugs and other forms of hedonistic escape, while others turned to communitarian movements, spiritual pursuits, radical politics, or traditional cultures. As one observer noted at the time, these manifold pursuits represented American youth's attempts to "transform the rationalistic bureaucratic formalized pattern of relationships which they believe characterize mainstream American life."¹

The Irish Arts Center is best understood in the context of this youth rebellion when American youth sought respite from the rationality and impersonality of contemporary society. Led by an assortment of political and social activists, the Arts Center set out to revive traditional Irish culture, not only for aesthetic reasons, but as a model of a way to live. In common with those who had led the

Irish Literary Revival in turn-of-the-century Ireland, the organizers of the Arts Center saw traditional Irish culture as an alternative to modern society with its emphasis on individualism and profit. The supposed rural simplicity and communal values of pre-industrial Ireland were contrasted with the complexity and competitiveness of the modern world. Against the disorienting and fragmenting forces of contemporary society, Irish folk culture was held up as a superior way of life, a symbol of the integrated community. As one former leader described the impulse behind the Center: "It was a cultural enterprise by urban Irish and non-Irish who saw in Irishness a symbol of a more fully human possibility in community."

Like many other revival movements, including the one in Ireland at the turn of the century, the Arts Center contained an atavistic impulse. Thus the organization emphasized the restoration of "traditional" Irish culture and generally eschewed more recent Irish and Irish American cultural forms as diluted or distorted versions of the original one. For example, the Center celebrated pre-Christian, Celtic holidays and customs that have long since disappeared in Ireland. Like the Romantics in the 19th century, the Arts Center looked to primitive mythology and peasant culture for a more authentic tradition, one furthest removed from the corrupting influences of civilization. This quest for authenticity is also part of an age-old struggle to restore the last unity of man. As one commentator described the impulse to recreate the past:

Only in the revival of primitive myth, in the immediacy of poetry, and in the revival of passion, can we reconstitute ourselves as both feeling and thinking human beings.²

Thus, at one level, the Center's attempt to reestablish traditional Irish culture can be seen as an attempt to create some form of community in the face of the alienating effects of modernity.

The Irish Arts Center's roots in the counterculture can be seen not only in its veneration of traditional culture, but in its politics as well. Its founders and organizers were schooled in the radical politics of the counterculture. They were political and social activists who had participated in the civil rights movement, anti-Vietnam War activities, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and union organizing. Because of this influence, the Center was organized as a participatory democracy in which the members ran the organization, taking part in most decisions, and doing most of the work as volunteers. In addition, the group was committed to forging ties with minorities, labor unions, and the local community.

While the Arts Center's participatory democracy and outreach efforts reflected the activist wing of the countercultural movement, its emphasis on amateur participation in the arts, self-expression, and personal development was more reminiscent of the movement's introspective branch.³ This broad orientation made the Center attractive to a variety of individuals (including non-Irish), with a diversity of motives.

The Irish Arts Center is one example of a variety of alternative, anti-bureaucratic organizations that arose in the 1960's and 1970's as part of the growing resistance of many young people to the impersonality and authoritarianism of formal institutions.⁴ In search of greater autonomy, spontaneity, and mutual support, these young people formed their own collectives. They were usually volunteer-run community-oriented groups such as free schools, alternative newspapers, medical or legal clinics, and art centers.

In contrast to bureaucratic organizations, these collectives are committed to operating as participatory democracies. In addition, there is little division of labor, and members are encouraged to contribute to the organization in a variety of ways. Further, members are motivated by a commitment to shared ideals, rather than the incentives of salary, supervision, and rules common in bureaucracies. Finally, in search of community, collectivist organizations stress intimacy and warmth in relations among their members and judge them in terms of personal attributes rather than official position as in more formal structures.

Thus, the Irish Arts Center emerged as part of the radical politics of the 1960's when American youth rejected dominant institutions and practices as alienating and undemocratic and sought to create their own alternative structures.

The Reaction Against Assimilation

The countercultural movement was one influence, but the Irish Arts Center should also be seen in the context of the general resurgence of ethnicity in America during the late 1960's and early 1970's. In attempting to reverse the tide of assimilation that appeared to be overwhelming them, many of America's older ethnic groups began to reassert their cultural identities and, in the process, rejected any suggestion that they were disappearing into the mainstream. Although the cultural revival among America's white ethnic groups was partly a response to the rising demands of blacks for greater equality, it also signaled a yearning for history and community.

For many white ethnics, moving up in American society meant severing or weakening many ties to the past, which were later deemed valuable. In reflecting on their past, they lamented the loss of their cultural heritage and the sense of belonging it provided, and sought to recapture it. For many Irish Americans, as members of one of America's oldest immigrant groups, there was an acute sense of loss. For example, Lawrence McCaffrey, a historian, declared:

Irish identity is going, going, and soon it will be gone. And it will be difficult — probably impossible — for the American Irish to recover something that has almost disappeared. . . . Irish-America exists in a cultural nowhere. The trip from the old city neighborhoods to the suburbs has been a journey from someplace to no place.⁵

Andrew Greeley, the sociologist, lamented:

The legitimization of ethnicity came too late for the American Irish. They are the only European group to

have overacculturated. They stopped being Irish the day before it became all right to be Irish. The WASPS won the battle to convert the Irish into WASPS, just before the announcement came that permanent peace had been made with ethnic diversity.⁶

As if in response to the specter of complete assimilation, in the 1960's and 1970's some of the Irish in America began to take a renewed interest in their cultural past. William D. Griffin, a historian, has noted this phenomenon:

Recently, many Irish Americans have joined in the general revival of ethnic consciousness and search for "roots" that has developed in the United States. The manifestations of this movement range from genealogical quests to debates over whether assimilation was inevitable or, after all, desirable. Perhaps the most striking evidence of this desire to recover cultural heritage has been the proliferation of groups promoting traditional art, music, and dance, and the study of the history, mythology, folklore, and language of Ireland.⁷

The Irish Arts Center was one such group that emerged with a mission to restore a culture it saw on the verge of extinction. Its founders and organizers felt the Irish in America had lost touch with their Old World heritage. In the view of these activists, the remaining vestiges of Irish culture were symbolized by St. Patrick's Day and its association with drinking, shamrocks, leprechauns, stage Irishmen, and Tin Pan Alley songs. They believed this portrait of the Irish in America was not only demeaning, but largely an artificial creation to serve commercial interests. They aimed to present an older, "truer" picture of Irish culture, one which would give Irish Americans a more positive image of themselves. As Jim Dowd, the

primary force behind the Arts Center, told the New York Times in the fall of 1972 at the Irish Arts Center's inauguration:

There are few real Irish people in the United States. They know little about authentic Irish culture and care less. The Irish American is a victim of cultural disintegration, as much so as the Mayan Indian. We have to go back to the beginning, to learn again what it means to be Irish.⁸

Thus the Irish Arts Center was part of a larger ethnic revival movement in the late 1960's and early 1970's, when many Americans sought to renew Old World ties. The organizers of the Irish Arts Center hoped to reverse the assimilation process by transporting traditional Irish culture to America, in the belief that it would provide a sound basis for a lasting ethnicity.

Irish Nationalism

The impetus behind the Irish Arts Center was to create popular support in the Irish-American community for the struggle in Northern Ireland. As activists on behalf of Irish nationalism, the originators of the Center found little support in the Irish-American community. They attributed this indifference to a diminished sense of ethnic identity among Irish Americans. As a result, the activists resolved to revive Irish culture in America, as a way to promote Irish nationalism. As Dowd explained it:

Most of the Americans I dealt with did not identify with the movement at all. Most Irish immigration took place in the 19th century, before the renaissance of Irish culture that began in the early years of this century. I realized that they needed, far more than another organization, a consciousness of their own heritage.⁹

Although the Arts Center did not succeed in producing a groundswell of American-based support for Irish nationalism, it did turn out several individuals who became activists in the movement here. Moreover, despite the Center's mantle of political neutrality, Northern Ireland politics has been a constant in the life of the organization. For example, over the years the Center has lent its name, support, and resources to a variety of groups and events dedicated to the cause of Irish nationalism. In addition, the conflict in Northern Ireland has often been a theme in the plays and other events produced by the Center. Further, the development in the early 1980's of a comprehensive Irish history program in the Center can be traced to a rise in tensions in that part of the world at the time. This was an unanticipated boon to the organization, bringing in new members, volunteers, and students. Aside from courses that focus on "The Troubles," the history program sponsors lectures and films devoted to them. However, the Arts Center's association with Irish politics has also been a source of conflict over the years, as some members argued that it was contrary to the original mandate and inappropriate for an arts organization.

The Irish Arts Center grew out of Irish American support for the Catholic civil rights campaign that began in Northern Ireland in the late 1960's and which evolved into a nationalist movement by the early 1970's. For those who organized the Center, their support of Irish nationalism was an extension of their political and social

activism on other fronts in America at the time. Thus, the Irish Arts Center is best understood against the backdrop of the turbulent sixties when Northern Ireland erupted once again, when America's youth rebelled against the state and other authorities, and her ethnic groups rose up to reclaim their heritages.

Methodology

This is a case study that evolved from a personal interest to one of academic concern. During the 1960's, I, like many other Irish Americans, began to take an interest in my Irish background. It began with my exposure to the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem, a popular singing group who emerged as part of the folk music revival of the time, and it developed into an abiding concern for Irish history, culture, and politics. In graduate school, I became interested in understanding sociologically why I, and so many other Americans of various ethnic backgrounds, began to rediscover our Old World connections. Then, in 1983, as the subject of my dissertation, I decided to do an analysis of the Irish Arts Center as a case study in ethnic revival. It seemed to me a uniquely appropriate organization for such an undertaking. First, its main purpose was to revive Irish identity in America through the arts. Second, the members and participants were mainly third and fourth generation Irish Americans.

Despite my participation in some of the Center's classes and other activities in the mid-1970's, I did not know anyone in the

organization when I began my research in 1983. Entering the group was difficult at first. To an outsider, the members appeared somewhat insular and most of their involvement with the Center seemed focused around a particular event or activity. There appeared to be little opportunity to become acquainted with the membership. These problems were compounded by my own shyness and lack of initiative. I realized that I would have to participate in a particular activity in order to penetrate the Arts Center. However, I had little aptitude for most of the activities such as music, dance, theatre, language, or magazine production. Fortunately, a history program was developing within the organization at the time. This provided me with a more appealing way of entering the group. I began taking classes in Irish history and literature, and became friendly with one of the instructors, who was also the director of the history program. With his encouragement, I began teaching courses in Irish American history and culture, and eventually served as director of the history program. My identification with the history program made me feel less insecure about approaching members for interviews and investigating other areas of the organization.

Although I did become a member of the Arts Center and director of its history program, and took part in most membership meetings and events, I believe I was able to remain relatively detached from the organization. In part, I think this derived from my own personal agenda, which always transcended any attachment I felt to the Center.

In addition, my identification with things Irish had greatly diminished by the time I began research, which I believe allowed me another measure of distance from the organization and its goals. However, in my participation in the Arts Center, I was often caught up in the issues that affected the organization. For example, at membership meetings I occasionally expressed my own views and always took part in votes taken. Further, I sometimes found myself in heated discussion with particular members over organizational issues. However, I do not believe that I ever played a pivotal role in any issue affecting the Center or that my analysis was compromised by my participation in the organization's activities.

This study is based in part on interviews with 43 current and former members of the Irish Arts Center. These were open-ended, taped interviews lasting about one hour. The interviews took place in a variety of settings such as the organization's headquarters, restaurants, bars, and members' homes and workplaces in and around New York City and its suburbs in the period 1983-84. In these efforts I received the cooperation and support of the Center's Executive Director, who also made himself available for extensive interviewing. While taping interviews provided me with more complete accounts of the members' backgrounds and experiences with the organization, it also presented an enormous burden in terms of transcribing them. While tapes may be summarized and used selectively, initial research concerns were sometimes superseded by new priorities that emerged in

gathering the data, which ultimately required transcribing most of the interviews fully.

In my work, I also received access to all of the Center's records, which essentially are contained in the minutes of membership meetings. In addition, I kept a journal on the Arts Center, which consisted of notes taken during membership meetings, accounts of organizational issues that arose, and descriptions of various activities and events in which I participated.

However, a major obstacle in doing this research was the incomplete records kept by the organization. For example, accounts of many membership meetings are either missing or only partially recorded. In addition, summaries of discussions are not given or are drawn only sketchily; and while those motions that pass are noted, those that fail often are not. In addition, the Center's unorthodox bookkeeping made it difficult to analyze those budgets that could be found in the minutes. Thus, the organization's poor record keeping (which was symptomatic of its problems) presented difficulties in reconstructing its history and overall analysis.

Plan for the Work

There were two major reasons for undertaking this study: a desire to understand the impulse behind the efforts of many assimilated Irish Americans to renew their ethnic ties and to examine the implications of this for the continued salience of Irish identity in America. Initially, the internal dynamics of the Irish Arts Center were

considered peripheral to a larger discussion of the social and psychological reasons that motivated its members to join the organization. However, during the course of research it became apparent that the motivations of the members were intimately linked to the character of the Arts Center and the issues that concerned it. If this were so, then the difficulties that the Center encountered in creating an ethnic community had wider meaning. Consequently, my research efforts were redirected toward the organization itself as a problem in community construction.

To a large extent, the Irish Arts Center is the product of an attempt by a group of young Irish Americans and others to deal with their sense of alienation in New York City in the early 1970's. They wanted to use the arts to foster Irish identity and nationalism in America and to reach out to minorities and other groups while operating as a collective. Chapter 1 outlines how these idealistic goals became hard to sustain once they became embedded in organization. For example, the Center was confronted with a number of conflicts and contradictions: the relationship between ideology and action, between ideology and organization, and ideology and professionalism; the imperatives of bureaucracy as an organization grows and the limits of democratic participation within the framework of bureaucracy; and the contradiction between the personal motivations of members and participants and organizational imperatives.

Chapter 2 illustrates how these conflicts and contradictions were reflected in the diversity of motives members had for joining the organization. The various sets of motivations led to debates over the nature, purpose, and policy of the organization, pulling it in different directions. Chapter 3 describes the ways in which these conflicts became located within specific programs and assumed a dynamic of their own in which the opposing forces of amateurism and professionalism, participatory democracy and bureaucratization, special interests and cultural and political aims operated. Chapter 4 relates how these counterforces were expressed at the organizational level as tendencies toward communitarianism as well as professionalism, specialization, and bureaucratization. It also indicates how the Center's inability to resolve its identity as an organization left it in a permanent state of transition leading to stagnation and finally decline.

Although Chapter 4 deals with the internal dynamics of the Arts Center in the process of routinizing its activity, the chapter also raises larger issues relating to the obstacles to reconstructing ethnicity and community. For example, it points to a general problem in building a community while maintaining consensus and accommodating different points of view and the difficulty of recreating an ethnic culture and community that is not rooted in neighborhood and the institutions based on informal networks of family and friends.

Notes

1. Andrew M. Greeley, Why Can't They Be Like Us? America's White Ethnic Groups (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1975), p.14.
2. Taken from notes of a classroom lecture by Joseph Bensman, The Graduate Center of the City University of New York.
3. A number of authors have noted that the counterculture was not a monolithic movement, but consisted of various subdivisions which could be roughly divided into two branches: one directed toward political and social reform, the other focused on personal exploration. Cf. Joseph Bensman and Arthur J. Vidich, American Society: The Welfare State and Beyond (Revised ed.), (South Hadley, Mass: Bergin & Garvey, 1987); Kenneth Keniston, Youth and Dissent: The Rise of a New Opposition (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971); Daniel Yankelevich, The New Morality: A Profile of American Youth in the 70's (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974).
4. This discussion of the development of anti-bureaucratic organizations is based on an article by Joyce Rothschild Whitt, "The Collectivist Organization: An Alternative to Rational-Bureaucratic Models," American Sociological Review, 44 (August 1979): 509-527.
5. Lawrence J. McCaffrey, The Irish Diaspora in America (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1976), p. 176, 178.
6. Andrew M. Greeley, That Most Distressful Nation: The Taming of the American Irish (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1972), p. 263. Greeley has since reversed himself to argue that ethnicity continues to be a salient feature of Irish American life. See Andrew M. Greeley and William C. McCready, "The Transmission of Cultural Heritages: The Case of the Irish and Italians," in Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, eds., Ethnicity: Theory and Experience (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1975).
7. William D. Griffin, A Portrait of the Irish in America. (New York: Scribner, 1973).
8. "Irish Arts Center — A Proud Beginning," New York Times, December 7, 1972.
9. Ibid.

Chapter 1

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE IRISH ARTS CENTER

An Claidheamh Soluis¹/The Irish Arts Center officially began on May 31, 1972 when it was incorporated as a non-profit organization with the state of New York. The impetus to form the organization came from two married couples, Jim and Mary Dowd² and John and Kathy Ward, who as members of the National Association for Irish Freedom, were active in support of the Catholic civil rights movement in Northern Ireland. In their participation in this group, they noted that there was little Irish American support for this cause except during times of crisis. They concluded that this was the result of the assimilation of the Irish in America who, except for some vague attachments, no longer identified with Ireland. As one of them said in referring to Irish Americans, "they were not informed, they did not know where they came from, who they were, the whole history. And they didn't have a positive sense of Irishness." This small group of activists agreed that what was needed was an Irish cultural revival in America that would serve as the basis for a sustained and widespread support of the nationalist movement in Northern Ireland. Thus, the Irish Arts Center was intended to be the catalyst for a cultural awakening of the Irish in America in the hope of politicizing them about the conflict in that part of the world. There was also a

consensus within this group that a new organization was needed to achieve these goals because they could not be accomplished through the National Association for Irish Freedom. There were a number of reasons for this. First, NAIF was viewed as being too narrowly focused on civil rights in Northern Ireland, and as a consequence, failed to address the larger question of self-determination for the Catholic minority there. As one founding member of the Arts Center said, "The political situation has to do with a basic struggle to be Irish and have a right to a place." In addition, the organizers of the Center felt that NAIF exploited artists and never incorporated them into the organization. This was considered a major tactical mistake because, following the example of the literary and cultural revival that preceded Ireland's independence movement earlier in this century, these activists believed that culture and politics were inextricably linked. Thus, the need for a new organization and social movement came with the conviction that a cultural reawakening among Irish Americans was a necessary precondition for their support of Irish nationalism.

The originators of the Irish Arts Center also believed it was necessary for the Irish to join up with other ethnic and racial groups in America. The reasoning behind this was that any strong or assertive ethnic or nationalist movement in this country would be persecuted because it would be viewed as a challenge to the dominant WASP establishment. Therefore, there was a need for such groups to

unify against attack. As one organizer said: "we must establish solidarity between oppressed national groupings, otherwise, we'll get divided up and wiped out one at a time." In addition, it was agreed that the claims of American Indians, because of their special status as this country's most oppressed cultural group, should be adopted by the Arts Center. As one activist said: Any genuine nationalist movement in this country would have to make the demands of native people of this country their priority."

These two ideas, to revive Irish culture in America and to establish ties with other ethnic groups in this country, became the basis of the group's formal statement of purpose articulated in 1972. It reads as follows:

1. To establish an awareness among Americans of Irish descent and the American public in general, of the artistic expression of the Irish people.
2. To provide a forum for education, research, exploration and development of Irish art forms and for communication through art with peoples of other national backgrounds.³

The political aim of the Irish Arts Center was not formally stated, partly out of a concern for attaining non-profit status and not alienating potential members and supporters, and partly because it was not the main or direct goal. The founders of the Arts Center were sincere in their desire to create a non-political arts organization. At the same time, they believed art was very political and could serve as the basis of an Irish nationalist movement in America. Thus, the Center's role was to restore a sense of history, identity,

and culture among Irish Americans, but the political implications of such efforts were understood to operate independently of the organization. In other words, a cultural revival would inevitably raise political questions that Irish Americans would have to answer for themselves.

The Irish Arts Center had an auspicious beginning. For example, in his effort to gain publicity and financial support to launch the Irish Arts Center, Jim Dowd was able to enlist the aid of a number of prominent people. In the fall of 1972, the actress Janice Rule and her husband, actor Ben Gazzara, held a fundraising party for the group in their home. This gathering also produced a board of advisors for the new organization, which included Ms. Rule and other well-known figures such as Gore Vidal, the writer; Jason Miller, author of "That Championship Season;" Arlo Guthrie, the folksinger; and Pete Hamill, the columnist. For its official opening to the public, the Arts Center rented the Abbey Theater on 13th Street in Manhattan in the fall of 1972, to present a series of cultural programs highlighting celebrity artists. These events drew the attention of the media to what one reporter from the New York Times referred to as "the latest addition to New York's burgeoning ethnic revival."⁴

However, once the publicity had died down and the celebrities were gone, Jim Dowd, the only original organizer left, had little money left to finance this venture. Using his organizing experience

and powers of persuasion, Dowd was able to assemble a core of activists around him who struggled to keep the Arts Center alive in the fall of 1972.

One of them was Michael Kane, a twenty-six year old street musician from New Jersey. Dowd first encountered Kane on a Manhattan street corner selling pennywhistles. After learning that Kane could play Irish music on the tin whistle and Irish pipes, he invited him to join his fledgling group. Although wary at first, Kane accepted Dowd's offer, drawn by the ideals of the Center and his own professional interest in Irish music. Despite his non-Irish background, Kane had a love of Celtic music that began as a boy when he heard a recording of the famous musical, Brigadoon.

I couldn't get my parents to play that record enough. I loved it. As I got a bit older, whenever I heard anything Irish or Scottish, I went nuts. Our teacher used to play "The Wearing of the Green" in the first grade. I thought that was the greatest song I'd ever heard. . . . I just dreamed about this music. It was just the rhythms, just a sheer kind of visceral reaction to the rhythms and the sounds.

As he grew older, Kane's fascination with Irish music became stronger, especially during the folk music revival in the 1960's, and by the time he was in college, he had taught himself to play Irish tunes on the pennywhistle. It was in graduate school that the possibility of Irish music becoming a career for him emerged when he went to a feis, a competition of traditional Irish musicians and dancers. Surprised and pleased to find a community of traditional Irish musicians and dancers, he began to think of a career in Irish music.

And unable to find a teaching job after graduate school, Kane turned to "making street music for a living."

Michael Kane became the first musician the Arts Center could claim as its own. As one of a select few in the Irish community who could play the uilleann (elbow) pipes, he became an important drawing card for the organization early on and symbolized its concern for traditional Irish music.

Another early activist Dowd recruited in the fall of 1972 was John Finn, a third-generation Irish American from the Bronx. He had read about the opening of the Irish Arts Center and went down to the Abbey theatre to see what it was like. Finn was excited by what he saw and met Dowd who told him the group needed more full time organizers. After a second meeting, Finn agreed to join the Center as a full-time activist in exchange for fifty dollars a week and free room and board with Dowd.

Finn's interest in his Irish background was sparked by his participation in the black civil rights movement in the 1960's. As a Vista Volunteer and a community organizer in the South Side of Chicago in 1968, he was very impressed by "black culture and black people's struggle for cultural affirmation." This raised questions for him about his own ethnic identity:

I'm Irish, what does that mean? I thought I knew what it meant. . . . For me, at a certain point, what it meant to be Irish was the commercial version because I knew no other. That is, Irish meant that your vocation possibilities were priest, cop, or lawyer. You were a

racist. You liked to brawl in bars and you were drunk. Some of it had great truth of course.

Finn's exposure to black culture led him to reject the stereotype of the Irish as drunks and racists and to search for a more positive image of Irishness, which he found at the Arts Center. Finn, along with Dowd, Kane and a few others, kept the Arts Center going with their cultural programs after the initial excitement surrounding its opening had subsided. The group had also recruited a professional director and cast for a play, Brendan Behan's The Hostage, but these plans and the rest of its activities were cancelled when the organization was locked out of the Abbey theatre for failing to pay its rent.

In 1973, the Irish Arts Center reestablished itself down the street from the Abbey with a Monday night traditional Irish music session in a pub called the Mushroom. The group struck a deal with the bar owners, in which it would receive half of the bar's take in exchange for supplying the entertainment. Although it got off to a shaky start, the music session slowly began to build a following. The organization invited various musicians to play at these music sessions and worked hard to publicize them. The Monday night session grew in popularity and reached its peak by the end of 1973, in a pub called Munk's Park on Park Avenue South in Manhattan. Michael Kane recalls what it was like:

It really started taking off there. There'd be music on two floors. All sorts of people were becoming attracted to it. It was basically me, Jim [Dowd], and . . . playing

music. We really didn't have any fantastic attractions, but it was new and we were really the only ones doing it outside of the pockets in the boroughs. . . . It was like a "scene." I think most people were attracted to it because it was like a social scene. Some people were attracted to it for the music and some people for their ethnic identity.

While the pub sessions drew many people interested mainly in the music and socializing, they also attracted activists to the organization. One was Joe Bray, a boyhood friend of John Finn. Acting on an invitation from his friend, Bray came to a music session and was enthralled by what he heard:

There was just a bunch of musicians playing Irish music I hadn't heard. It had a wildness to it that I had never experienced before. I had been exposed to the Clancy Brothers of course. I'd been exposed to ceili [dance] bands, the old-style music, and dance music, the old tenors. But this had a wildness to it that took me. . . . And also the fact that they were long-haired people playing.

For Bray, the appeal of the Arts Center went beyond its music to providing him with an Irish substitute for American culture:

I think the emotional thrust for me, the thing that pushed me into it. I'm not denigrating Irish culture, I really do love all that stuff. But the emotional thrust that pushed me into working for it, working to make it more widely known, was a disaffection from America. What I wanted was an alternative to American culture. Instead of being second class American, you can be first class Irish.

Bray's sense of estrangement from American society in the early 1970's was echoed by his fellow activists. For example, Michael Kane said: "The Center, I think, essentially was a big womb for a lot of people, myself included. . . . It really attracted alienated

people. There are obviously loads of alienated people in this society, myself included." And John Finn remarked: "We were happy to rebel against damn near anything, political, cultural, you name it."

Finn, Kane, and Bray were part of a growing nucleus of volunteers, led by Jim Dowd, who were attempting to establish the Irish Arts Center as a viable organization in the early 1970's. Aside from putting in place a successful music session, this core of organizers began to do street theatre and conduct free workshops in Irish music and dance at various schools and halls in Manhattan where free space was available. As a result of this increasing activity, the Arts Center was soon pressed to find space of its own for rehearsals and workshops. In June of 1973, it rented a room in a community center on 68th street. Now, for the first time, the group could confidently schedule rehearsals for plays and expand its workshop program to include Irish language and drama. In addition, the Center obtained free use of an office nearby on 73rd street. These were important steps because they provided the group with a territorial base, enabling it to organize more effectively, build on its support, and begin to plan its activity.

As the Arts Center's programs grew more popular, it created pressure for even more space. This was especially true of its theatre which had evolved from a street performance troupe to an Off-off Broadway type of acting company using a mixture of amateurs and professionals. Thus, in May of 1974, after much searching and a

battle with a rival Irish theatre group, the organization obtained a lease for fifty dollars a month on a vacant and dilapidated three-story, city-owned building on West 51st Street off Eleventh Avenue in Manhattan. The Irish Arts Center now had a permanent home for its theatre and office. This was another significant advancement in the development of the group, providing it with a greater sense of stability and permanence. As one organizer said:

Finally, we were actively an Irish Arts Center. And there was a place we could have classes. We could have a theatre company, we could store sets and costumes and not be at the mercy of other people. I don't think the organization would be in existence right now if it hadn't been for that building.

The acquisition of the building allowed the organization to conduct all of its activities in one location for the first time. This, along with the process of restoring the building, promoted the sense of community for which the Center was striving. There was an outpouring of volunteers in response to the Center's request for help in refurbishing its new home. This is how one participant remembered it:

It's incredible that we fixed that building and what it looked like, all donated labor. I think they spent around \$2,000 to renovate it. People tell us, I think, we'd have to spend \$20,000, which of course we didn't have. But everything else was donated. And people spent so much time. I painted for the first time in my life. I did all sorts of things I didn't know I could do. The idea was, you just come and somebody will show you how to do it. You do it and you show somebody else. And we would do all these things. That was incredible. Talk about bringing people together.

The Development of Internal Conflict

By the fall of 1974, the Center had rehabilitated its new headquarters, produced its first play there, and resumed its other activities. At this point, the organization still had no formal structure and was essentially run by a small core of about twenty activists who functioned much like a commune. Many of its members lived together, working intermittently, sharing expenses and devoting most of their time to the group. As one said:

We were there, available. We weren't working. We were enjoying the least amount of outside work just to make enough money. Our greatest desire was to be doing the things we were doing, and so we did them. . . . You see, it grew out of this thing; you had to have moved into the house when you got involved - practically, not really, to Jim's [Dowd] place. We hung out a lot.

The group was anti-bureaucratic in orientation, rejecting the impersonality and hierarchical structure of formal organization in favor of collective decision making and voluntarism. It consisted of social activists interested in creating a cultural community and establishing ties with local residents and with minority groups.

In addition to this small band of ideologically committed activists, by late 1974 the Arts Center had a following of about fifty individuals whose participation in the group ranged from active involvement to passive spectatorship. Many of them were uncomfortable with the communal orientation of the Center's inner core and its left-wing politics. In addition, as volunteers they began to feel

exploited because they had no say in the organization. Their frustration led to increasing demands for representation in the organization.

In response, the Director⁵ of the Center said he endorsed efforts to democratize the organization and established an "Executive Committee" to take temporary control of the organization and oversee the transition to more popular rule. In appointing the members of the committee, the Director said he would focus on individuals "whom I felt were doing most for the organization, who were taking responsibility for things, because there were a lot of people hanging around, but I didn't think they were taking the responsibility."

The formation of an executive committee was immediately condemned by some participants as an attempt by the Center's ideological core to subvert efforts to open the organization to wider participation. By the spring of 1975, a full-fledged battle was underway for control of the Irish Arts Center. Two factions, having roughly the same number of participants, emerged to assert their divergent visions of the organization. The debate between the two opposing camps focused on membership criteria. The Center's leadership and its supporters wanted an activist membership that would be directly responsible for running the organization, that would participate in meetings, serve on committees, and be actively engaged in learning an Irish art form. The opposition, who called themselves the "Democratic Caucus," wanted a more traditional organizational structure with elected officials representing a membership whose level of

participation would be optional. Under this latter proposal, a member could take part in music, dance, drama, or any other activity, either as a performer, student, or spectator, without incurring any further obligation to the Irish Arts Center. Thus, while the conflict revolved around membership requirements, it represented more basic differences among the participants regarding the nature and purpose of the organization. As one participant said: "What the big political battle in the spring of 1975 was, what is the Center about?" Aside from the two warring camps, there were other participants who were confused by the conflict, some who were undecided, and some uncommitted to either side.

In the struggle for control of the organization, both sides worked to gather support and could often be found in different areas of the Center planning strategy. There were also committee meetings between the two sides in an effort to reach a compromise, draft proposals and set dates for larger meetings. Periodically, both camps would come together in large meeting to debate and vote on proposals that were mainly concerned with membership criteria. Since anyone who showed up at these meetings was entitled to vote, it became extremely important to both factions to have as many supporters as possible attend them. Advantage between the two sides seesawed as they were alternately successful in packing these meetings with their adherents. Ultimately, the proponents of an activist membership prevailed in a series of votes on the issue. As one of

them said: "Somehow, we wore them down . . . we brought in more members than they did."

Some of the members of the Democratic Caucus, the losing side in the conflict, left to form their own arts organization, the American Irish Cultural Project. Hampered by limited resources and factionalism, it never became a viable organization, but continues to sponsor weekly music events at the Eagle Tavern on 14th Street in Manhattan and occasionally publishes a magazine called Adrift.

The Establishment of a Formal Organizational Structure

Having survived internal conflicts and arriving at a clear conception of what kind of organization the Arts Center was going to be, in the spring of 1975 its activist oriented membership set out with a renewed sense of purpose to create a formal structure. The Center had already grown substantially, with a budget of approximately \$25,000⁶, which by itself called for a more orderly structure and operation. Initially committees were set up to delineate the purpose of the organization and define membership requirements. Since "art" was considered the main purpose of the Center, "regular participation" in an Irish art form was the first membership criterion established. In addition, members would be required to share in the administration and maintenance of the Center, which included serving on a committee and participating in membership meetings. Finally, members were also asked to make a commitment to learning the Irish language⁷. Thus, the Irish Arts Center was attempting to

establish itself as a participatory democracy with the goals of developing its members artistically and encouraging active participation in the Irish arts.

Establishing such a collective proved difficult. For example, initially there were complaints over long, poorly attended and conducted membership meetings in which few decisions were reached. So little procedure was observed that meetings became bogged down with vast agendas and endless discussion. In addition, there was confusion regarding the Center's structure and the scope of the authority of its committees and membership. In part, this was the result of differences among members regarding how much authority should be delegated. The overall consequence of these problems was that the organization was having difficulty in setting priorities and finding a "common direction."⁸

Other problems also beset the Center in 1975. There were indications that many members were not contributing their full share to administering and maintaining the organization. Complaints were made about poor attendance at membership meetings and about committees that were not fulfilling their responsibilities. This resulted in several attempts to challenge the "credentials" of those members judged not to be participating fully in the organization.

The Center's difficulty in motivating its members to take a more active role in running the organization was partly due to the burdensome nature of the chores associated with the task. The

difficulty was also related to the increase in the number of members who appeared to be attached primarily to the cultural programs rather than to the purposes behind them. Thus, for example, by the end of 1975 a number of musicians had become dissatisfied with the organization's refusal to hire professional instructors to advance them further. As one participant explained it:

One of the other things there seemed to be a conflict over is, at what point does the Center stop teaching? People wanted to go on. They wanted to learn more, and it was like they could only go so far, the dancers, the musicians. "Okay, this is it, [the Center would say] we're not going to get Johnny Cronin [well-known Irish musician] in to teach you because that's not what we're about. We're about teaching beginners." This was a conflict all the time. It was like a certain group of people didn't want to take the next step, didn't want people to get good. And so therefore what happened was people left the Center because there was no place for them to go forward and you just can't stay in the same spot.

The disagreement over the Center's policy of using only volunteer instructors marked a renewal of the debate over the purpose of the organization. In this instance, the question was whether the main function of the Center was to promote popular participation in the arts by having amateurs pass on what they know, or to develop artists, of all levels of ability, for whom excellence was the primary goal.

While the Arts Center was eager to satisfy the disgruntled musicians, who were important in advancing its goals, it remained steadfast in refusing to hire teachers as contrary to those very goals. The Center's position was that its classes were intended to

encourage amateur participation in the Irish arts. As one leader at the time said: "Our aim is not to produce professionals but to encourage people to perform at their own level. The classes are almost devoid of competition and the whole point is to give participants the means to express the music of their forebears."⁹

At the same time as the Center proclaimed its commitment to popular participation in the arts, it also, in a more subtle fashion, encouraged the pursuit of excellence in them. For example, the Center defined itself as a "serious" arts organization and vowed "to give priority to the fullest possible development of the artistic expression of the members."¹⁰ Thus, while the Center wanted to foster widespread participation in the arts, it also wanted to be accepted as a legitimate arts organization.

Another issue for the Arts Center in 1975, was the growing autonomy of its various programs (what it terms "areas") which was leading to fragmentation in the group. For example, in 1975-76, there was increasing competition in the Center for space, as well as for financial and membership support. The leadership charged that the various components within the Center were not fulfilling their obligations to the organization. As a result, the leadership threatened to curtail the activities of such programs, and the Artistic Director warned against the divisive effects of this growing self-interest:

In the absence of a clear direction for the organization as a whole, its four areas will tend to assume a direction

of their own. The result will be disunity, resentment and weakness. By defining the short term goals of the organization as a whole, and then by defining the goals of the areas in terms of the overall goals, we will achieve unity of purpose.¹¹

Despite its internal problems, the Arts Center's programs were proving popular with the public and by the spring of 1976, it could boast about its dramatic growth in two years:

In May 1974, An Claidheamh Soluis was, by any standards, a small organization. Working out of a borrowed office, our activities consisted of a weekly Seisuin [music session], two music workshops, one dance workshop, and the Irish Rebel Theatre — which at that time was presenting "The Shadow of a Gunman," our first production to have any pretence towards professional theatre standards.

Just two years later, the picture is very different. The Monday night Seisuin continues, but now is held in our own building. There are now twenty-two workshops in music, dance, theatre and the Irish language, with well over a hundred students participating. Once a month we hold the only regular Ceili [dance] in Manhattan. Ais-Eiri, The Magazine of Irish Americans, has a circulation of 2,000. And the Irish Rebel Theatre has become one of the finest small theatre companies in New York.¹²

Reflecting its expanded activity and financial success, the Center's budget had grown to \$31,000, and it posted a profit of \$10,000 for the fiscal year ending in June 1976. Except for some donations and grants, which accounted for roughly one-fifth of its income, the Arts Center was self supporting.

Despite its growth, in 1976 the Center still retained a great deal of the ideological fervor that had launched the organization. For example, it accepted an invitation from the National Association for Irish Freedom to present a play at Town Hall to commemorate "Bloody

Sunday"¹³ and raise funds for the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association. The Center also accepted an invitation to perform at a prison in upstate New York. This was the start of an extended relationship between the organization and prison inmates. The organization also maintained its ties to the labor movement by participating in events sponsored by the United Farm Workers and by the Bakers' Union.

Within the organization, there was also evidence of a continuing ideological commitment. There were unsuccessful moves to institute compulsory study of Gaelic for members, as well as numerous discussions of the relationship of language to culture. Reference was also made to events in Northern Ireland and efforts were made to get the membership to explore their possible relevance to the work of the Center. For example, one motion that passed directed the membership to "discuss and examine the relationship of Irish art to the struggle of the Irish and Irish-American peoples."¹⁴

However, other ideological principles were being challenged as the Center tried to manage its expanded activity. As the organization continued to grow and develop, its participatory democracy became increasingly strained by the added responsibility. The ongoing reluctance of many members to contribute to the maintenance of the organization exacerbated the situation. This was indicated by the recurrence in 1976 of problems with the organization's structure. A number of committees charged with various organizational responsibilities were no longer functioning. An effort was made to

reorganize these committees to get them working again. This succeeded for a short while, but by the fall of 1976 they were again nonfunctioning. As a result, the Center's leadership body, the Organizing Committee, was forced to assume more of the burden of maintaining the organization. As the Artistic Director said in his report to the membership:

In the absence of a functioning committee structure, the Organizing Committee began to accept direct responsibility for more and more programs (e.g., film series, concert series, Litir Nuacht [Newsletter], building). By the end of last year, "structure" was once again appearing on O.C. agendas, as one of the few items which are met not by loud dispute, but by thunderous silence -- a sure sign that we have a serious problem.¹⁵

The Arts Center continued to have problems in other areas as well. For example, there was competition for space, complaints of overwork and lack of communication between programs, poor attendance at membership meetings, as well as cash flow problems. In response, there was discussion of a membership drive to bring in new supporters as well as to make the "work program" through which the Center recruited volunteer labor in exchange for free classes, more effective. In addition, members were assessed dues of four dollars a month and students were charged a registration fee of ten dollars for classes.

Despite its difficulties, the Arts Center remained optimistic in outlook. This was indicated by the ambitious three-year plan it established in 1976, to spread Irish culture across America. The plan included making the organization known to most New Yorkers

interested in Irish art, obtaining a larger building in a better location, and establishing a chapter in another city.

The Arts Center continued to produce a fairly successful program of activities in 1977. Theatre was still the main event in terms of bringing in audiences, as well as money. The Center's production of Sean O'Casey's Juno and the Paycock proved to be an "unprecedented success." The music and dance department continued to provide free classes and an array of cultural programs. The magazine, Ais-Eiri, gained new volunteer support, its circulation rose from 2,000 to 2,5000, and its winter issue was described as the best to date. The Center's growing activity led to the hiring of a handful of teachers, despite official policy against it, and to more concerted efforts for grant support.

Despite its progress, the organization also suffered a number of setbacks in 1977. A fire in June caused significant damage to the building, resulting in about \$5,000 worth of repairs. As a consequence, the Center suffered its first financial loss in fiscal year 1976-77. Although net income dropped to \$21,500 from the previous year's \$27,000, the Center's actual deficit was only \$3,300.¹⁶ Later that year the organization had another reversal, when the building's boiler broke down "disrupting all programs for six weeks."

The Arts Center was also coping with other problems in 1977, some of them old and some of them new. For example, there were complaints about general disorganization, indicated by requests that

the membership "take upon itself the discipline necessary to restrain itself from abuse of the phones, the offices, and the building."¹⁷ In addition, the Gaelic language program was deemed to be non-functioning and there was conflict in the theatre over who should be given authority over, or priority in, the casting of productions.

Finally, by the fall of 1977, the Center's increasing activity, unwieldy structure, and passive membership, combined to produce a crisis for its participatory democracy which became the subject of a report entitled: "How to Check Our Dwindling Membership: A Discussion of Meetings, Leadership, Membership Criteria, Directions and Goals."¹⁸ Although it was compiled and written by one member, he stressed that it represented the views of many others in the organization.

The report noted the declining participation of the membership in the work of the Irish Arts Center and the greater burden this was putting on active members. It warned that, aside from the dispiriting effect and friction this process was causing, if left unchecked it threatened the viability of the organization. This account argued that it was the excesses of the Center's participatory democracy such as, interminable and largely unproductive membership meetings, collective decision making, and weakly enforced membership requirements, that were undermining the organization.

Another problem cited was the growing number of members who were not actively engaged in learning an Irish art, which was one of the key requirements for membership. Because of the nature of some

of the Center's activities, members could participate in them without having to study an Irish art. For example, working in the theatre or on the magazine did not necessarily require a knowledge of or commitment to Irish art. Thus, these activities were open to individuals looking only to acquire some specific skills. As a result, it was suggested that the membership criterion, "to be actively engaged in learning an Irish art form," be strictly enforced to guard against self-interested individuals motivated solely by the desire to pick up some technical skills or professional experience.

The membership endorsed this suggestion as well as a number of others made in the report such as reforming the organization's structure to delegate more authority and clarifying its goals. And because of a growing tendency toward professionalism within the Center, it was also proposed that the membership reexamine the role and purpose of the organization to make explicit the direction in which it wanted to go:

What type of organization are we and who do we want to reach? I see two basic choices in front of us. We could become a very successful "arts" organization in the narrow sense of the word. The market for Irish art is greater now than it ever was. We could go out into the arts world and reach people who normally patronize the arts in this society. They are sure to respond favorably to well done Irish presentations. Or we could become a different type of "arts" organization: one that aggressively goes out and works to reach people who normally don't patronize the arts in society. These are people in the mainstream of America whose cultural life consists largely of what the mass media dishes out to them. We have elements of both approaches in the organization at this time.¹⁹

Because of the growing participation of members and others whose focus was on artistic development, the Center was becoming divided in its approach to the arts. While its ideology stressed the importance of the Irish arts as activities for everyone's casual enjoyment as well as a tool for social and political goals, there was also a tendency stressing technique, proficiency, excellence, and professionalism in the arts. Overall, the report on the decline of what was termed "working" members illustrates the difficulty the Center was having in trying to stimulate its members to take a more active role in its participatory democracy.

Organizational Routinization and Its Effects

As the Arts Center grew larger and more complex, it became less viable to manage its day-to-day needs with volunteers or occasional part-time administrators. Thus, by the fall of 1978, the organization hired its first full-time administrator. As the Center's volunteer Artistic Director explained: "We have reached a point in our development where we will always need a full-time administrator." While this step was an obvious breach of the organization's commitment to voluntarism, it was generally accepted because it was seen as indispensable to its smooth functioning. This, along with the fact that the Administrator was a long-time activist dedicated to the ideals of the group, and who would relieve the membership of some of its workload, made the appointment more palatable. In addition, with the aid of a CETA grant, the organization began hiring the

first of five full-time employees. The music and dance program received a National Endowment for the Arts grant to expand and hire teachers, and the magazine obtained a similar award for its work. This developing dependence on grant support marked a change from the Center's earlier history as a largely self-sustaining operation.

The Arts Center's aim to create a social movement and the increasing popularity of many of its programs created pressure to expand and provided a rationale for abandoning an earlier sentiment against accepting grants as a threat to the integrity of the organization. For example, the growing demand for music and dance instruction led to a steady increase in the number of workshops offered by the organization. By 1978, music and dance workshops had grown to 46 with an enrollment of over 200 students. The result was a greater need for more teachers and expertise in these areas than the Center could provide. In response, those members active in music and dance proposed hiring some professional instructors as a temporary measure to fill the gap and help train more volunteer teachers for the organization. This recommendation for more paid staff also met with little opposition because of its provisional nature and the fact that it was put forward by some of the Center's most committed activists. Though inadvertent, this decision promoted a trend toward professionalism in the Center, both in terms of staffing and attitude toward the arts.

Another aspect of the Arts Center's process of routinizing its activity was the movement toward a more centralized structure of authority in 1978. The organization established a new executive body, Coiste Stiurtha [Steering Committee], consisting of the directors of its various areas of activity to represent the members between membership meetings. The Center's overall Artistic Director, in turn, would have the authority to speak for the membership between Coiste Stiurtha meetings. In addition, the appointment of an administrator represented another step toward the concentration of power in the organization in 1978. But in spite of these changes, the Center demonstrated its continuing commitment to participatory democracy by affirming the membership's right to overrule its representatives.

The development of a bureaucratic core and the trend toward centralization of authority was largely a response to the membership's failure to assume its responsibility to maintain the organization. Aside from a core of committed activists, most members were not fulfilling their ideological obligations to the Center. This was related to the growth of members who were mainly focused on activities and who either lacked or had a weak commitment to the principles of the organization. Although the Center tried in various ways to coax, push, and even force (through threat of suspension or expulsion) members to carry out their responsibilities, it was not very successful. This general indifference to the organization's precepts extended to its workshop students who mostly avoided their obligation to do

volunteer work in exchange for free classes. In an effort to motivate the student body and boost membership, the Center decided once again to have a workshop orientation day to educate newcomers about the organization and its goals.

Despite some actions toward the bureaucratization and professionalization of its staff and centralization of authority, as well as the relative detachment of its members and students, the Center remained steadfast in its commitment to communitarian democracy and the goals of spreading Irish culture and reaching out to other ethnic groups. For example, most of its teachers were still volunteers and its classes remained free notwithstanding some members' calls for establishing fees. In addition, the membership was still considered the governing body of the organization with the power to set budgets, policy, and to veto its leaders decisions.

Another sign of the ideological commitment of the Center's leadership, despite the indifference of the rank and file, was its continuing support of unsuccessful programs. For example, while its Irish language program was able to sustain some relatively successful classes, it was unable to attract enough membership support to become a viable entity within the organization. Still, the leadership encouraged and subsidized it because Gaelic was thought to be the basis of Irish culture. The Center's magazine, Ais-Eiri, was another activity that drew little membership interest and was a major financial drain on the organization. Nonetheless it was viewed

as an important instrument in spreading the group's message and thus was underwritten. One more indication of the Center's resoluteness in its goals was its continuing attempts to establish itself in other communities. Thus, in 1978, the leadership asked an already overtaxed cadre of active members to spend half their organization time in setting up other chapters of the group. Hence, while the Irish Arts Center began to bureaucratize and professionalize its staff and centralize its structure of authority in 1978, it remained committed to aims which were antithetical to this process, or at least served to undermine it.

In 1979, Center activity continued to expand, and the annual budget increased to \$54,000. Most of its income was still coming from its cultural programs and events, but grant aid now accounted for approximately one-fifth of the group's overall income. This did not include moneys from a CETA grant supporting five full time staff, which was renewed for eighteen months that year. The extension of CETA funding allowed the organization to continue paying a limited number of music, dance, and language instructors as well as to support ongoing work. The organization once again reaffirmed paying teachers as a temporary measure and vowed to return to an all-volunteer teaching staff the next year. While this intention was based on principles, it also had a practical basis, since there was a general fear the organization would become too dependent on CETA funding.

In 1979, the Arts Center hired a part-time editor to revive the Center's magazine. However, problems persisted and only two issues were published, which led to discussion as to whether the organization should be publishing a quarterly magazine. The language program fared a little bit better in 1979. There was a total of 84 people enrolled in language classes, prompting this report:

The number and quality of these workshops have contributed largely to an unprecedented level of activity within the Irish areas, and have resulted in the emergence of a core of Irish speakers within An Claidheamh Soluis.²⁰

One of the main purposes behind producing a nucleus of Gaelic speakers within the Center was to integrate the language program with the other activities. As the Artistic Director said: "We cannot accomplish our goals of doing plays, Ais-Eiri articles, or literature in Irish until people know the language. This is our first step."²¹

In 1979, Gaelic remained an important component in the Center's cultural revival effort, as illustrated by the membership's endorsement of this statement relating to it:

Language is at the root of all cultures. The rhythm and phrasing of language is that which gives the interpretative form to music and dance. Our manner of thinking is to be found in the language we use. Study of Irish music and dance without the study of the Irish language (through the medium of English) imposes an Anglo-Saxon perspective on the creative and interpretative aspects of these art forms at worst, and confines them to mimicry without substance of Irish art at best. It is this reason and this reason only that will justify a decision by us to discipline ourselves to the study of the Irish language.²²

Aside from maintaining its cultural programs at its headquarters in 1979, the Center continued to work in the larger community.

For example, the music and dance department gave more than 40 performances at various senior citizen and community centers, old age homes hospitals, and schools for more than 8,000 people around the city.²³ In addition, the organization established a three-year plan to expand into other areas outside of Manhattan and to "implement our aim of communicating through art with peoples of other national backgrounds."²⁴ Part of these efforts included sponsoring cultural activities in Brooklyn and Queens. However, despite the addition of fifteen new members who were described as "contributing enormously to the organization," such outreach efforts were not considered a success by the Artistic Director, who faulted the membership for its lack of motivation in this area.

The Arts Center continued to grow in 1980, with its budget climbing to \$63,000 and the addition of a major new program, a summer Irish language school in Ireland. The organization was beginning to outgrow its building, leading the Artistic Director to call for support in a search for larger headquarters:

Our present building limits our operations. We cannot significantly expand our programs while we burst at the seams each Spring as our workshops spawn brand new Name-A-Subject 1-1's. The theatre is often sold out and so turns away its audience, our potential new members. . . . we can locate and refurbish another suitable and permanent home for ACS if this becomes a priority for every area in this organization.²⁵

However, the Center was also having financial problems. Faced with a "bleak cash flow picture for the summer," the organization suspended the September publication of its magazine, laid off the

part-time editor, and reduced its full-time Administrator to part-time status. These financial difficulties were relieved somewhat by the theatre's commercial success in the fall.

In addition, the organization was still struggling to engage its membership and make its structure function more efficiently. For example, there were renewed complaints about members failing to perform their duties or aiding in external organizing efforts and of becoming too focused on the activities as ends in themselves, losing sight of their original purpose. The problems detected within the Center's structure reflected, in part, the unwillingness of many members to involve themselves in its participatory democracy. For example, they reveal that the various units within the organization were not meeting often enough, that lines of authority were unclear, that the Artistic Director was carrying too much of the administrative responsibility and that there was, again, confusion regarding the overall structure and the membership's role in it. In short, as one participant at the time griped: "The governing body [membership] of the organization isn't governing."

Because of complications with its structure and fear of becoming too dependent on its CETA workers, as well as its stated intention to return to an all-volunteer teaching staff in 1980, the Arts Center began an assessment of its overall operation, which resulted in a number of reports. One report focused on the organization's structure, but was generally too abstract to be of much

practical use.²⁶ It did make some substantive recommendations that were adopted by the membership, such as decentralizing the "workload and responsibility" of the Center and clarifying the duties of the Artistic Director and the Administrator. However, in concentrating on resolving the structural problems of the organization, this account made only passing reference to the importance of volunteers to support it.

And as a volunteer organization, it must be remembered that our ability to work for the Center is, by definition, limited. It will take more of us working longer together to communicate and perform a task than in a salaried organization. Therefore, particular attention must be paid to how we communicate and cooperate.²⁷

Another organizational analysis stressed the group's need to "clarify" its structure, but also emphasized the exhaustion of members and financial instability as problems.²⁸ The main result of the Center's 1980 self-examination was a declaration to once again diffuse responsibility within the organization by refining its structure and to reinspire as well as rebuild its membership.

Moves Toward Professionalism and Pragmatism and Their Effects

By 1981, the Irish Arts Center appeared to be overwhelmed by its growing activity and responsibility. The workshop program was in disarray with classes and enrollments in sharp decline. An analysis of the program determined that it was generally disorganized with a makeshift curriculum and an inadequately trained staff of instructors. In turn, the deterioration of the workshop program affected the

Center's work program which relied on student volunteers to assist the organization. In addition, the summer Irish language study program in Ireland was found to be mismanaged and understaffed, and the theatre, although commercially successful, had little membership support. There was also growing criticism concerning the artistic quality of the Center's performances by members as well as other interested observers in the Irish community. Performers representing the organization at various events were judged to be unprepared or poorly trained. All of these problems were aggravated by, or at least partly the result of, limited funds. The Arts Center was in a continuing struggle to maintain a cash flow and balance its budget, which had grown to \$89,000. This persistent financial strain prompted the Artistic Director to say in exasperation:

I think it is time for us to make an all out effort to raise enough money for our work, that we won't have to worry next June if we'll make it through the summer; that we won't have to lay off staff in midstream; that we won't have to throw a siamsa together quickly to raise some money; that we won't have to freeze for weeks because we don't have enough money to get another delivery of oil or that we won't have to worry whether this play will be financially successful enough so we can do it. We never seem to be able to get our heads above water enough to focus entirely on our art and what we want to be saying.²⁹

The Center's difficulties in 1981 were also partly due to the loss of five full-time staff in September, when CETA funding expired. As the Administrator warned at the time, such a significant loss would have to be compensated for by much greater efforts on the part of volunteers.

While there is no cause for panic, obviously we cannot absorb the loss of five positions without serious effects in the long run. Much greater dependence on members, volunteers, and the work program will be necessary.³⁰

In attempting to address its problems in 1981, the Center concentrated on improving the artistic quality of the programs. It was agreed that the organization's primary goal in 1981-82 would be the artistic development of all its programs. There were a number of reasons for this. First, many in the organization were particularly stung by comments questioning the artistic merit of its programs and productions. This criticism undermined the Center's claim to being a legitimate representative of Irish art in America which could affect its ability to attract funding and compete with other artists in the Irish community. Thus, even though the group defined itself as an amateur arts organization, by performing in public (often for a fee) it became subject to the critical scrutiny of others in the Irish community. In recognition of this, an assessment of the music and dance program cautioned that: "Standards have to be set for people representing ACS, and such standards must be objectively applied."³¹

The Center also emphasized artistic development in 1981, to improve the workshop program on which it depended as its main source for new members and volunteers. There was a consensus that the quality of the classes offered had declined, leading to lower enrollments. Pressure was also coming in the form of renewed calls from students and members for more advanced instruction. Thus, in

order to satisfy all these needs, the organization established a three-year plan to become the focus of Irish art in America at both professional and amateur levels.

However, these ambitious plans required individuals with the skills and training to implement them. Since the Center had few volunteer instructors with such experience, it began to hire them. Thus, in 1982, it hired four instructors for its music and dance program and two more to teach language. In actuality, the Arts Center had been paying some of its teaching staff since 1978, a policy which had been intended as a short-term solution to the problem of producing its own experienced volunteer instructors. Since the Center was unable to do this, it continued to pay a limited number of its teachers. Because of both financial and ideological constraints, the organization could not significantly increase this small core of paid instructors. However, now there was increasing pressure for more expert instruction and the establishment of a more structured, rationalized curriculum. In addition, a part-time coordinator was hired to oversee the workshop program and there was growing sentiment in the membership for a fully professional, paid, teaching staff and a student fee schedule to pay for it. Finally, the Center hired a full-time professional theatre director to improve the quality of dramatic productions. Thus, the need to compete for audiences in the Irish community and to satisfy the growing demand for more expert

instruction by its members and students, and to compensate for their lack of participation in its democracy, pushed the Irish Arts Center further to professionalize its management and programs in 1982.

There were other signs of ideology giving way to pragmatism in the organization in 1982. For example, the magazine came under attack for being too political and unrepresentative of the Center's focus on cultural activities. As a result, the magazine was given a new name and management, with the mandate to stick to the traditional Irish arts. In addition, the Center's Irish language program in Ireland, which was having financial and administrative problems, was criticized for being a drain on the organization's resources.

The Irish Arts Center found itself in a dilemma. It was trying to accommodate various pressures to professionalize and rationalize its operations to develop further without losing sight of its original cultural and communitarian goals. However, these two aims--professionalization and rationalization of operations on the one side and retaining communitarian and cultural goals on the other--were not easily or readily reconcilable. Many members feared that the Arts Center would lose its "character" and become another bureaucracy. As one report warned:

These goals make us special. Our emphasis on "active participation," on "re-establishing Irish art, language, and culture as the everyday expression of the Irish people," as we sometimes put it, is unique. . . . These goals are our reason for being. Our activities should always reflect our goals above all else, and despite the various non-artistic pressures which affect us. If any

of our activities do not reflect our goals, we must seriously consider whether such activities should exist.³²

The push toward professionalization produced a backlash in 1983 as some members began to argue that it had become excessive, subverting the organization's populist approach to the arts. There were intense debates over issues such as paying teachers and charging fees for instruction. There were also charges that the membership was losing control of the theatre (which in 1983 claimed its first "fully professional production") to its new director and that the general emphasis on professionalism was fostering a competitiveness in the Center that was inimical to its communal values. In addition, there were complaints and confusion over some staff and members receiving salaries while others worked as volunteers. These criticisms continued and widened in 1983 to include allegations that the Administrator was acting in an arbitrary manner, undermining the Center's participatory democracy, and that the various departments were becoming isolated from one another, leading once again to fragmentation and a lack of unified focus within the organization.

The Administrator responded to his critics by saying that the organization had grown too large and complex to be run as a direct democracy. As a result, he argued, authority for most decisions had to be delegated. As he viewed it, the membership's role had evolved into one of primarily setting broad policy for the organization. The only alternative, the Administrator contended, was a

return to a simpler structure which would require reduction in the scope of the Center's activities.

As a result of the growing criticism of professionalism, a number of steps were taken to reassert the Arts Center's communitarian democracy. For example, it was ruled that free classes would become a principle of the organization, that the theatre be restored as a unit within the democratic process, and that all members take a more active role in the Center by getting involved in their areas again, meeting more often, and remaining mindful of the "vision and objectives of ACS."³³ Thus, measures taken to professionalize and bureaucratize the Center were resisted by the membership when these measures were seen as a threat to communitarian, cultural, and political aims.

However, this attempt in 1983 to once again revitalize the Center's participatory democracy was not successful, in part because the membership did not respond to calls for renewed activism. Thus, few members volunteered to provide any input into theatre, and the group's organizing efforts in the Bronx and Brooklyn received little support. Further, the Center's summer language program in Ireland had to be cancelled due to insufficient financial and human resources, and the perennial complaints about the administration and maintenance of the organization continued unabated.

Thus, the Arts Center's efforts to improve the quality of its programs, in large part to retain and enhance the loyalty of its

members, had the paradoxical effect of promoting their self-interest and the growing autonomy of the various programs. The result of the membership's continuing detachment from the Center's participatory democracy was the development of a professional and bureaucratic core to keep the organization going. Professionalization of the Center's staff and activities created conflict as some members argued that this violated the principles and spirit of the organization. Thus, the organizational and professional needs of the Arts Center were at variance with its communitarian beliefs, leading to dissent within its ranks. Unable to resolve its identity as an organization, in 1983 the Arts Center seemed to have reached an uneasy compromise. As the Artistic Director said:

Where do we want the organization to go from here? Do we continue towards "professionalism" or do we want to be a "grass roots organization?" My feeling is that we're aspects of both.³⁴

Conflict over the nature and purpose of the organization continued into 1984, with a repetition of complaints about the decline of participatory democracy, the growth of professionalism, and the increasing remoteness of the Center's programs from one another. Some leaders and members began to interpret the compartmentalization and increasing professionalization of certain activities, such as the theatre and magazine, as well as the trend to a more representative democracy, as the inevitable result of expansion and the growth of a more career-oriented membership less able to give as much time to the organization as earlier members. In similar fashion, the

Administrator argued that in order to remain viable and develop further, the Center would have to make some concessions toward bureaucratization and professionalization. The only alternatives, he asserted, would be to return to a much smaller and simpler communal structure or die slowly under the weight of an enlarged program of activities that the Center's shrinking cadre of activists could no longer support.

Notwithstanding the growth of bureaucracy and professionalism, in 1984 the Center was still an overburdened organization in a continuing battle to motivate a passive membership, increase the quality of its programs, and survive financially. It was caught in a conflict between its principles and the need to survive and compete as an arts organization. Coupled with its expansion since the mid-1970's, this put the group in the position of constantly trying to catch up with its increasing responsibilities. The outcome was a recurring set of problems as the Center's resources proved inadequate to its needs.

Thus, in 1985, even though the Arts Center's budget had grown to \$167,000 and it had an administrative staff of four (three full time and one part time), it was still contending with problems relating to its structure and lines of authority within it, the quality of its programs, the efficiency of its operation, and non-support by members and students. More specifically, the workshop program had deteriorated once again, and was determined to be poorly organized

and administered with a generally inexperienced staff of teachers. Again, it was agreed that someone be hired to manage the program on a part-time basis. In addition, two artistic consultants were hired to devise a curriculum for music and dance classes and to instruct advanced students. By 1985, renewed concern for artistic standards and the difficulty of producing its own qualified musicians, led the Center to hire professional musicians to represent it at most of its performances. Tension and conflict remained between the goals of excellence in the arts and popular and casual participation in them.

Despite, or perhaps because of the Center's problems in 1985, the Administrator defined expansion as a major organizational goal. This was to be supported by the aggressive pursuit of additional grant aid. In requesting membership endorsement of expansion efforts, the Administrator argued that without further grant support, the organization would collapse within two years. Although the membership approved this request, no major grant money materialized. However, the group did receive \$28,000 to underwrite cultural programs in the boroughs outside Manhattan. It was hoped (vainly) that these cultural programs would serve as the basis for establishing "chapters" of the Irish Arts Center in the boroughs. Expansion efforts in 1985 were also to be directed toward all of the Center's internal cultural programs, except for theatre. However, lack of financial and membership support prevented this.

As before, in 1985 the Arts Center employed various strategies, such as social activities and direct appeals for help, in the attempt to draw members and participants closer to the group. They were largely unsuccessful and morale sank to what the leadership regarded as an all-time low. Membership meetings became fewer and participation in them declined. The leadership vowed to reverse this trend and offer a clear sense of direction and purpose to the membership.

However, by 1986 the Arts Center's core of activists had virtually disappeared and paid staff was relied on to carry out the bulk of its activity. For example, an administrator was hired to direct music and dance programs and others were paid to produce the Center's magazine. With the further professionalization of its staff and operation, the organization focused more on raising money by hiring a part-time professional fundraiser.³⁵

Although the Center's leadership had taken significant steps toward the establishment of a bureaucratic structure, it remained committed to participatory democracy (at least in a more restricted form) as well as other original goals of the organization. For example, the leadership was concerned that the Center might become a staff-run organization. In response to the membership's request for clarification of the definition of a member, the leadership reasserted participation in the Center's democracy as the essential condition for membership. In addition, efforts were still being made to recruit new members and volunteers. Despite some modest

success in stimulating the interest of some individuals, these attempts had little lasting effect. Finally, in keeping with the Center's goal of reaching out to other cultural groups, the leadership initiated a series of concerts highlighting minority artists. Thus, while in many respects the Center's leaders promoted the bureaucratization and professionalization of the organization, they also checked this process through their continuing broad commitment to the original goals of participatory democracy, amateur participation in the Irish arts, and social and political activism.

By 1987, the Center's paid staff had assumed responsibility for most of its programs. While it could still attract volunteers to teach many of its classes and support a specific event, it was generally unable to get them to participate more broadly in the organization. For all practical purposes the Arts Center's participatory democracy ceased to exist in 1987. There have been no organization-wide membership meetings, although indications of renewed activism in particular programs have been encouraged. To date, this has not gone beyond the stage of exploratory meetings focused around a particular activity or event.

In the course of its development over the last eighteen years, from a loosely knit band of social and political activists to one of the highest funded white ethnic organizations in New York State, the Irish Arts Center has had to face a number of problems. Most notable was the tension between organizational imperatives and the attempt

to operate as a participatory democracy. This can be seen in the repeated confusion regarding the organization's structure and lines of authority within it as well as the attempts to reform it. It is also reflected in the frequent complaints surrounding the administration and maintenance of the organization.

Another recurring issue for the Arts Center has been the conflicts engendered by the conflicting ideologies of professionalism and amateurism. This can be seen in the demands and pressures for more expert training in the arts and the opposition to it, and in the tendency of the different programs to assume directions of their own.

There were also conflicts and tensions between those who wanted to use Irishness as a base for larger social and political purposes, and those who had a more circumscribed view of ethnicity. This is indicated by the repeated difficulty in gaining sustained membership support for outreach efforts and other activist aims.

At one level, these conflicts, tensions, and contradictions are expressed in the differing motivations various members brought with them when they joined the Arts Center. The motivations of individual participants and the different directions in which they pointed organizational policy provides us with a basis for the analysis of these problems.

Notes

1. "An Claidheamh Soluis" is Gaelic for "sword of light" and was chosen as part of the Center's name for its symbolic value. As one organizational account put it: "[it] was an ancient symbol in Irish mythology which was said to appear when Irish people were in trouble. Now it is the rich and varied culture of the Irish that is endangered. Eight hundred years of colonial occupation, combined with the more recent influences of mass technological entertainment as well as the general process of assimilation that occurs in America have taken their toll" (Minutes, February 18, 1978).
2. All names are pseudonymous.
3. Irish Arts Center, Minutes of Membership Meetings, May 3, 1975, "Membership Committee Report," p.1. Hereafter minutes of these organization-wide membership meetings will be referred to simply as "Minutes," to distinguish them from the minutes of particular programs in the Center.
4. George Gent, "Irish Arts Center -- A Proud Beginning," New York Times, December 7, 1972, p.72.
5. At this stage, the only formal structure in the Arts Center was its Board of Directors, which consisted of the few remaining founders and some later activists. About once a year, the core activists chose a Director by consensus to represent the group.
6. While the Center was receiving some grant aid, its activity was largely self sustaining at this point.
7. Minutes, May 3, 1975.
8. Ibid.
9. S. D. Poole, "Irish Renaissance," Irish Echo, November 15, 1975, p.17.
10. Minutes, May 3, 1975. "Preamble: History of the Music Area of ACS."
11. Minutes, November 7, 1976, "Director's Report to Organizing Committee on Planning."

12. Litir Nuacht [Newsletter], May, 1976.
13. Bloody Sunday refers to the day in January, 1972, when British troops killed thirteen unarmed demonstrators in an attempt to break up a civil rights and anti-internment meeting in Derry, Northern Ireland.
14. Minutes, May 22, 1976.
15. Minutes, November 7, 1976, "Director's Report to Organizing Committee on Planning."
16. Minutes, October 23, 1977.
17. Minutes, September 4, 1977.
18. Minutes, November 12, 1977.
19. Ibid.
20. Minutes, October 13, 1979, "Director's Report to the Membership."
21. Minutes, June 2, 1979.
22. Minutes, July 21, 1979 and September 8, 1979.
23. Minutes, October 13, 1979, "Director's Report to the Membership."
24. Minutes, April 29, 1979.
25. Minutes, October 25, 1980, "Director's Report to the Membership."
26. Minutes, October 25, 1980, "Structure Report."
27. Ibid., p.1.
28. Minutes, June 28, 1980, "Planning Committee Report to the Membership."
29. Minutes, September 24, 1981, "Director's Report to the Membership."
30. Ibid., "Administrator's Report on Loss of CETA Funding, September, 1981."
31. Minutes, November 17, 1981. "Rince Ceol [Music and Dance]: Evaluation of the Workshop Program."
32. Minutes, June 19, 1982, "Development Unit Report: Summary of Our Organization's Structure," p.9.

33. Minutes, April 16, 1983.
34. Ibid., "Director's Report to the Membership."
35. By 1986, the Center's budget had grown to \$230,000, of which \$100,000 came from grants.

Chapter 2

MOTIVATIONS OF MEMBERS OF THE IRISH ARTS CENTER

The motivations of those who initiated this movement were diverse. They included a commitment to participatory democracy, with all its implications for reaching out to minority groups; the revival of traditional Irish culture in America as a prelude to an Irish nationalist movement; a rejection of the "stage Irishman" stereotype; and an effort to separate the organization from IRA politics. Other and later participants were motivated by an interest in music, dance, theatre, the publication of a magazine, language studies, and Irish history. This complex of motives as a totality underlies the development of conflicts among the participants over the direction in which the organization should go and conflicts between and within segments of the overall program.

I have separated the members¹ into three groups in order to illustrate the different motivational orientations represented by each. First, there are those members who were attracted primarily by the political and communitarian values of the Center, as illustrated by its earlier participants. The second group's interest was guided by a desire to develop themselves professionally, and has been present at all stages of the Center's history. The third group was drawn into the Center mainly by the appeal of its programs and activities, and tends to be more representative of the organization's later and present-day membership.

Social and Political Activists and their Motivations²

One of the Irish Art Center's first activists who was motivated chiefly by its politics and emphasis on community, and who helped shape its ideology in this regard, was John Finn. Finn had a background in political and social activism before coming to the organization in 1972. As a college student in the 1960's, he had done some tutoring in Harlem and participated in his school's local community program. He then became interested in black culture and civil rights, and went to Chicago in 1968 as a Vista volunteer to organize in the black community. Finn's interest in black culture spurred him to investigate his Irish heritage, and when he went to the opening of the Arts Center in 1972, he had been thinking of organizing a similar group himself.

One sign of Finn's commitment to the Center was his willingness to quit his job and move in with Jim Dowd, one of its founders, in order to become a full-time organizer for the nascent organization. Finn believed strongly in creating an awareness of Irish culture in America, as well as in reaching out to other ethnic groups through art: "It was very important for us that we have a good relationship with black and Puerto Rican and all the ethnic groups in New York."

Finn also embraced the Center's attempt to dissociate itself from the Irish stereotype and the image of the Irish as racists and political conservatives. In addition, he was dedicated to the Center's participatory democracy:

We had great debates in the membership. It was a wonderful place to be in terms of getting people's ideas on any number of subjects out. You had very articulate, thoughtful, ideological and artistic people who were struggling with one thing or another; all trying to express themselves, to put all of that stuff into ideas in terms of which direction the Center would go. And that the membership was the guiding light of the Center. It was a membership organization in which the membership really decided what happened. Any decision that was made anywhere in the organization could go right back to the membership and be changed over if the membership so decided.

Joe Bray, another early activist, was drawn to the Arts Center mainly out of a sense of alienation from American culture and society. The Center's definition of Irishness provided him with an alternative culture with which he could more readily identify:

My feeling was that American culture brought on things like Vietnam. Being from a working class background, the feeling that the only way to get ahead in American society would be to adopt the speech, life-styles, and clothes of the dominant culture. I was just enough of a Bolshevik. Never that interested in getting ahead I guess. I was just very disaffected from America. But it was certainly part of the counter culture. A lot of it is the children of immigrants' inferiority feelings to America: "Well, you don't like me, I don't like you either." It was that thing. But it was nice to be, "Hey, here I'm involved with, you know, a movement that is different from America, different from the Western European tradition."

Bray was also committed to the organization's notions of voluntarism, participatory democracy, and amateur participation in the arts. Impressed by the Center's potential, he gave up his job to join the group full time:

Then, again, there was the idea that this was going to be a mass movement so that any day now it would just blossom and we would be needed. We shouldn't be doing anything but the Irish Arts Center. We were getting these communal notions that what we'll do if we need to,

we'll take jobs and we'll give the Arts Center all our money. We'll just take enough to live off. We were getting very communally oriented.

Paul Dunne also was an initial participant predominantly motivated by the Center's political and communitarian approach to the arts. In 1974, he became the organization's theatre director in order to pursue his art without the restrictions imposed on him in the commercial theatre:

Although I was making a living in the commercial theatre, there were certain artistic values that I was interested in that couldn't be realized in the more commercial context. I was interested in whether they could be realized through this kind of collectivist approach. . . . All we were trying to do was formulate a concept to do this artistic work in some, quote, kind of supportive environment without money.

Dunne's artistic values included a concern that the plays chosen for production reflect the history and experience of the Irish people in their attempt to maintain their cultural identity. These values also embraced the notion of democratic participation in the arts:

That was a basic concept for us, that artists were going to make the decisions. That's what we used to fight over. We used to fight over artistic development in terms of choice of plays.

Dunne was also willing to give most of his time in order to accomplish the goals of the Center: "I would say that there were some of us prepared to work 24 hours a day to realize what we wanted to artistically." Mary Clancy was another important player in the

Center's historical development. Initially, the Arts Center appealed to her in a personal way:

Basically how I got involved was through the personal relationships with people. That people appreciated that I was a valuable human being and that I had something to offer and that I was willing to offer it. That was something I had not encountered before. . . . So you didn't have to be any expert, and they encouraged you. So I tried things that I had never tried before. I never played an instrument before. I never danced. I never acted in a play. I've done just about everything in the Center that there was to be done. And this was because people encouraged me by telling me I could do it.

But as Clancy became more active in the organization, she began to adopt many of its ideas. For example, she supported attempts to relate to minority groups, especially American Indians. In 1974, she joined a group led by Jim Dowd on a four and one-half month cross-country trip to visit American Indian reservations. This is how she explained her purpose in going:

I live in this country and I'm interested in my roots and in promoting the maintenance of my culture and that I have to be able to relate to the maintenance of the native culture of this country or I'm the same as the English government [and] what they did to the people of Ireland.

Clancy also came to identify with the nationalist movement in Northern Ireland, eventually joining a group in support of prisoner's rights over there. In addition, she became a strong advocate of membership participation:

Another thing the Center taught me, particularly through membership meetings, is that ten hands are better than one. And if you can pick out the good and smart things that all the people say and the different viewpoints, and pull them all together. If you can do that and not let your personal stuff get in the way, but really work toward

the common good you're all going for, you come up with brilliant stuff and you make a lot of progress. I've seen that constantly, which is why I have a great belief in the broad membership deciding things. Not that when it's necessary somebody shouldn't take authority.

Clancy's attachment to the Arts Center grew so strong that she too left her job and moved in with Jim Dowd to devote all of her time to the group. As she said, "I got to the point where it so filled my life that I moved out of my house and just moved into Brooklyn and quit my job."

Clancy, Dunne, Bray, and Finn helped form part of a nucleus around Jim Dowd, which became the basis of the Irish Arts Center in the early 1970's. Disenchanted with American culture and society, they looked to traditional Irish culture and art for a more meaningful way to live. They were also social and political activists who wanted to use culture and the arts to politicize Irish Americans about Northern Ireland, to relate to minorities, and to establish a communitarian democracy. In pursuit of these aims, some gave up their jobs and lived together to save money and have more time for organizing. Whatever their particular situations, these individuals were united in their vision of the Center as an expression of their social and political activism. But there were also a number of other early participants in the organization who were motivated by other reasons.

Musicians and Actors and their Motivations

Music was the Arts Center's first activity and it eventually became very successful in attracting audiences. But in order to attract people, the music program required some professional or semi-professional musicians. Some of these musicians chose to participate further in the organization, mainly because of a professional interest in Irish music. One notable example was Michael Kane. Although he was very active in the Center and identified with some aspects of its political and communitarian program, Kane's chief concern was in a career as a musician. And while he was willing to teach and perform for free to establish the group, he expected to be paid after that:

I was sympathetic to the cause of Irish nationalism. . . But on the other hand, I wanted to be paid. I'd been sort of paid off and on. I had kind of stopped by own personal story. I was getting better and better at what I had done and I had invested a lot of time and energy. That had been one of the things on my personal agenda, coming to the Center to become a cultural worker for this movement. Not to become rich off it, but to get remuneration for my services. . . . The basic idea of the people who were more into organizing and more politically oriented was that it was kind of a necessary evil to pay some musicians to keep them around, but their students would become teachers.

Kane advocated charging tuition for classes, paying teachers, and verifying their competency as well. But, according to him, this ran counter to the Center's desire for a free school of amateur artists with a mission to teach the Irish arts for free, to as many people as possible:

I basically felt they wanted quantity versus quality. They did not want a core of salaried professional musicians. . . . They wanted to control the thing by having as many people teaching as possible regardless of their competency.

While Kane initially had some commitment to the precepts of the Arts Center, his participation was motivated mainly by a career interest in Irish music.

There were also a number of individuals attracted to the Irish Arts Center early on predominantly because of a professional interest in its theatre. One was Brenda Sheehy, a professional actress who began acting there in 1974. Sheehy was perplexed and frustrated by the group's communal approach to running its theatre, which, she said, resulted in abrupt policy changes affecting the quality of plays produced:

There'd be a marvelous play and then there'd be a change. It would be decided that nobody could be in the plays unless they were a member and they were learning Irish and they were sweeping out the place. Consequently, the choice of actors was kind of limited. Then there was casting by committee. . . . At one point somebody suggested that it would be anti-democratic to have our names on the playbill. I said, "You cannot ask an actor to do a showcase and not have a resume or something in the playbill. The audience wants to know who they are, forget anything else." And of course, none of us ever got paid. So it was all done for love.

Sheehy disagreed with running the theatre, as well as the rest of the organization, as a collective, contending that it often resulted in poor theatrical productions and overall inefficiency. She found membership meetings particularly irksome:

They [meetings] just lasted and lasted. You know how the Irish can talk. They'd last for three or four hours. It just seemed to be going round and round in circles a lot of the time. There wasn't too much knowledge of Roberts' Rules of Order which would have helped. . . . I finally got fed up with going to those meetings.

Although Sheehy has had a life-long interest in Irish culture, and supported the Center's aim to revive it in America, her participation in the group has been largely limited to its theatre. Her concern for acting overcame her annoyance at the way the organization was run: "I went right on doing whatever came up because I loved the Center and I wanted it to prosper, and a good part is a good part."

Sheehy and Kane are representative of a number of individuals who began to take part in the Irish Arts Center's programs and activities in its earliest phase, principally out of a desire to develop themselves as professional artists, and to find a forum in which to do it. Their focus on artistic quality and becoming paid professionals put them in contention with other members for whom the artistic programs were mainly a vehicle for social and political activism. Thus, even at this early stage in the organization's development, there were conflicts emerging over its role and function.

Other Activity-Oriented Members and Their Motivations

There were also many people attracted to the Arts Center's programs early on for non-professional reasons. They were often looking to resume an interest in one of the art forms in a relaxed social setting. One was Teresa Lysaght. She had learned Irish step

dancing as a child and worked many years as a professional dancer in variety theatre. Though she had been retired from dancing for quite some time, the encouragement and appreciation she received at the Center induced her to take it up again for recreation:

I went up there one night and there was a crowd of girls ceili dancing. I came in and enjoyed the music and listening to the girls and all of that. It was like a little party mood and everybody sang a song and _____ played the harp and somebody else did a poem. I got up and danced them a jig and they liked it. And then all the girls got around me and said, "Oh come on and teach us, come on and teach us." And I started off teaching every Monday night, every two weeks. And then it went to every week. And then I was here twice a week. I thought I had finished dancing and this gave me incentive when the girls were so eager to dance. And I liked the crowd very much here.

Aside from teaching, Lysaght has performed in a variety of Center productions over the years and was once employed there as a CETA worker. In fact, the Arts Center has become the focus of her life. "I do very little else. My whole life is around the Center." But Lysaght's participation in the organization revolves around her interest in its activities, especially dance. She doesn't take a strong stand on any of the major issues that confront the Arts Center, such as increasing professionalism, paying teachers, and charging students. In general, she feels that the organization should try to accommodate all points of view. She has little interest in the group's participatory democracy, attending few membership meetings, and waiting eight years to become an official member: "Someone put my name up at one of the meetings that I wasn't even at myself. I always had it in my mind that I wanted to, but just never got around to it."

Lysaght was motivated mainly by the appeal of the Center's programs and the social possibilities they provided.

Agnes Cleary is another example of someone who was attracted principally by the Arts Center's array of activities and the chance to socialize. As a new arrival to the city, she found the Center very inviting:

I'd come from the suburbs and just moved into the city and so I wanted to have some activities that would enable me to meet people and do things that I enjoyed. . . . It was very difficult to get to know people. There really wasn't an opportunity to meet people through my job. The other activities I pursued did not provide that kind of opportunity to get to know people and become friendly with them. It's just a totally different set-up that the Center provides.

Inspired by the group's weekly music session, she renewed her interest in Irish dancing, which she had learned as a child: "I've always loved dancing. It's a passion that I have in life, and that I still have. And the seisuins [music sessions] just provided the opportunity to learn all those dances. It was wonderful." Cleary soon became more active in the Center, taking and teaching classes, dancing in its productions, and helping out administratively. By the time she became a member, she was spending most of her free time there. But in spite of her high level of participation, Cleary did not subscribe to such of the Center's policies as free classes, volunteer teachers, and rule by direct democracy. She too found membership meetings interminable and purposeless, and was generally disappointed by the way in which the organization was run:

It was difficult for me to understand the way things were run at the Center because I had come straight from school into the work force at _____ where there are deadlines and deadlines are met. There are activities that are planned for rationally and people work toward carrying out whatever goals and activities have been set. And so when I became more familiar with the Center, in the way that things were run, I became somewhat disenchanted. Because it didn't make any sense to me that membership meetings would be held and people would ramble on for hours. There would be no real accomplishments at the meetings. And it took me a long time to figure out that it was just total disorganization and, I guess, an inability for the people who are really running the organization, to realize that the world does not work in the way that the Irish Arts Center does.

Aside from her dislike of participatory democracy, Cleary rejected the Center's position that politics and art are inextricably intertwined: "I think you can exist without paying a whole lot of attention to that particular aspect of the culture or that particular aspect of the Irish people." Cleary's main motivation for participating in the Arts Center grew out of her desire for a social outlet and the chance to resume her interest in Irish dancing.

Tracy Purcell is another illustration of a member who was chiefly drawn to the Arts Center in the early 1970's by the allure of its program and social life. She found its traditional Irish music sessions particularly appealing:

Music was the thing that drew a lot of people in. A good seisuin at the Center was the nicest kind of social experience you could have almost anywhere. A great deal of friendship, wonderful dancing -- make a fool of yourself, it didn't matter. It was all like a wonderful little nest to live in.

Purcell worked as a volunteer for the organization, but began to feel exploited by the increasing demands made on her. She describes the Center's organizers as a tightly knit group who were suspicious of those who were less dedicated to the organization:

It was very definitely implied that if you didn't give a lot of time, you somehow weren't committed to the goals of the Arts Center. It was somehow considered immoral to have other things to do in your free time.

Purcell was also generally uninterested in membership meetings and organizational debates, and felt the Center had a "dogmatic," "romantic," and "anti-intellectual" view of Irish culture. Purcell's chief motivation for participating in the Arts Center was the appeal of its music and dance programs and the socializing that went with it.

Purcell, Cleary, and Lysaght are early examples of members drawn to the Irish Arts Center primarily because of a recreational interest in its programs and activities. As a result, they were less concerned with or supportive of the social and political activism they found there. Like the professionals, their concentration on the artistic programs as an end in themselves put them at odds with the activists in the organization. Thus, these various reasons members had for participating in the organization formed the basis for the development of conflicts over its purpose.

The Development of Organizational Conflicts between
Political Activists, Professional Careerists,
and Recreationally Oriented Members

Almost since its beginning, when the Irish Arts Center consisted mainly of a Monday night music session and a few workshops in borrowed spaces around Manhattan, it was attracting a number of individuals who didn't fully share the political and communitarian motives of the early organizers. Some of them became very active in the organization, others participated more intermittently, while more remained on the periphery.³ By the beginning of 1975, many of these people began to demand a greater say in the Arts Center and the way in which things were run. This is how one insider described the emergence of this group within the organization:

When we had an office and we had more activities like the plays, we had jobs for people to do. And we built up a mailing list for clerical work to do, grant proposals to be typed, stuff like that. There just came to be a body of people who saw themselves as Irish, were in fact, Irish. I mean, a lot of them, their parents were born in Ireland. They looked at the Irish Arts Center that they were attracted to and they looked at the people in the leadership and what they represented, how they were living, and how they were being treated basically. They felt they had no voice in this organization but they were being asked to stuff envelopes and stuff like that. You know, it wasn't a membership organization at that time at all. It was just the directorship was passed on from one person to another person. But basically, what the people's complaint was that they weren't being represented and they wanted it to be a membership organization and Jim [Dowd] claimed this is what he was waiting for, for people to demand power.

While both camps, the political and social activists and those with professional or recreational interests in the Center's programs,

were in favor of the creation of an official membership with a voice in the organization, debate arose over what the membership criteria should be. And the debate in the spring of 1975 over the membership criteria reflects the different set of motivations each group had for participating in the Center. The political and social activists wanted an active membership that would contribute a significant amount of time to the organization, participate directly in its running, and be engaged in learning an art form. As one of their leaders said:

The idea was an Irish arts center. There'd have to be some movement toward Irish art. Willing to do an equitable share of the work and dues, twelve dollars a year. But you had to participate, that was the idea. And you had to move towards Irish arts because we're an Irish arts center. The opposition group did not want to do this.

In opposition was a group of individuals drawn to the Center's activities primarily for entertainment or career enhancement. They wanted a more traditional kind of voluntary organization in which the membership would be relatively passive, with a board of elected officers to represent them. They viewed the attempt to institute a more activist membership as a way of barring them from participating in the Arts Center. As one principal in this faction said about his supporters:

They were finding themselves being pushed out of the Center by the Gaeltachts⁴ and the communal self interests. They [the activists] just found it easier to exclude people who differed with them. And a lot of the kids who were there for the purposes of trying to find their roots, found themselves in a situation where they weren't being allowed to do that.

Those who emerged as the leaders of this group typified activity focused members, ranging from casual participants to regular volunteers. One was Peter Casey, who described the nature of his participation in the Center this way: "I was interested in the organization, not in terms of its organizational structure, but in terms of its performances." Casey's involvement with the Arts Center was essentially limited to his attendance at its weekly music session. From Casey's perspective, the new membership requirements proposed by the Center's leadership had a sect-like quality about them:

They had a very clear and closed concept of what it means to be a member of the Center. In effect, you were joining a cell. You were becoming part of a very closed secret, kind of organization in which the inner workings are not to be questioned.

Because of his casual interest in the Center's programs, mainly as a spectator, Casey resisted the activists' proposed requirements for membership.

Jim Leahy was another leader in the opposition to the demand for a more active membership. Like Casey, his participation in the Arts Center was limited to its music programs. He went basically for entertainment: "I would not suggest that my commitment or my area of expertise lay in cultural activities; it didn't. I was willing to enjoy, and to a lesser degree, learn on whatever time was available to me." Leahy was against the move toward an activist membership on the grounds that it would eliminate the Arts Center's more casual participants:

I think the establishment of the criteria were done in such a way as to exclude the vast majority of people who were going to the seisuins as observers and only allowed those participants who were in the vast minority at that point, to run the Irish Arts Center.

Thus, while Leahy supported the Center's stance on Northern Ireland politics, he renounced the communitarian impulse behind the call for an activist membership as undemocratic. He was trying to protect the interest of individuals like himself who were mainly drawn to the Center's activities for diversion or professional development.

Frank Costello, another leading opponent of required activism, had also worked as a volunteer at the Arts Center. He liked participating in music and dance activities, and believed in a more accessible kind of organization: "I thought at the time that people should be allowed to contribute in any way they chose . . . I thought things ought to be kept open to the general population." At the same time, Costello did not think the development of a core of activists in the Center was necessarily detrimental to wider participation, and could even see a rationale for it:

There was a Celtic commune and dropping off everything they learned in this kind of Anglicized society. That wasn't necessarily a bad thing either. . . . I'm sure that Jim [Dowd] felt he needed that kind of intense situation where people would live the thing.

While Costello was sympathetic with the nationalist cause in Northern Ireland, and saw little wrong with the organization's activist core, he felt the imposition of more stringent membership requirements was

too restrictive. He wanted to be able to enjoy the Center's programs and contribute to the Arts Center in his own way.

Frank Grimes also figured prominently in the resistance to mandatory membership participation. He too was active in the Center as a volunteer and had been drawn in by the appeal of its music and dance programs.

I'd hear about some musical sessions. I would go to these. I knew at that point I didn't have the discipline to be a musician. I loved the music, but I wasn't a musician. I started to feel some frustration at not being able to participate in it. You know, I loved the music, why not try and learn some steps. The Irish Arts Center was sponsoring adult ceili dancing and so I got involved in that.

Grimes, who had gone to college in the late 1960's, looked to Irish culture and the Arts Center out of "a sense of shame of being American with the experience in Vietnam." But in spite of his identification with social protest, Grimes felt the Arts Center was becoming too political and was failing in its cultural mission:

Many of us felt it was too left wing at that point and not doing enough to reach Irish and Irish Americans, relating to them, going out and finding them. . . . It was left wing, I think, in terms of politics and republicanism, almost Marxist. These kinds of things I felt very uncomfortable with.

Grimes was principally attracted to the Center's music and dance programs as a recreational outlet. He resented what he saw as the politicization of Irish culture by the Center and the excessive demands of an activist membership.

Grimes, Costello, Leahy, and Casey all had as their primary motivation for participating in the Irish Arts Center their enjoyment of its music and dance programs. They represented a larger group of perhaps fifty or more individuals who were attracted to the organization's activities either as amateurs or professionals. When the Center's leadership and its supporters initiated steps to establish a formal membership in 1975, it came into conflict with these participants who found the proposed membership criteria too demanding and exclusive. A debate ensued as a result of the incompatibility of these two different sets of motives and the visions of the Center they produced. After many meetings of heated discussion and canvassing and caucusing by both sides, the political activists prevailed in the battle to define the Arts Center.

The Ascendancy of Social and Political Activists

Buoyed by its success against the challenge to its control of the organization in the spring of 1975, the Center's leadership and its supporters set about the task of establishing a formal structure with a renewed sense of optimism. They were heady times, according to older members who recall a strong sense of dedication and community in the group. During this period, a number of members lived together in an apartment near the Arts Center and were largely unemployed or working part-time, devoting all of their free time to the organization. This is how one member characterized the situation at the time:

When I came here first, very few people were working. There were a lot of wonderful musicians and a lot of people with great ideas. And there was a great spirit about the place. But one out of eight people I'd say had a job. And they had lots of time to put all this energy into this show and that show.

Another member recounts the group's esprit de corps in putting on a play then:

So maybe there were 25 people. So if you weren't in the play, maybe you were doing the sound, the lighting, the props for the house. You were one of it. It was always like that. Plus, it was doing it. You had to work the night before building the set until 3 a.m., paint it, whatever. Then you came back the next day and cleaned the whole joint because it was always a wreck. And then you did your parts in the play. And then you had a party. Then we'd play music and dance and have a wonderful party.

The Center's warm social environment, spirit of voluntarism, and ideals attracted a number of new members in the mid-1970's. One was Joan Hackett who first came into contact with the group in 1976. Although she was interested in learning Irish music and dance, the Arts Center had a broader appeal for her:

It was more than the music and the dance, the fact that they were working the way they were. That it was an idealistic group, and people believed in doing things for other people. The values that were here were not rooted in profit or image, or getting ahead -- what I'd come out of when I first came out of college. It was just turning into the careering and self-loving period when what counted was pursuing your own potential. But beyond that, just indulging yourself, being beautiful, decadent. . . . This [the Center] is something I felt much more comfortable in.

After taking some music and dance workshops, Hackett became very active in the organization and it assumed a central role in her life: "I used to be here almost every night. When I first got

involved, everything else fell by the wayside pretty much." Hackett was also fully committed to the active participation of the membership in running the Center and "really enjoyed talking and debating questions for hours and hours," at membership meetings. Also, she suggests that herself and other members were ideologically committed in the mid-1970's: "I think in those days practicality or pragmatism was sacrificed quite readily to what we believed in." But Hackett's enthusiasm for the Center's ideology did not include the Irish language or politics. While she considered Gaelic an important component of Irish culture, she was not interested in learning it or making it a priority. And she was not a political person: "My own interests were more music and art and not political questions." Hackett was more attracted to the communitarian aspect of the Arts Center which stressed mutual aid and voluntarism, which she saw as an antidote to the competitiveness and acquisitiveness of the larger society.

Ed Malvey was another member drawn to the Irish Arts Center's communal environment in 1976:

The thing I remember vividly about the early years, and of course I think it was a reflection of the 60's spirit to a certain extent, the Center was genuinely a community. People here were totally involved, not only in the sense of doing the activities here, but they were involved with each other as people. . . . I remember the first theatre performance I was ever at here opening night. Everybody that was in the organization was in that theatre. Up on the stage, there wasn't what they would call professional acting. A lot of people never had been in a play before, but it didn't make a bit of difference. What was up there you could see was a real commitment of people doing something that they really believed in.

Malvey became active in the Center and became so absorbed with it that he often longed to quit his job and give all his time to the group. He was a strong proponent of membership participation and supported amateur theatre produced by members of the Center: "I remember when I was director of the theatre my feeling was, let's go with our own people and do plays with just people involved in the organization." Malvey also believed very much in the importance of Gaelic to Irish culture and made a serious effort to learn the language himself and felt it should have been made a membership requirement when the Arts Center began:

It would have been great. It's almost an impossible task. If that kind of foundation had been laid down, that if you wanted to be a member of this organization, you had to learn the language, you had to speak the language, and that the meetings were going to be conducted in the Irish language. Very hard to do considering where we are. I think it would have made the Center unique.

Although he enjoyed the Center's activities, Malvey was mainly motivated by its principles, which stressed participatory democracy, amateur participation in the arts, the revival of Gaelic, and an identification with Irish nationalist politics. He spent a great deal of time at the Center in support of its activities, attending meetings and directing programs.

Steve Dempsey joined the Arts Center in 1976, primarily because of a radical political culture he sensed there. He had been interested in radical politics in college, but found it wanting there and was looking around for something more:

I started school in 1972, in . . .'s radical years, and peaked and then ebbed very dramatically while I was there. So there was a little bit of radical culture around. . . . But there wasn't a movement to tag along onto, and there wasn't any supportive radical culture. . . . I guess I was very eager for anything that would be intense and personal, have enough politics that it would feel like a deeper experience.

It was also in college that Dempsey first heard traditional Irish music and was enthralled by it. Shortly after moving to the city he read an advertisement for one of the Center's music sessions and went to see what it was like. He immediately felt that the organization had the cultural and political atmosphere he was searching for:

I looked around at this group and they all looked fairly unemployed and I felt at home. I never felt at home, when I was growing up. And I walked in the door and I thought, "This is the place for me." So very dramatically, I found a place where I could work, that had enough supportive culture, and that lovely music that I was so addicted to.

Dempsey immersed himself in the Arts Center, enrolling in classes and eventually teaching himself and working on its magazine, where he discovered "the perfect synthesis, for me, of radical politics that I'd gotten a taste in . . . , and Irish culture which I'd always been eager to take part in, altogether in this magazine."

Dempsey's interest in radical politics included a desire to see an Irish American cultural revival exported to Ireland in the service of nationalism:

. . . people had this long buried agenda that if we could get a genuine revival to take hold in New York that would eventually nourish and fuel a revival of the sort of

cultural politics in Ireland that would lead to electoral politics and revolutionary politics; the politics that would result in a united Ireland that would speak Irish and cherish its own culture.

Dempsey's interest in politics did not extend to the Center's participatory democracy. Although he attended membership meetings, he found them to be "endless marathon" affairs with too much organizational in-fighting. In his opinion, the organization's consensual democracy was basically unworkable: "Because what the Irish Arts Center is trying to do is fairly abstract, the democratic forms don't make much sense to me." Dempsey's predominant motivation for participating in the Center was his interest in radical cultural politics. The Arts Center provided him with the supportive environment and range of activities in which he could express himself this way.

Dempsey, Malvey, and Hackett are representative of those political and social activists who were dominant in the Irish Arts Center in the mid-1970's. While some were more interested in politics than community, they were most often the members who ran the organization during this time, doing most of its work, and participating in its communal democracy. But there were also other individuals who began to participate in the Irish Arts Center then, who were less enamored of its cultural politics.

Activity Oriented Members in the Mid-1970's

Although the communitarian spirit was reaching its apex in the Arts Center in the mid-1970's, there were still individuals coming

into the group whose primary focus was on the activities themselves. One of these individuals was Ray Flynn, who came to New York in 1976, "basically to get involved in theatre." After seeing a listing for a play at the Center in a local magazine, he went there and was impressed by the group's idealism:

There was a certain excitement about what was going on. There was a certain visionary quality to what was happening and people were operating with sort of larger goals than whatever selfish ones, kind of.

Flynn also had a strong interest in Irish culture and was a fluent Irish speaker, which made the Arts Center all the more appealing: "I had spent a year in Ireland and just was very interested in Irish theatre and Irish culture in general. So this was, I thought, the perfect place for me in a way."

Flynn became active in the Center's theatre and eventually served as its director. He also taught language classes. Although he went to membership meetings, he never became an official member of the organization because he resented having to pay dues, as he felt he was contributing enough to the Center in other ways:

To be a member there was this business of dues. And I would find that I would immediately not be able to afford to pay the dues to be a member. I was teaching here and working in the plays which I felt was plenty of contribution, not to mention being around here all the time. . . . And that time, even such as what I did, was never quite enough. I mean, the fact that I wasn't manning the phones in the office as well was a big problem, or sweeping the floor or that kind of thing. It was all clocked up in those days.

Aside from what he viewed as unreasonable demands on members, Flynn also disagreed with the Arts Center's practice of free classes and unsalaried teachers. Since students are no longer required to contribute their time to the Center in exchange for free classes, he sees no rationale for it. In addition, he feels that free classes carry a stigma: "If I go to take a lesson in something, I would be asked to pay for it. The message of giving this stuff away for free is devaluating it." Similarly, he believes the Center's teachers ought to be paid for their knowledge and expertise. After teaching as a volunteer for a number of years, Flynn demanded and received payment from the organization. He also became disenchanted with membership meetings because he felt they were undemocratic since the membership's role had been usurped by the machinations of the Center's staff.

Although Flynn had a deep interest in Irish culture, and was active in support of the nationalist movement in Northern Ireland, his commitment to the Arts Center's principles and policies was limited. His main concern in the Center and his life was acting. His participation in the organization revolved mainly around its theatre. He resented being called upon to do administrative and maintenance work. Flynn was first and foremost a professional actor, and this fact guided his participation in the Center.

There were other individuals drawn to the Irish Arts Center in the mid-1970's who had a more casual interest in its programs.

One example is John Conway. He first heard the Center's musicians playing in a pub and enjoyed the music so much that he inquired where he might hear more. Soon after, he started going to the Center's music sessions, enrolled in some music and dance classes, and eventually joined its ceili band performing in various programs. Besides the appeal of the music, the Arts Center was important to Conway as a way of exploring his Irishness and for self-development:

I had gotten very interested in my roots, many people did at that point. For me, it was the source of finding all about what it specifically means to be an Irish American and what's involved in it. And on a personal level, I was very shy and it really drew me out of myself, forced me to do a lot of things that I would have been reluctant to do under other circumstances such as get up in front of somebody and sing or play or whatever. Talk to different people and that sort of thing. So it really was a tremendous benefit to me in both of these ways.

Although the Arts Center was important in Conway's life, "I really felt it was central to my life," and he spent a good deal of his free time there, he never overextended himself: "I always felt that I was able to keep it at arms length and limit the amount of things I would be doing." One of the things he consciously avoided doing was attending membership meetings because he had no interest in the kinds of discussion that took place:

I got conned into going to one membership meeting. . . . It was very flattering that these people paid all this attention to me and asking me to come to meetings about new directions they wanted things to go in. I went to this meeting and I became a member. So I'm standing at this interminable meeting, hungover, freezing cold. Every time Jim [Dowd] would show up there would be quasi-reverential deference to him. And I wasn't around when Jim got the whole thing started and didn't really share in that.

He went into this sort of rhetorical questioning of someone: "Well, what are the Center's aims?" Then he would ask another question. I remember thinking to myself: "What the fuck am I standing here listening to this bullshit for." And that was the last meeting I ever went to.

Although he was active as a volunteer in the organization, Conway was not attracted by its participatory democracy or its politics in regard to Northern Ireland, at least not initially: "I wasn't particularly politically aware early on. I may have picked it up." His chief motivation for taking part in the Irish Arts Center was the appeal of its music and dance programs.

Richard Gavigan is another illustration of someone attracted to the activities of the Arts Center in the mid-1970's, mainly for enjoyment. He first went to the Center in 1976, to continue his interest in Irish dance. He gradually became more active in the organization out of a sense of "guilt" since students at the time were expected to do volunteer work in exchange for free instruction. Gavigan eventually became a central figure in the Center's music and dance program, but in spite of this, he waited a number of years before becoming a member. One reason was that he had little time for membership meetings, as well as feeling they weren't very productive:

I really didn't have much more time to spare and I felt it was a hollow gesture to become a member knowing I would never go to any membership meetings. . . . I have a constant battle with going to the damn meetings. They're so damn long and nothing ever seems to be resolved. You start an hour late and then you get these pontificators up there. That just drives me nut.

Gavigan also did not share the organization's special regard for the Irish language: "To me, Irish is one of the most convoluted languages I've ever heard in my life. I'm not really concerned about the language." He was also critical of what he saw as the tendency of the Arts Center to become too closely associated with Irish nationalist politics. But he did like the Center's notion of sharing cultural knowledge: "You come, and you learn for free, but you're expected to pass on your knowledge and give it freely to other people. And I like that. I think it's a nice idea." However, according to Gavigan, the reliance on volunteer teachers has its limits:

I think we need to pay teachers. Unfortunately, many times you'll take a class at the Center where the teacher is two lessons ahead of where you are and you're never going to get anywhere with that. . . . So I think it's critical that we pay teachers at the upper level.

Finally, Gavigan was also in favor of the organization remaining an amateur arts group and believed that the tendency toward professionalization was contrary to the organization's original purpose.

Gavigan's participation in the Arts Center was prompted primarily by his enjoyment of Irish music and dance. His contribution to the group was made in terms of his support for his favorite activities. Beyond this, he did not take part in the organization, especially its participatory democracy, which he found led to factionalism and disorder. Although some of the ideas behind the programs held some appeal for him, his focus was on the activities for recreation.

Gavigan, Conway, and Flynn are illustrative of those members who were principally motivated by an amateur or professional interest in the Irish Arts Center's programs in the mid-1970's. They were much less attracted to, and often were in disagreement with, the political and collectivist meanings attached to the activities. For example, all three were critical of some aspects of the Center's communitarian democracy. Thus, while the political and social activists were trying to implement their ideas in the mid-1970's, they had to contend with the re-emergence of members like Gavigan, Conway, and Flynn, who were either largely indifferent to or critical of them.

The growth in the number of members whose participation in the Arts Center was limited to their preferred activity became so great that it caused a crisis in the organization. It meant that relatively fewer members were fulfilling their obligations, resulting in an increasing burden for those volunteers supporting an expanding program of activities. This shrinkage of working members was severe enough to warrant a report on it in 1977, entitled "How to Check Our Dwindling Membership." The report noted the demoralization and strain resulting from this trend, and even characterized it as a threat to the organization's existence. However, the Irish Arts Center was sustained throughout the mid-1970's by the efforts of a small band of active members one participant called "a handful of heroes."

The Transformation of the Irish Arts Center's Membership
in the Late 1970's

By the late 1970's, the Arts Center's membership began to go through a gradual transformation, from a group marked by irregularly employed individuals with roots in the youth and counter cultures to one made up mainly of your career-oriented professionals. This change in the makeup of the membership has been noted by a number of veteran members. For example, one remarked: "It [the membership] definitely has changed. It used to be a band of long-haired hippies and unemployed people like that. And now definitely, I think they all have jobs." Another said: "It seems to have taken a real swing toward the nine to fivers in terms of lawyers, social workers, and accountants." In this account, one early activist sums up the evolution of the Center's membership:

There were traces of old anti-war sentiment in people at the Irish Arts Center when I came there. Lots of long hair, lots of people who were blissfully happy to collect unemployment rather than work. Lots of counter cultures or living arrangements. In fact, over the last few years the Irish Arts Center has made a transition from that kind of people to a group that's very professionally oriented. There's yuppies in the organization.

As these more career minded members entered the organization, many of the older members were leaving in order to focus more on their personal lives. But a few old-guard members remained and continued function as part of the Center's activist core. They were joined by several of the young urban professionals who became members of the Irish Arts Center in the late 1970's. However, these newer

members tended to be less committed to the political and communitarian motives of their predecessors and less able or willing to contribute as much time to the organization.

One of them was Anthony Hannon. He first went to the Arts Center in the fall of 1977 to take dance classes. He had a general interest in dance and found the Center socially appealing:

The influence was certainly with the dance. I've always been a dancer. And I've always enjoyed dancing. I think what keeps me around the Center and what got me there in the first place was the people and the environment. . . . It's a fun place to be.

Hannon gradually grew more active in the organization, teaching dance and becoming a member in 1979. He then served as director of the music and dance department and later as Artistic Director of the Arts Center. Having spent a number of years in left wing politics in the 1960's, Hannon was favorably disposed to a number of the Center policies. He liked the idea of reaching out to other ethnic groups, free classes, and the general progressive political atmosphere he discovered at the Center:

I think some of the early people at the Center had some sort of a socialist orientation. People take classes at the Center and rather than pay money, give time back. I thought that was a very nice idea. A concern about other minority groups. And go to great lengths to make men and women feel equal. . . . I felt that there was a certain political interest at the Center, a political enthusiasm that I liked and that I felt I could be part of.

However, there were other tenets of the Arts Center that Hannon disagreed with. One was its commitment to amateurism in the arts. He and some of his fellow dancers in the organization were

becoming more professionally oriented, dancing in competitions and for fees: "We're probably the best developed ceili group in the country right now." He believed the Center could still serve the needs of amateur artists but would have to move toward professionalism in order to survive:

Some people are afraid that moving in a professional direction is causing us to lose our ideals. . . . I'm a person who doesn't believe professionalizing forces us to lose. We've overemphasized one at the expense of the other. It's a source of tension. Most of the old guard, except for . . . seem to want to go back to the old days. . . . I don't want to lose what we had, but I think we have to move or we'll stagnate and die. Therefore, I think the move toward professionalism is a good one.

Besides his limited commitment to amateurism in the arts, Hannon also differed with early activists in the amount of time he gave to the Center. At his most active, he averaged about five to seven hours a week there, including classes. But increasing work demands have forced him to reduce that time: "I think it was mainly work. I work long hours. I start in the morning about nine-thirty, and I often times work till nine or ten o'clock at night and I'm burned out as much from work as anything." Despite his reduced participation in the organization, Hannon remains committed to dancing: "I've cut back on the number of hours I'm at the Center and the number of things I do at the Center. In terms of the intensity of what I do, I'm certainly as intense about my dancing now as I ever was."

Although he was a member of the Center's activist core, Hannon's commitment to the organization's political and communitarian

ideology was limited. He supported its notion of a participatory democracy, but wanted more professionalism in the arts, including the hiring of teachers and entering artistic competitions. While he was in favor of reaching out to minorities, he did not approve of the association of the Arts Center with Northern Ireland politics. Hannon's developing professional interest in dance put him in conflict with those members who viewed the Center as a place solely for amateur artists.

Michael Madden is another example of the career oriented individuals who joined the Arts Center's band of most active members in the late 1970's and early 1980's. He too did not fully share the set of motives that guided earlier activists. Initially, the opportunity to learn Irish dancing in a supportive environment drew Madden into the Center:

The dance is what hooked me. The dance came easy to me and I really enjoyed it and I really felt that it was something for me. . . . The thing that attracted me to the Center was that it is very non-judgmental and it's very non-competitive, nurturing. And I felt that there were so many people there encouraging me all the time to learn more when I didn't know a thing. . . . So I stuck with the Center basically because of free classes, and it was a social event, and that it was something that I enjoyed doing.

Madden began taking classes at the Arts Center in 1979, and started to participate more by doing various chores because he felt he had gotten so much from the organization that he wanted to give something back. He has served in a number of capacities over the years, but takes breaks from the organization when he feels

overwhelmed. Although he supported the Center's principle of required voluntarism and participated in its democracy, he went against the communitarian platform in favoring the goal of artistic excellence and charging students and paying teachers to attain it. However, he was torn on the issue of professionalism in the arts because he felt this trend was responsible for attracting people with the wrong kinds of motives to the organization:

I like the idea of people progressing to the highest point they can and being able to do it at the Center. On the other hand, there are people who come into the theatre, they star in a play for six weeks, and they're gone. They're off to Off-Broadway, or Broadway, and they're not connected with the Center except for that play. And I don't mean to be picking on the theatre, but that's more or less the most blatant example.

Although Madden basically supported the principles of the Irish Arts Center, there were a few important exceptions. For example, he favored professionalism in the arts to the extent of backing the goal of artistic excellence and charging students as well as paying teachers to achieve it. To this extent, he was in disagreement with those members advocating strict adherence to voluntarism and popular participation in the arts.

Madden and Hannon are characteristic of those young professionals who began to join the Irish Arts Center in the late 1970's. What distinguishes them from this larger group is that they became part of the organization's small band of most dedicated volunteers who have traditionally carried the major burden of running the Center. Even so, like some other earlier core activists, they also had a strong

interest in one of the art forms. Consequently, they came to value artistic excellence or professionalism in the activities, which was at variance with other members' interpretation of them as strictly amateur arts to be freely taught by volunteers. Thus, as before, even at the heart of the organization, there were members with mixed and diverse motives for participation, resulting in conflicting notions about the nature, role, and direction of the Irish Arts Center.

Mainstream Activity Oriented Members
in the Late 1970's and Early 1980's

a. amateur enthusiasts

Beyond the Irish Arts Center's nucleus of activists, there were other young professionals entering the mainstream of its membership who were motivated chiefly by an avocational or recreational interest in its programs. Many made significant contributions to the organization, and often brought with them values and attitudes cultivated in the workplace which were antithetical to the Center's communal approach and which promoted professionalism, bureaucratization, and specialization with the group. One example is Tom Lenihan. He first came to the Arts Center in 1976, to take a dance class while he was in graduate school. After two years of classes, Lenihan, moved by the Center's idealism and his desire to explore his roots, became a member:

It was still that spark of saying, "What is it to be Irish?" That is what the Center brought out in me. And I think that is what the mission of the Center is. For me, it was a place I enjoyed the spirit. . . . It was those same people who had a spirit, a determination to make this thing work that ultimately captured me. They

were making no money. They were running an unbelievable amount of hours in this God-awful place on the West side of Manhattan. And it just kind of captured me in a way that said: "Well, you've given something to me. I believe in what you're doing. Let me give something back to you."

Lenihan's work as a volunteer in the Center included performing in its music and dance programs as well as helping to produce its magazine. Although he was intensely involved with its magazine and participated in some of its other activities, he was able to remain somewhat detached from the organization:

That [the magazine] was the primary reason I was there. It was a job for me. I mean that in a positive sense. It was a contained aspect of my life. It wasn't all-encompassing. It wasn't the beginning and end of my life. It was a recreational experience for me. But I wasn't going there to meet people and I wasn't going there to find something that was going to add to my life.

Although Lenihan was attracted by the Arts Center's overall spirit of voluntarism, he disagreed with a number of specific policies deriving from it, such as free classes (for advanced students) and unsalaried teachers. He felt such practices were part of a general resistance to professionalizing the organization: "I believe in the need to professionalize the Center. To go on in this communal spirit is not going to go beyond where it's at now. The Center has reached a plateau and is going to stay there until it does professionalize."

Lenihan also did not subscribe to the Arts Center's participatory democracy, contending that it was unproductive:

The organization has never learned to function as an organization. . . . People come in, agendas are put on those meetings at the moment. People start jumping up and screaming. Nobody can ever decipher what the issue is

versus who was angry at who yesterday for doing what to who kind of thing. So issues kind of limp along and usually under a crisis, there will be a decision made. . . . I believe in the Center's goals, but I don't have enough time to spend Saturday after Saturday debating and rehashing issues over and over again and getting into arguments and fights with no closure in sight.

Lenihan was initially attracted by the idealism he saw at the Center and its programs, which he enjoyed. His primary focus became the Center's magazine, and he directed all his administrative skills toward making the magazine as professional as possible. Because Lenihan's main reason for participating in the organization became the production of a high quality magazine, he was critical of other areas or aspects of the Center that didn't share this goal of professionalism or employ the methods to attain it.

Marie Mackey is another illustration of a mainstream member who made a significant contribution to the Arts Center, but was more interested in its programs than its ideology. Mackey came to the Center in 1980 to learn Irish dancing as a result of her exposure to traditional Irish music. Eventually, she taught dance and worked in other areas of the organization. At one point she was spending so much time at the Center that it created a strain in other areas of her life. Mackey believed strongly that the Arts Center should abandon its "hippie" ways and become more professional by hiring qualified teachers and charging students tuition. In her opinion, the organization's commitment to voluntarism and free classes promoted mediocrity in the arts. In addition, she found membership meetings fruitless,

in part because of her conviction that they were subverted by influential members. Mackey also considered Gaelic a dead language, and the Center's attempts to revive it hopelessly romantic. Finally, she considered culture as being quite distinct from politics and was critical of the organization for mixing the two.

Mackey's main motivation for participating in the Arts Center can be traced to her interest in Irish music, dance, and theatre. It was her belief that striving for excellence in art was of primary importance which led her to argue for professionalism in all areas of the Center.

John Maher is another activity oriented member who joined the Arts Center in the early 1980's, but who made a more modest contribution to the organization. He first visited the Center in 1981, at the request of a friend who was taking a dance class there. He had an abiding interest in dance and was immediately attracted to the Irish form: "I was hooked in the first five minutes to ceili dancing and I've been with it as a student and a performer ever since." Maher also enjoyed the social life of the Arts Center and the opportunity it gave him to examine the Irish side of his ancestry.

Maher went on to become a dancer in many of the group's productions as well as working in other areas of the Irish Arts Center. Despite this participation, he resisted becoming a member for a few years because of his fear of becoming embroiled in organizational squabbles and his general lack of interest in policy issues:

Some of it was just plain fear of hearing too many burned out ex-members or even present members, complaining about the bureaucracy that went on and other difficulties that they encountered, meetings and conflicts that arose on the side as a result of meetings. That's only part of it. It's just a matter of not having very much interest in the policies set by the Center, at least, not initially.

When Maher finally became a member, he went to membership meetings which he didn't find very productive: "They were interminable and they were boring. And we didn't get a lot done." His overall conclusion was that the Arts Center was too small and insular and would have to become more organized to be effective:

Some people prefer to preserve the clubby approach and relatively small, intimate, informal one and keeping everything free just as it is now. I have no gripes with that, but I don't see it as fostering a successful growth. In the foreseeable future, I think it is going to work against us. . . . we have to get away from the clubhouse atmosphere, which, I think, is catering to a relative few, and expand to a more structured organization where we can handle anybody and every group involved equally.

Maher was drawn to the Arts Center predominantly because of its programs, especially dance. As a result of his strong interest in dance and becoming more proficient in it, he was in favor of professionalizing the organization in terms of hiring expert instructors, charging fees, and providing an expanded salaried staff to support this.

Maher, Mackey, and Lenihan are typical of those young career-oriented individuals who helped transform the Center's membership in the late 1970's and early 1980's. They were struck initially by the Center's idealism and, in a variety of ways, contributed their time

and skills to the group. However, their tendency to focus on a particular art form or other activity undermined the organization's communitarian democracy, which required a wider form of participation. In addition, their primary interest in one activity and becoming proficient in it, often led them to be critical of Center policies they thought weakened this aim. In general, they called for more advanced instruction, paid staff, delegation of authority, and efficiency of operation.

b. professionals and careerists

The push toward professionalism in the Arts Center during the late 1970's and early 1980's also came from the growth of members who had a career interest in the organization's programs. One was Richard Cronin, who first came into the Center as a salaried music teacher in 1979, but also worked as a volunteer there for a number of years. Although he supported the group's aim of creating a community of artists, he felt it didn't take art seriously enough:

The orientation I found there as an artist, as a musician -- there was a bit of a lie going on. . . . It was a charade in a way because the same people, who were the Center really, fundamentally were activity coordinators, performers. This idea of cultivating an art form took a back seat to that. Individuals cultivating their art took a rumble seat to that.

Cronin cited the Center's policies of free classes and volunteer teachers as evidence of a less than serious attitude toward art:

My continuing gripe with them is this. The workshop program where they have people teaching instruments who have six months experience themselves. That's neither

doing the people who want to learn any justice. It's not doing the music any justice. It's not doing the teacher any justice. It becomes almost a farce.

He also believed that the Center's reliance on volunteers had strained the organization to the breaking point, causing disarray. He argued for professionalizing and bureaucratizing the organization's staff. And while the group's participatory democracy appealed to him, he saw limits to it: "Actions sometimes suffered at the expense of everybody having their way."

Although Cronin was in favor of building a cultural community, he differed with other members over what type of community it would be. As a professional musician, he envisioned a group of dedicated artists working together to achieve artistic excellence. In addition, he felt that as a professional he should be paid for services such as teaching and performing. Thus, Cronin's main motivation for participating in the Arts Center was to develop himself as an artist and to have a forum in which to do it.

Jean Tully, a professional actress, also saw the Arts Center as important to her career aims. She initially sought out the center in order to maintain her fluency in Gaelic by taking classes and conversing with other Irish speakers there. Soon after, in the fall of 1981, she began teaching Gaelic at the Center and acting in its plays. Even though the organization provides her with an opportunity to practice her Gaelic, which is very important to her, its theatre has become her main concern:

Oh yes, absolutely, the theatre would be more important than anything else, than any of the other involvements I have with the Center. By now, after three and a half years, this is where a lot of my friends are. We socialize outside of doing plays together. So that's real important. A lot of my friends are in the theatre section.

Tully's professional interest in the Center is highlighted by her dissatisfaction with its participatory democracy:

In the early days, I did attend a lot of meetings because everything was run by meetings and I found them pretty much futile and useless. They were a waste of time. . . . True democracy is, of course, ideal, but this was rubbish, all this wasting of time. You know, letting every fool in the place speak their mind. But the meetings went on for hours and nothing was resolved. The workings of democracy were more important than democracy itself.

Tully was critical also of other practices of the Arts Center, such as required voluntarism: "Volunteer labor in return for free classes doesn't work because people are too busy, I think." And while she was undecided about free classes, she believed they were not taken seriously by many students:

Well, if you haven't paid for a class, you don't mind skipping a couple of classes, which is frustrating because that particular student is behind. There's a general lack of concern by students, I think, if they haven't paid out any money.

In addition, Tully felt that artistic standards in the organization were too lax:

I think standards are all-important, and I think there is somewhat the feeling that if it's Irish, it's wonderful. If you're playing a piece of music, and it's Irish, then, it's got to be wonderful. It might be pathetic music, really crummily played.

Tully's chief reason for becoming active in the Irish Arts Center was the opportunity it gave her to pursue her acting career.

Tony Fallon is another professional actor who became a member of the Center. His main purpose in joining the group in 1979 was to work in its theatre. As he said, "I wanted to act, number one, and the Center was there." He was also drawn to the social and cultural life of the organization. "I was amazed. I really was. I hadn't seen this type of stuff, all the cultural aspects, the dancing, spoken Irish, the seisuins, any of that stuff. . . . My friends are people basically from the Irish Arts Center."

Although Fallon became a member of the Arts Center and did some volunteer work, he didn't attend membership meetings or participate much beyond his theatre activity. He was drawn to the Center primarily because of its theatre and the chance to act. He was essentially indifferent to other aspects of the organization.

The possibility of career enhancement also played a large role in the decision of James Greene to join the Irish Arts Center. Although he had taken classes at the Center for a few years, he didn't become active in the organization until he began journalism school:

After that initial workshop in the fall of 1979, I didn't get involved again in the Center until the spring of 1982. I started investigating my own interest in journalism and I felt that perhaps I could do some work on the magazine here. So I just made an effort to get down here and started attending magazine meetings. . . . And I've been with An Gael ever since those incipient meetings. An Gael has been to a large extent my entire focus at the Center.

Green also had an interest in Irish culture and liked the social life of the Arts Center, but found membership meetings tedious and time consuming:

I was just pretty much bored as things were. And if I was to get more involved, it would probably be at the jeopardy of my new career as a journalist. So I felt I couldn't serve two masters. I pretty much made that choice, that I was going to have to devote my spare time to my studies as an incipient journalist.

Greene's participation in the Arts Center was prompted by his desire to acquire experience as a journalist. His involvement in the organization was limited to his work on its magazine. He had little time or concern for other aspects of the Center, such as membership meetings.

Greene, along with Fallon, Tully, and Cronin were drawn to the Center principally by a desire to advance their careers. Their professional interest in the Center's programs caused them to be either uninterested in, or critical of, many aspects of its communitarian democracy. For example, the artists in the group were especially unhappy with what they viewed as the Center's casual approach to teaching and performing the arts. They argued for more attention to artistic standards and the hiring of experienced instructors to ensure this.

Reflecting larger social changes in the late 1970's and early 1980's, the Irish Arts Center's membership changed from one dominated by sixties-style activists to one composed largely of young urban professionals. While later members had varying degrees of commitment to

the Center's social and political agenda, they were more focused on the programs as an end in themselves than their predecessors. The result of this concentration of particular activities was that fewer members were contributing to the general upkeep of the organization. This created a greater workload for those members who were assuming the responsibility of maintaining the organization. Thus, while the membership had not appreciably decreased in the early 1980's, its more circumscribed pattern of participation was making it more difficult for the Center to support itself and its goals with volunteers.

The changing character of the Center's membership, with its emphasis on self-development and limited participation, was decried by old-line activists who saw this as a betrayal of original motives. As one founding member said:

People tend to be more self-centered today. They tend to think more in terms of their own individual development as the end. . . . We really got into an intellectual, thinking, studying number. I think it was bad in that it became overemphasized and the togetherness context, the identity context, the being on picket lines, that didn't get emphasized so much because you've got to get your shit together before you can do that.

Another originator of the Center lamented the absence of any larger sense of purpose among later members:

The Irish Arts Center as I see it now, ten or twelve years later, has reverted more to a kind of ethnic expression. It doesn't have that urgency. It is a place more where you go to learn to play the tin whistle or do an Irish dance and perhaps now and then, a reminder, a very verbal reminder, that in doing this we're reviving a culture. . . . And indeed, you can learn to play the tin whistle and perhaps have courses in Irish history, which they have there, and not give a damn about what's happening in

Ireland. This is an end in itself, to master this step, whatever.

This veteran activist notes the decline in participation and sense of community among the members:

When I first came here, they were people who were out of the 60's. The hippie or the beautiful people kind of mentality was here in the sense that you had a lot of people who weren't working at specific jobs. They got really involved in their culture and they got really involved in the music and playing. And there was that community kind of idealism. And then what happened, down through the years was that a lot of these initial people left. . . .

The newer group did not give their all to the Center. They also had their personal lives. People were always interested in the place, but they also had their personal lives. So they came, for example, and they put in their time, they taught their classes. You had your specific nights here and then you went home. There was a very subtle eroding away of the idea that this was sort of a community. I think that's the way it is today.

This transformation in the character of the membership over the years was so pronounced in the eyes of the older members that it has become part of the folklore of the Arts Center to be wistfully passed along to newer members. As one later member said:

They speak of those days as if they were stunning. . . . The people who have been here the longest are inclined to be filled with nostalgia when they speak of the early days because people were so much more committed. They feel things were so much better.

Social and Political Activists in the Early 1980's

The Arts Center received some relief from the declining participation of its members with the addition of a few activists to its ranks in the early 1980's. One was Mary Farrell. Although she had

been taking classes at the Center since 1977, she was too busy to become a member until 1980. Farrell has served with the organization in a number of capacities, giving most of her free time to it: "The better part of my time that is not spent at work is spent on something Center related. There is very little time that I spend doing anything that has nothing to do with the Center." Her commitment to the group has also had consequences in her professional life: "If I weren't so involved here, I would be more involved probably in furthering my career. It's just a choice that the career's kind of secondary."

Farrell attends membership meetings regularly, believes strongly in the Center's participatory democracy, and fears that the turn toward professionalism will alter the character of the organization:

We're at a really major turning point here, I think, and we have been for the past year or so. Are we going to be grass roots, or are we going to aspire to be professional? We had said at a membership meetings several years ago, that within three years we wanted to be turning out professional quality people without ever realizing what that meant. I mean, that's why you see at membership meetings now, the feeling of frustration that people have at not having any input into this organization, or the feeling of powerlessness, I think. If you're going to aspire to growth, you're going to change the structure of a grass roots organization. It cannot necessarily be a membership led organization.

Farrell is also an advocate of voluntarism, which is highlighted by her resentment of members who are only peripherally connected to the Arts Center:

When I bump into a person who is active in an area and I don't know that person, my personal sense is that they

are being much too provincial and they are not here because of the organization, but they are simply here for their own self-interest.

Farrell was not only committed to the Center's community, but also to its politics, and was an activist in behalf of the nationalist movement in Northern Ireland. According to her, the Center's activities were part of a broader cultural movement to reclaim a national identity which gave them a political dimension:

One of the principles for the founding of this organization is simply to give back the culture to people who it's been taken away from by circumstances. And to maintain that culture and to pass it on to the next generation to make sure it doesn't die because it's valuable. And that attitude toward things has a whole political connotation, I'd say. It's not just simply learning a dance for the sake of learning a dance.

Farrell was a vigorous supporter of direct democracy, voluntarism, amateur arts, revival of Gaelic, and Irish nationalism, which often put her in conflict with members who found some or all of these aspects of the Center inappropriate or detrimental to its well-being.

Peter Larkin is another member who joined the Arts Center's activist core in the early 1980's. He first came into contact with the group through his political activity in support of the Irish nationalist cause. As a result, he discovered a connection between Irish culture and politics:

There isn't a hard and fast divide between Irish culture and Irish politics which both sides somehow make. I think that Irish culture is a profoundly political thing. I think the Irish Arts Center is a political organization. The fact that you choose to proclaim the art of an oppressed people is a political statement.

Using his skills as an organizer, Larkin led an effort to revive the Arts Center by creating new programs and activities, attracting some new members and reinspiring some old ones in the process. Since his arrival he has played a major role in the organization and has been a leading proponent of membership participation in the Center's democracy, work, and art forms. He takes a strong stand against steps to professionalize the organization, such as paying teachers and charging tuition, contending that such actions would radically alter the character of the group.

Larkin and Farrell represent a small number of members who entered the Irish Arts Center in the early 1980's and took an active role in running the organization and participating in its programs and activities beyond any special interests they might have had. They were mainly attracted by the political and communitarian principles on which the organization had been founded and fought to maintain them.

The Decline of Participatory Democracy in the Mid-1980's

The handful of activists who came into the Arts Center in the early 1980's was hardly enough to compensate for the general decline of the membership's participation in maintaining the organization. By 1985, the organization had reached a critical point in which its core of activists had shrunk to a few individuals and most of its members were no longer active in the organization, outside of occasional participation in a particular program or activity. As one member said, remarking on this phenomenon:

There are a lot of people who want to do a lot of things at the Center, but they don't want to get involved in the actual doing of things. . . . There's no people to stock the democracy. You go to a membership meeting and you see eight people that show up. The people just aren't interested in running it, that's all.

By 1986, in response to the apathy of the members, the Center's leadership suspended membership meetings and cancelled or curtailed some of its activities. With the addition of some paid staff and grant money, the organization was able to offset the loss of volunteer support and maintain much of its activity.

The originators and organizers of the Irish Arts Center in the early 1970's had an ideological program they wanted to implement. It called for restoring Irish identity in America and creating support for Irish nationalism; embracing other ethnic groups, especially oppressed minorities; and establishing a participatory democracy. They were able to attract a number of supporters in their quest. Thus, in its early stages, the Arts Center was dominated by social and political activists who viewed the arts as a means to express politics. Because of this general consensus, conflict was minimized.

However, the Center's emphasis on cultural activities brought in other members less interested in them for ideological reasons than for entertainment, escape, the search for roots, or a chance to develop some skills. This diversity of motives led to conflicts among the members and these conflicts spread throughout the different parts and programs of the organization. Thus, all activities were colored with similar conflicts and tensions resulting from the

contradictions in members' motivations and their expectations about policy directions that should be taken by the organization in curricula, theatre, music and dance, language, and history.

Notes

1. The term 'members' refers to the organizers and activists in the Center before the formal creation of a membership, as well as to those individuals who participated as members but never officially joined the organization. Because the Arts Center has generally been unable to maintain a current record of its membership, it is difficult to say with precision how many members there are at any given time. However, it can be said that the membership has averaged between 30 and 45 individuals over the years.

2. These members were dominant in the early stages of the organization during the period 1972-1975. They constituted about 20 of the approximately 35 individuals active in the organization at the time.

3. Aside from the Center's approximately thirty-five members, there was about an equal number of individuals participating more sporadically and a similar number of people whose relationship to the organization was still more tangential.

4. Gaeltacht is an Irish word referring to the Gaelic-speaking areas of Ireland.

Chapter 3

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CURRICULA AND ACTIVITIES
AS AN EXPRESSION OF IDEOLOGY, INTERESTS, AND MOTIVES

The Irish Arts Center grew from what was essentially a weekly pub music session into a formal cultural organization, with an annual budget of over \$200,000. In the process, the Center became involved in a number of activities that were established as separate subdivisions within the organization. They are theatre, music and dance, language, history, and a magazine. In their development, these programs reflected the tensions, conflicts, and contradictions resulting from the various motives members had for participating in them.

Music and Dance Area: Ideology vs. the Challenges
of Growth and Development

Music was the Irish Arts Center's first major activity that attracted a following. The Center's music sessions in various Manhattan pubs in the early 1970's were very popular among young Irish Americans and others who found the traditional tunes and songs a refreshing change from the more familiar Irish ballads. But music, almost from the beginning, required professionals or semi-professionals to establish credibility and build an audience. The fact that the music area of the Center has needed experienced musicians has influenced its development.

Many of the musicians attracted to the Arts Center early on were at least as interested in careers in music as in the goals of the organization. These musicians were known for their short-term attachment to the Center. As one organizational report noted in 1975: "The early musical history of An Claidheimh Soluis is one of musicians coming and going, but mostly going."¹ When the Center began to formalize its structure that year, it attempted to deal with the problem of musicians who were connected with it only tangentially. For example, the Center's music committee recommended that:

The policy of An Claidheamh Soluis as regards music should be to develop a community of musicians, who by their attitudes, actions and musical expression, fully participate in the internal and external development of the Center and who will encourage, support and stimulate each other's artistic growth.²

In an effort to ensure that it would have a group of musicians committed to the organization, the Center began its own music workshops to train them. However, this did not produce the community of musicians that had been envisioned. By 1976, a number of musicians had become disenchanted because they could not develop any further, having exhausted the expertise available within the organization. They wanted the Center to hire professional musicians to help them advance further. This caused a conflict, because it was considered contrary to the aim of amateurism in the arts. As one participant described the situation:

You get to a certain point at the Center in terms of your art and then you didn't get any further because there was no one there to teach you. And the Center saw you as the teacher once you got to a certain point and said, "Pass on what you know."

The organization's position was that its limited resources should be used to further the aim of popularizing Irish art, and not be diluted in support of the development of what was viewed as an elite group of artists. In addition, hiring professional teachers violated the Center's principle of voluntarism and presented the possibility of outsiders having a say in the organization's affairs.

Although the Center's leadership at the time adopted a motion forwarded from the theatre area that offered the musicians "who seem to be withdrawing or isolating themselves from ACS, the opportunity of creating any program they wish to satisfy their needs," it did not include the hiring of teachers. Some of the discontented musicians eventually drifted away from the organization, while others chose to stay and press their view.

The demands of some musicians for further training and the resistance to them highlight their different interests. The Center wanted artists to advance the organization's goals, while many of the artists were mainly interested in developing their art, or at the least, divided in their loyalty to art and to the Center. One of the aims of the music workshops (and of the workshop program³ in general) was to instill in the participants the communitarian principles of the Irish Arts Center. However, the organization was

having difficulty producing enough musicians with this "spirit of An Claidheamh Soluis."

Part of the problem was in the artistic process itself. Proficiency in an art requires concentration on its technique, which takes a great deal of practice. The emphasis on technique and the development of skills create a pull toward valuing the art for itself rather than for any other purpose. Thus, a number of the Center's musicians began to focus on developing themselves as artists, which was viewed as detrimental to larger organizational purposes. This difference in attitude toward art is illustrated by the case of Michael Kane. He was an early activist in the Center, and a strong supporter of its goals, but he was also an aspiring musician who eventually became dissatisfied with the Center's approach to art:

There's always that this professionalism will mean elitism. . . . Joe can get up and sing a song slightly out of tune, but with feeling. It's like the soul behind it. I think it's an anti-art stance, that technique does not matter at all. If I had to choose between art that is technically great art and art that has soul, I would always choose the art that had the soul. But I never saw why it had to be an either/or choice. That gets you to the whole definition of art, and this place claimed to be an arts center. I think that what art is about is really trying to strive and perfect one's technique to be able to express the soul. And I saw no respect for that at all.

Kane's attitude reflected that of a number of musicians early in the Center's history who felt that artistic standards were being sacrificed for communitarian purposes.

Because it was unable to produce enough of its own volunteer teachers for its increasing number of classes, the music and dance program was forced to deviate from organizational policy and hire some instructors. In the fall of 1978, with the aid of NEA and CETA funds, five instructors were hired for a two-year period, with the understanding that by then music and dance would have developed enough of its own volunteer instructors to maintain its workshops.

As this report noted:

In 1976-77, we had 67 students in our workshops, in 77-78, 90 students, and this year (fall '78) we have an all-time high of 150 registered for the upcoming session. . . . Because we feel it is very important to develop teachers for our workshops, we have decided on a two year goal for ourselves to develop our teachers to a high level of proficiency. To do this we have decided to hire whatever teachers are necessary, and pay for their salaries through grants and also through our work.⁴

Thus, early on, the music and dance program had to make a compromise between principle and practice.

Another stated goal of the music and dance workshop program was to "recruit workshop students to the membership."⁵ The Arts Center had charged ten dollars for each workshop in 1974, but stopped when it found that people treated the classes as a commercial exchange, feeling no responsibility to become involved in the organization. This decision was also influenced by an evolving belief that Irish culture was a product of the Irish people and therefore should not be for sale. As a result, in 1975 the Center offered free workshops to the public. Instead of payment, students were asked to contribute

one hour of their time to the organization. The reasoning behind this "Work Program" was that it would create a better understanding among the students of the Center's goals and thereby increase its membership. Later on, a "workshop orientation day" was instituted to familiarize students with the Center and its goals, with the expectation that it would "bring a sense of the community of An Claidheamh Soluis to all the students very early in the program and also be an aid in the recruitment of new members."⁶

However, the workshops and work programs did not bring in many new members, and there were indications that most students were interested only in classes and were not participating further in the Center. In reaction, there was an effort to make some students contribute to the organization. For example, in 1978, the music and dance area established a policy stating that: "All students in advanced classes are required to participate in our performances; for each class taken, one performance and all rehearsals for it are required."⁷ However, this attempt to coerce students to contribute to the organization was not very successful, mainly because of the difficulty of enforcement. Some in the membership suggested allowing those students interested only in classes the option of paying tuition, but this was rejected and the policy of free workshops with students participating in the work program was reaffirmed. The policy of free classes in exchange for contributing time to the Center was maintained despite the apparent reluctance of students to participate.

Another goal of the music and dance program was "to encourage the study of the relationship between music and dance and to encourage the study of the history of the Irish people."⁸ This reflected the Center's view, that the art forms and language were historically integrated in Irish culture and must be understood in that way if a viable cultural revival were to take place. Toward that end, initially all students were required to study Irish history for the first few weeks of the semester. However, because it aroused little interest and proved impractical, it was discontinued. In 1977, the music and dance area discussed the possibility of "making dancing in music classes mandatory." This notion was abandoned for the same reasons.

Although in the mid-1970's the music and dance area found it too difficult to demonstrate the interrelationship of the art forms to students in its workshops, it presumably had a better chance with its members. There were a number of attempts to launch a "Compulsory Study" program in which members were obligated to take part in an exercise that would incorporate one or more of the art forms with the language. This program failed because of lack of membership participation. In a report in 1977, one member chastised his peers for neither taking the program seriously nor recognizing its importance to the goals of the Center:

Studying Irish art and its social, historical and cultural context should be a primary requirement for membership. Without sound knowledge in this area we will be limited in our ability to create policies and implement programs that will achieve our goals. The membership [compulsory study] program was a step in this direction, but only a

token, and it was swept under the rug this fall as soon as convenience dictated. We need an integrated approach of real learning if we are to succeed in reaching people. [Original emphasis.]⁹

The goals of the music and dance workshop program of the mid-1970's, outlined above, were a reflection of the Center's belief in amateur arts, voluntarism, and propagating Irish culture. The program was having difficulty implementing these ideas because of the relative indifference of students and members to them. Efforts to stimulate the interest of these individuals in the principles of the organization were largely unsuccessful.

Beyond its workshop program, the music and dance department had other goals that mirrored larger organizational interests. For example, in 1978, in line with the aim of interacting through art with other ethnic groups, it urged promoting respect for other cultures and building "alliances with other ethnic organizations with similar goals." Another larger objective of music and dance that year was to assist in establishing other chapters of the Arts Center. In fact, it spearheaded organizing efforts in the other boroughs with music and dance activities. This added responsibility soon proved too much, and the director of music and dance asked to be relieved of it.

Last year the membership passed a ruling that each director of an area spend half their time as director, organizing externally. I would like to have this decision re-evaluated as I do not feel that we are ready to follow through with this decision. Regarding rince-ceol [music and dance], I feel that we are still in need of organizing

internally and are doing so, but still have more work to do.¹⁰

Outreach efforts beyond Manhattan were not very successful in 1979, and the Center's Director lamented the overall membership's failure to adequately support them. In analyzing the situation, the Director pointed to the growing self-interest of members and the areas they represent: "Our activity is in large part self-justifying, and as it continues from year to year, we are in danger of losing sight of our original larger reasons as a membership, for initiating it."¹¹

In 1980, the Center was still struggling to motivate its students to become more active in the organization. Once again, there was an assumption that the problem was a lack of understanding about the mission of the group. As one organizational report complained:

Not enough communication to workshop participants about aims of ACS. Teachers are not continuing to tie in classes with the greater goals of ACS. . . . Teachers should announce activities of importance in ACS and make classes aware of what's happening at ACS rather than just reading off announcements.¹²

One remedy chosen was to devote one class each semester to a "discussion of [the] purpose of An Claidheamh Soluis."¹³ In addition, the music and dance area determined that to "rejuvenate [the] spirit of workshops," it would explore the possibility of combining music and dance classes.¹⁴ Again, in integrating the arts, the organization

wanted to illustrate their original function as part of a larger culture they were trying to recreate.

These attempts to inspire students to participate more were not very successful and were undermined by a decline in the quality of classes given.¹⁵ In 1981, an assessment of music and dance workshops cited the problem of developing and maintaining "teachers who can teach" and said that many teachers had "insufficient background in the dance or instrument or were unable to fully convey what is known to students." In regard to classes, the report contended that there was too great a disparity in the skills of the students within them, an "inconsistency in what is taught," and "too much focus on quantity rather than quality." The workshop program was said to be poorly organized and maintained, and to show a dramatic drop in enrollment:

At the present time, the workshops (and thus the work program) are at an all-time (or at least in recent memory) low. Total number of classes offered is down, general direction is lacking, etc.¹⁶

The increase in the number of classes offered during the late 1970's, and the Center's inability to produce enough of its own experienced volunteer instructors, put a great strain on the workshop program. This was exacerbated in 1981 by the end of CETA funding, which had permitted the organization to hire people to teach and to oversee its curriculum. The result was a workshop program that lapsed into disarray through lack of supervision and too many inexperienced teachers.

Solutions suggested for improving music and dance classes included the screening of students and teachers, and the creation of a more structured curriculum. The report on music and dance workshops went on to recommend that to accomplish this someone be hired full time to administer all of the Center's workshops as well as the volunteer work programs related to them. However, a shortage of funds prevented the organization from following through on this advice.

The review of the music and dance program also noted the poor quality of some of its productions: "At gigs, ceilis, and other events, ACS is represented by performers and spokespeople with uneven levels of artistic ability and organizational knowledge." In response to criticism of the quality of its performances and classes, the Center announced a three-year plan to improve its artistic programs and become the hub of Irish art in America on both an amateur and a professional basis. Thus, the music and dance program was intended to produce professional as well as amateur artists by 1982. As the area with the most members and students, it was looked to as a model of how the organization might provide for both types of artist. The program was supposed to provide separate activities for professionals as well as amateurs. However, because the music and dance area was already overwhelmed by too many responsibilities and too few volunteers, little came of this ambitious plan.

The music and dance program's avowed aim to improve the artistic quality of its activities in 1982 did little to activate

the membership. As the Center's Artistic Director said in reference to all of the organization's programs that year, "there is no functioning area behind the activities; rather, a few individuals are keeping things going."¹⁷

In 1983, the music and dance program continued to wrestle with the issues of declining enrollments and recruitment of new members. As part of this process, some suggested expanding registration to include an introduction to the Center and its aims. Others recommended that students be encouraged to "sign up with an area" at registration, so as to become immediately involved with the organization. There were other recurring problems in 1983 with music and dance's effort to organize other chapters and administer a volunteer work program.

In the early 1980's, the Arts Center, under pressure, had declared its aim to be a professional as well as an amateur arts organization. Despite this, in many instances there was resistance toward professionalism when it was viewed as subversive of communal goals. One example of this occurred in 1984, in music and dance. There was a dispute over the dismissal of a salaried dance instructor by the program's director against the wishes of the dance class. The director's justification, which was later ratified by a vote of the program's members, was that the teacher never participated in the organization, outside of her class. In addition, the director felt that the emphasis on technique in the dance class promoted rivalry rather than mutual support among the students.

I felt that in a lots of ways, the class is concentrating so much on perfecting what they're doing, there has been a loss of warmth between the people. . . . Maybe concentrating so much on the particular activity that they're not relating to one another as much. There is more a level of competition rather of cooperation.

Most members of the dance class protested the firing of their instructor, insisting that she was hired to teach dance, and that her responsibility to the Center finished there. In addition, there was also a feeling among these dancers that the Center was not really committed to artistic development. As one of them said:

That phenomenon was very threatening to the people at the Center who are not very goal oriented and who do not deal with the issue of competition or the reality of life, that some people are good at some things and not good at others. . . . And if they [dancers] have the discipline to be that committed to a class and work to achieve something, [and] if they [the Center] can't see the merits in that for individual growth and for the ways that will reflect on the Center, I just find it very upsetting.

The dancers were interested principally in developing their art and felt that the Center's notion of voluntarism and casual approach to the arts had gone too far. They believed they were making a contribution to the organization through their commitment to artistic excellence. However, the music and dance director felt that the dancers' concern with their artistic development was creating a competitive atmosphere which was contrary to the communitarian principle of sharing cultural knowledge in a supportive environment. The firing of the dance instructor was one example of the limits to which the music and dance director would go in accommodating members

focused on artistic development. Although initially in favor of bringing in more expert instruction, the music and dance director withdrew support when it appeared to undermine communal goals. Thus professionalism during this period was tolerated within music and dance only as long as it did not exceed certain bounds.

One result of the dismissal of the dance instructor was that most of her class left the Arts Center, formed their own dance troupe, and rehired their former teacher. This reduced the number of supporters within the music and dance program and by 1985, it had so few volunteers that it became the responsibility of paid staff. By that time, most musicians performing at the Center's events were paid professionals. In 1985 another analysis of the music and dance curriculum concluded, once again, that the program was poorly administered and that the quality of its classes varied greatly.¹⁸ As a result, two artistic consultants were hired to create curricula and to help develop teachers for the program.

By 1985, the music and dance program ceased to operate as a volunteer-run unit within the Arts Center. Most of its participating members had either left the organization or were involved only sporadically. In 1986-87, music and dance regained a volunteer director, who was aided in maintaining the program by paid staff. Efforts were also being made to encourage participants in the area to attend meetings and other events aimed at returning it to volunteer-control.

However, these efforts largely failed and the program has ceased to function as a part of the Center's participatory democracy.

The Arts Center's need for experienced musicians to attract audiences and build a following affected the development of the Center's music and dance program. For example, a number of musicians who had come into the organization early on had career interests in music. As a result they became a force in pushing for more advanced instruction and higher standards of artistic excellence.

In addition, later members and students wanted to increase their proficiency in music and dance, which created further pressure for advanced training. Initially the call for more qualified paid instructors was rejected as antithetical to communitarian purposes, but eventually the music and dance program did hire some teachers to satisfy the growing demand for expert help and the need to staff more classes. This exception to policy was rationalized as an interim measure, one which would enable music and dance to eventually produce enough of its own teachers to return to an all-volunteer teaching staff. However, this has not occurred, and the program has continued to hire at least some of its teachers.

The failure of the music and dance program to produce enough qualified volunteer teachers (especially musicians) was due partly to members either being primarily interested in their own artistic development and/or refusing to teach for free. The failure was also partly due to the program's inability or unwillingness to pay more

than only a few expert teachers for any sustained period of time. This resulted in the periodic decline of the music and dance curriculum, which in turn led to repeated calls to upgrade the quality of instruction and to pay more teachers and an administrator. Within music and dance there was usually consensus on the need to hire some personnel to improve the curriculum, but steps in that direction were limited by a combination of limited financial resources and ideological resistance. Thus the suggestions some members made that all instructors be paid and students charged for classes were vetoed.

The leaders of the music and dance program and their supporters were willing to make concessions to encourage greater participation of members and students as long as these concessions weren't deemed a threat to communitarian goals. This was vividly illustrated in the hiring and later dismissal of the dance instructor. Thus, even at the cost of losing members and other supporters, the music and dance program remained strongly committed to the organizational principles. Although in the early 1980's music and dance had endorsed the organization's addition of professionalism in the arts to its goals, amateurism in the arts was clearly kept ascendant.

In the end, the music and dance program lost most of its members and became mainly a staff function, because its participants were interested in music and dance for their own sake, rather than for any wider aims they were supposed to serve.

The Irish Rebel Theatre: The Paradigmatic Case of Professionalism

The Irish Arts Center's theatre started in 1972, and is one of its oldest activities. It began in 1972 with an abortive attempt to stage a professional production of Brendan Brehan's play, The Hostage, at the Abbey Theatre in Manhattan. Next the Irish Rebel Theatre turned to street theatre in 1973, with a play called Finn the Giant. Adapted from an Irish legend, the play proved quite popular with audiences in spite of the inexperienced cast, and was performed throughout New York City at block parties, libraries, in Central Park, the World Trade Center, and the Lincoln Street Theater Festival.¹⁹

Inspired by the success of "Finn," the Center rented the auditorium of the McBurney YMCA in Manhattan to present two one-act plays by John Millington Synge, The Tinker's Wedding and The Shadow of the Glen. Again, using primarily untrained actors but guided by a professional director, the production was well received by audiences. In 1974, the theatre staged Sean O'Casey's The Shadow of a Gunman at St. Peter's Episcopal Church on Twentieth Street. This production, too, was judged a success, and the Irish Rebel Theatre received its first notices from the non-Irish media.²⁰ Because the play was performed in a church, the set had to be razed each night. The extra demands this put on the cast and production crew increased the pressure on the Center to find a permanent home for its theatre.

By the spring of 1974, the Center had obtained a condemned city-owned building for its use, and in the fall produced its first play there, Walter Macken's Home is the Hero. This was the Rebel Theatre's biggest success, both in terms of audience response and of reviews. The New York Times said, "The small stage glows with real professionalism,"²¹ and The Village Voice called the production "a miracle," and "a strong, affecting, satisfying evening of theater."²² The play also garnered praise from the Irish, entertainment, and community presses. Paul Dunne, a director with Broadway experience, was able to combine professional and amateur actors to make a success of a play that had failed in its debut on Broadway in 1957.

Until 1975, the Irish Rebel Theatre consisted mainly of a loosely knit group of Center activists generally committed to the organization's broadly defined aims. When the Arts Center established a formal structure in the spring of that year, the theatre began to articulate its goals and role within the organization. For example, in a report to the membership, the theatre committee recommended:

. . . that a total functioning Theatre Department be set up that would give definite expression to the aspirations and struggles of the community of An Claidheamh Soluis; that a perspective of the drama be evolved that reflects the struggles of the Center at its various levels of development; and that an honest attempt be made to define the distinction between the Irish, the Anglo-Irish, and the world theatre in general and the possibilities of each in rendering expression and reflection of the aims and goals of the community.²³

In addition to declaring its intention to integrate the principles of the Center into its productions, the theatre committee

vowed to give "priority" to the development of artists and technicians from within the organization. To facilitate this it would set up workshops and invite artists from outside the Center to work with its participants. In addition, in keeping with the organization's pledge to democratic participation, the theatre would now be run by those members of the Center active in it. All decisions regarding the theatre, such as choice of play, its interpretation, director, and cast, would be reached by consensus. However, this form of direct democracy was difficult to implement in the theatre. By 1976, there were signs that producing plays by consensus was becoming inefficient, and attempts were made to streamline the procedure for choosing plays. For example, that year the theatre committee passed a motion stating:

In future, anyone wishing to submit a new play should be able to speak for the play in question and advise all members to read the play within the following two weeks so that an intelligent discussion can be realized -- and at the next meeting, a decision arrived at.²⁴

Later, a whole series of steps was introduced to rationalize the process for selecting plays.

By 1977, the theatre was also having trouble casting its plays by committee. Authority over productions usually was delegated to one or two individuals, such as the director and stage manager. Consensus had broken down into charges and countercharges of bias in casting, and lack of commitment to artistic goals or the director's point of view. Paul Dunne, who was to direct a production of O'Casey's Juno and the Paycock, resigned because he was denied the right to

choose his own cast. That particular issue was resolved when the theatre committee voted to give Dunne final say in casting, expressing the hope that the actors chosen would be members of the Arts Center.²⁵

Participatory democracy in the theatre was becoming too cumbersome. In order to get a play produced, the theatre committee was forced to delegate major responsibility for it to one or two individuals. However, when some members believed the decisions of the director or other appointed individuals regarding a production were arbitrary, they reasserted the principle of collective decision-making in the theatre. This was re-emphasized in a motion passed that year, stating: "That the director casts subject to committee approval."

The growing tension between artistic and communal goals in the theatre was also highlighted in the debate over casting. For example, Dunne, an active member and supporter of participatory democracy in the theatre, was also a professional director. In the dispute over casting he complained that people who were not seriously studying acting expected to be cast in plays and that there was "prejudice against artists with higher levels of technique and development in their art form."²⁶ According to Dunne, there was a "lack of commitment to realizing [the] highest artistic goals possible."²⁷ This sentiment was echoed by another member who referred to the "unwillingness of untrained actors (and others) to accept available training."²⁸ Against this view were members who charged that they weren't being afforded enough opportunity to audition or act, that

too many non-members were being cast, and that the director's perspective was unclear.

The dispute over casting reflected a developing strain in the theatre between two goals that were not easily reconcilable-- artistic excellence and communitarianism. The pursuit of artistic excellence promotes exclusivity, while the communitarian impulse is inclusive. For example, because of their commitment to art, members such as Dunne emphasized technique and craftsmanship in acting, which in turn led them to cast in plays those individuals whom they felt best exemplified those qualities. This attitude was viewed as a form of elitism by those members who were more casual in their approach to the theatre, stressing its communitarian purposes.

By the mid-1970's, the theatre was also confronting the problem of a growing number of participants who were not members of the Center. They were principally interested in the Center's theatre for career purposes, and took little notice of its goals. Their tangential involvement brought about efforts to induce them to become more active in the Center and to support its goals. According to the theatre committee, the increasing presence of non-member participants was undermining its participatory democracy. This resulted in a decision to "approach participants in the theatre area to become members of ACS in order to revitalize the theatre committee"²⁹ and set its future direction.

These recruitment attempts were not very successful, because the individuals at whom they were aimed had been drawn to the theatre mainly for professional experience, either as actors or in some other capacity. The theatre was especially open to the participation of non-members because, unlike other Center activities such as music and dance, one could take part in a play without having to study an Irish art form per se. In addition, from its inception, the theatre had welcomed and sought out professionals for their artistic and technical knowledge. Thus, out of the need to develop and compete as an Off-off-Broadway playhouse, the Irish Rebel Theatre had to tolerate the participation of individuals who didn't share its social and political aims.

The Irish Rebel Theatre was described as the dominant area in the Center in 1977, in regard to its "artistic output, attraction of new audiences, and bringing in money."³⁰ Although there was some fear that the theatre was becoming isolated from the rest of the organization, it still showed signs of commitment to the Center's principles. For example, there were many discussions focusing on the role of the theatre in the context of the goals of the organization. Further, the theatre was constantly looking for ways to incorporate some of the Center's other activities, such as music, dance, and Gaelic, into its performances, and alternatively, it was seeking to play a supportive role in those areas. The theatre retained

its ideological thrust largely because some of the Center's most committed members were still active in it.

In 1978, the theatre continued to indicate its desire to integrate the goals of the Center with its activities. For example, the theatre committee affirmed its intention to "create a theatre that reflects the Irish American experience, reach Irish American audiences, and build a company that shares all the work of the theatre."³¹ However, by 1979 some of the Center's leaders were dissatisfied with the theatre's progress towards these aims and directed it to make a more serious effort toward "developing the means for fulfilling the goals of ACS through the medium of theatre."³²

As a result of this pressure, the theatre committee held a series of meetings and compiled a list of objectives to further the goals of the Irish Arts Center and the means for attaining them. The list included the establishment of workshops consisting of members who were studying or familiar with other Irish art forms or the Irish language; an emphasis on the collective examination of the meaning and interpretation of a play as opposed to dependence on the perspective of one individual such as the director; and "sharing the work of productions so that artificial barriers between performers, artistic and technical staff are avoided as much as possible."³³

However, these cultural and communal goals were undermined by the participation of individuals who didn't share them. This lack of concern for such goals was sometimes made quite explicit.

For example, theatre meetings often began with a discussion of the play in question out of deference to those "with no other interest" in the Arts Center. The theatre tried to reserve many of the acting jobs for those most committed to its goals with a casting policy giving preference to "Center members and participants." However, the need to assemble the best possible cast forced the theatre to include in its productions many individuals with professional aspirations who were "not necessarily going to become members of ACS."³⁴ The Irish Rebel Theatre was trying to strike a balance between competing as an Off-Off-Broadway playhouse and remaining faithful to its principles.

Criticism of the theatre and demands that it rededicate itself to the Center's goals signaled its growing independence and professionalization. The criticism was also an indication of the difficulty of both producing high quality theatre and fulfilling organizational aims. The demands of professional theatre were at odds with communitarian interests.

This became evident in 1980 when the theatre presented a three-year plan to the organization, a plan which gave further evidence of increasing professionalization.³⁵ Declaring its intention to examine the Irish experience in Ireland and abroad, at the same time the theatre said it would also emphasize "artistic excellence throughout every aspect of production." To do this it would seek out "the finest Irish playwrights, actors, and directors." Further,

"professional behavior will be encouraged and rewarded in actors and directors." In addition, the plan contained a number of recommendations aimed at increasing the efficiency of the Irish Rebel Theatre.

Despite its avowed aim to become more professional and to rationalize the production process, the theatre still professed to be committed to the goals of the Center and collective control. The three-year plan called for reorganization of the administration of the theatre under the guidance of former participants and activists in it to guard against more selfishly motivated individuals:

These should be former actors, directors, and technical experts out of our theatre who will over-see the direction of the theatre as a whole. Theirs will be the responsibility of choosing plays, directors and casts. (The latter under the auspices of that production's director.) They will make all decisions regarding theatre policy, ticket prices, and advertising. No member of this council shall act or direct in any production while on the council. This is to gather on the committee people who are interested in the development of Irish Theatre in America and ACS particularly; people who have passed beyond personal goals and are prepared now to act as artistic directors.³⁶

There were members in the organization who were unhappy with the theatre's growing professionalism and proposed restructuring, who were able to gather enough support to delay ratification of the three-year plan in favor of forming a committee to establish what kind of theatre the membership wanted, the direction it should take, and which members would be responsible for it.

By 1981, the theatre's three-year plan, at least as it related to administrative reorganization, became irrelevant because the theatre

was unable to attract enough volunteer support to make it a functioning part of the Center's participatory democracy. According to its director:

The area itself has ceased to exist at all. Very few ACS members are involved in theatre at all, and of those who are, no one can be depended on to organize or do the very important technical work of each production.³⁷

Like other areas in the Center in 1981, the theatre was finding it more difficult to recruit volunteers. Aside from a general apathy on the part of members and participants, this was related to the expansion of the organization's activities. As the Center's Administrator³⁸ said:

It used to be people from the dance area would do the house, or from the music area would stage manage and stuff like that. But that was at a point where all activity was at such a low level that you could afford to be active in the theatre and in rince ceol [music and dance]. Now, if you're teaching a class and in a ceili band and going to rince ceol meetings, you don't have time to be involved in theatre also.

By the early 1980's, the Arts Center's range of activity had increased substantially, while its membership had not. This was reflected in the theatre's inability to attract much membership support. In addition, the theatre's increasing professionalism made it less accessible to amateur volunteers for whom menial tasks would be the order of the day. As one member said, "What happens is that not everybody who wants to has a chance at being in a theatrical production . . . obviously." Given the option of participating in

other areas where one might learn to play music or to dance, the theatre was no longer particularly attractive to volunteers.

In 1982, the Arts Center was under pressure to improve the artistic quality of all its programs. This permitted the theatre to become more aggressive in professionalizing its operation. The theatre, on the recommendation of the Center's Administrator, decided to launch a three-year effort to become "a professional company capable of competing in theatre terms with any American production of Irish drama [original emphasis]."³⁹ As part of this process, the membership, also on the advice of the Administrator, voted to hire a full-time director, beginning in the fall of 1982.

The engagement of a professional director caused renewed concern among those who felt the membership was in danger of losing control of the theatre. They wanted clarification prior to the appointment of the new director, of how the theatre would function with this change. For example, they wanted to know how responsibility for the nature and direction of the theatre would be divided between the director and the membership, and how other original goals of the theatre, such as the provision of acting workshops for members, would be carried out under the new arrangements. Although these moves failed to gain enough support, they highlighted the fear of some members that the growing professionalization of the theatre was subverting the Center's participatory democracy.

Despite the apprehension over the diminishing influence of the membership in the theatre, in 1983 it received little volunteer support. Once again, the membership voted in favor of the Administrator's request to approve the course the theatre had taken and to rehire its director for another year. At the same time, the Administrator asked that someone be appointed to help restore membership participation and influence in the theatre. With a professional director and the growing commercial importance of the theatre, this seemed a token gesture to appease critics in the membership.

Even some in the leadership were fearful that the professionalization of the theatre would deprive the membership of influence in its operation. For example, while acknowledging the improved quality of theatre productions under the guidance of a salaried director, the Center's Artistic Director nonetheless urged the membership to take a more active role in the theatre. In this report he relates an exchange with the theatre director, which illustrates the strain resulting from efforts to make the theatre serve ideological as well as professional and organizational interests:

. . . has asked for a commitment for another year. I think we should give it to him but I think we should help by giving him direction in terms of what we want from our theatre. When I mentioned to him about a "structure" we could build on, he said he prefers to develop good people and then develop a structure for them, not vice versa. Suggestion: Have . . . present his plans to the Coiste Stiurtha [steering committee] for discussion, suggestions and bring [them] back to the membership. [Original emphasis.]⁴⁰

Other members as well had misgivings about the changes in the theatre as signs of a departure from its original purpose. As one said:

I'm not saying that's all bad. Is that what the Irish Arts Center started out to be? Is it a professional vehicle for people who want to get into professional theatre, or is it like the Davis Players -- you have a whole bunch of people who are friends and you put on a production?

Another member related that the professionalization of the theatre to its demise as an activity run by the membership:

We've gone professional in the theatre. While we've gone professional, the theatre has no area [active members] and director [membership appointed representative]. And it hasn't had one for years probably, which I think is a disgrace if you're looking at it organizationally. . . . And you want to be a professional so you bring professionals in to do your theatre and it winds up belonging to them rather than to us.

Throughout 1983 and 1984, there was much criticism of the theatre's growing professionalism and autonomy. The Center's Administrator responded by saying that the organization's activity had increased fourfold since 1976, creating more demands on members in other areas, which left them little time for the theatre. In addition, he argued, the social climate had changed, making current members more career oriented and less available to the Center. Finally, he suggested that criticism of the theatre was also the result of envy of its success and chided the membership for allowing the other activities to stagnate.

The burden of explaining and defending the transformation of the Irish Rebel Theatre into a professional company no longer answerable or accessible to the membership fell to the Administrator, who was also the unofficial leader of the Arts Center. Although he gave qualified support to participatory democracy, as an administrator he saw a competitive, professional theatre as vital to the Center's well-being. In that light, he stressed its practical advantages:

The most visible thing we do is the theatre. So I would say it gets a lot of credit for the money we get for general operating support from both the State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts. . . . I think its real importance is it's our most public activity. It's our most successful activity. It's the one that most easily gets into the papers and because of some of the star names we've had. . . . And so when people have heard of the Irish Arts Center, it's probably the theatre they've heard of.

The Administrator viewed the theatre as indispensable to the organization, both financially and in terms of providing public exposure. In order for the theatre to remain a viable part of the Center, he felt it had to become professionalized: "That's the nature of theatre. If you're going to do good theatre, it demands people whose only interest in life is theatre." Nevertheless, professionalization of the theatre violated the Center's participatory democracy, which the Administrator was well aware of. It was his role to convince the membership of the necessity to deviate from organizational policy in this instance. He pointed out the practical need for a professional theatre, redefined it as a non-traditional Irish art, and asserted its unique role in the history of the Center. In other words, if theatre

were not an authentic traditional Irish art and always required professionals, then perhaps it could be treated as an anomaly within the Center. In any case, he argued, even under its new format, the theatre was still ultimately responsible to the membership:

So people say, "It's no longer our theatre." Well, (a) I don't think it ever was in the sense that the music program is inclusive, the theatre was always exclusive. I think it's the nature of the beast. My other response is, "Who signs the checks?" The Irish Arts Center signs the checks, it's the Irish Arts Center's theatre. We decide who the artistic director is. We decide to fire him if we don't like the kind of stuff he's doing.

According to this reasoning, the theatre's earlier direct democracy had evolved into a representative democracy in which its director is answerable to the administrator, who in turn is responsible to the membership. By redefining the theatre's history and role in the organization, as well as stressing its practical importance, the Administrator was able to obtain membership support for professionalizing the theatre. His analysis of the theatre was intended to resolve the contradiction many members sensed between the Center's communitarian ideology and its independent professional theatre company.

Still, for a number of reasons, gaining support for a professional theatre in the Irish Arts Center in 1983 and 1984 was not especially difficult, protestations notwithstanding. First, it was apparent that the theatre was unable to attract enough members to make it a viable part of the Center's participatory democracy. This fact alone weakened the argument for an amateur theatre. Second,

there was a tacit, if reluctant, recognition by many members of the theatre's special status as generally the most lucrative and prestigious of the organization's activities. Finally, the Administrator's endorsement of a professional theatre was very important. His long history as an activist in the Center with a general commitment to its ideological program, as well as his intimate knowledge of its workings as an administrator, added weight to his opinion. The Administrator's enthusiasm for a professional theatre was also informed by a personal interest in it. He had acted in and directed many of the Rebel Theatre's plays, and had done some directing outside the organization. This special regard for theatre was cited by members and participants who felt he favored it over the other areas in terms of the allocation of his time and the Center's resources.

By 1984, the professionalization of the Irish Rebel Theatre was virtually complete. Attendance had doubled since the arrival of a full-time professional director, and the theatre was now receiving regular funding from the State Council on the Arts. For the first time, the Irish Rebel Theatre began transferring some of its productions to Off-Broadway theatres with the possibility of reaching larger audiences and receiving reviews in the New York Times. This was an important consideration, according to the Administrator. "The people who go to the theatre read the New York Times. The New York Times will not review Off-Off-Broadway."

The two plays produced Off-Broadway in 1984, Mr. Joyce is Leaving Paris and Shadow of a Gunman, lost considerable money and

caused controversy because the membership had never been consulted about the transfer or the cast changes requiring the replacement of some of the Center's regular actors. Some members claimed that their decision-making role was being usurped again. Other members took the position that the theatre was effectively outside their jurisdiction, but that the other areas were still membership-run. Still others argued that the theatre remained under the influence of the membership because there were some members active in it whose primary loyalty was to the goals of the Center. Little resulted from this debate, because opinion was divided and the organization was in decline in regard to membership participation.

The move to Off-Broadway further promoted the professionalization of the Center's theatre by providing its regular actors with the opportunity to join Actor's Equity. Since most of the actors frequently used by the Center became unionized, it has become much more difficult to circumvent union rules when mounting productions. The actors are far less willing to cooperate for fear of losing their union cards.

The elimination of the name "Irish Rebel Theatre" by 1984 was another indication of the theatre's transformation into a professional company, as well as of its decline as a symbol of the organization's cultural politics. The Administrator defended the change against critics, saying that the name was "off putting" to a lot of people, and reduced the theatre's potential audience. He further

argued that since the membership was now composed mainly of young career-minded individuals and nothing revolutionary was going on at the Center, it was counter-productive to use a name which gives an inaccurate impression of the theatre and the organization.⁴¹

By 1985, the theatre was operating essentially independently of the membership as a professional Off-off Broadway playhouse. Its plays were, and continue to be, chosen by its director in consultation with the Center's Administrator. It has continued to produce some of the classic Irish plays such as Brendan Brehan's The Hostage, as well as much recent Irish dramas, especially as they relate to the conflict in Northern Ireland. The reason for this emphasis according to the Administrator is because: "That's where the new plays are coming from."

The theatre also gained some valuable publicity in 1985 with the surprise appearance of Peter O'Toole in a production of The Hostage, in which he shared the stage with his daughter Kate. In addition, later that year, John F. Kennedy, Jr. made his acting debut at the Center as the male lead in Winners, a play by Brian Friel. Although it was closed to the public, Kennedy's role in the production was highlighted in the major media, bringing welcome attention to the Arts Center.

In 1987, private donors provided the materials and labor to completely refurbish the Center's theatre. With the addition of such amenities as a renovated lobby, new seating, and an usher, prices

went up. In addition, the theatre appeared to be taking fewer risks in its choice of productions. For example, it opened its fall season with a production of Hugh Leonard's Da, which had been a hit on Broadway several years earlier. However, the Center's version of the play did not do well. After Da, the theatre turned to another former Broadway success, Mass Appeal, for its first production in 1988. Despite its church-related theme, concerning the relationship between a priest and a young seminarian, Mass Appeal was the first non-Irish play produced by the Arts Center. However, despite its potential to attract a wider audience, it was not a commercial success. Although it is too soon to judge, the Center, which historically has been quite willing to take chances with more obscure and untried plays, may be looking to limit its financial risks by producing more commercially proven plays.⁴²

Although the Irish Rebel Theatre began as a group of amateur artists doing street theatre, it quickly moved indoors and achieved almost immediate critical and commercial success. This propelled it into the Off-Off Broadway theatre arena where the forces of competition served to undermine its amateur basis and participatory democracy.

For example, in order to gain expertise, the theatre encouraged professionals to participate in it. However, with few exceptions, most did not share the theatre's communal goals. This, along with the membership's reluctance or inability to take a more active role in the theatre, undermined its participatory democracy and hastened

its professionalization. In addition, the attempt to produce plays by committee proved inefficient and led to a more conventional arrangement in which the director was given full control. The collective approach to mounting plays was also weakened by the growth of activists in the theatre who often gave primacy to artistic values over communitarian ones when conflict arose, which further contributed to the professionalization of the theatre.

The theatre was recognized early on for its financial importance, both direct and indirect, and as a symbol of prestige for the organization. Some leaders worked to promote the theatre's professionalization and a more restricted form of membership participation in it. Other leaders and their supporters wanted to retain an amateur theatrical company under the control of the membership and criticized the trend toward professionalization as a betrayal of original motives. However, their inability to stock the theatre with activists and gain sufficient membership support caused them to lose this battle.

The critical and commercial success of the theatre, its vulnerability to careerists with no interest in its ideological goals, as well as to activists who gave priority to their "art," and the membership's general failure to participate in it, fostered its professionalization and autonomy. The theatre's growing need to compete professionally and the memberships abdication of its role in it, created pressure for a professional director. However, the appointment of a professional director led to conflict as the theatre began to

operate independently of the membership. Thus the professional needs of the theatre were in conflict with the Center's principle of participatory democracy. Opposition, though often vocal, proved weak. Survival needs, and the decline of an activist membership, made the transformation to a professional theatre complete.

The Magazine: An Attempt at Rational Administration

The Center's magazine began in 1974, under the name Sword of Light, essentially as a one-man operation. After only two issues, this version of the magazine ended in the spring of 1975 as attention focused on the structural reorganization of the Arts Center. Later that year, a committee was formed to run the magazine. The first issue was produced during the summer, under a new name, Ais-Eiri, which is Gaelic for renaissance. The new title was designed to signal the "rebirth of Irish art and culture in America," with Gaelic used to symbolize the importance of the language in the development of an Irish consciousness.⁴³

The magazine quickly gained a reputation for being somewhat aloof from the rest of the organization. For example, some members charged that its staff did not participate in the Center's workshops and showed little interest in other organizational activities or goals. While this was debated, there were at least some grounds for the impression of remoteness on the part of the magazine. First, under the assumption that the Center's available space had already been claimed by other programs, the magazine staff held meetings and

did all of its production work outside of the organization's headquarters. By the fall of 1978, the magazine did obtain a secure room to meet and work in the Arts Center, but the perception of its detachment from the social life of the Center persisted. This was largely because the process of producing the magazine could not easily be made part of the Center's general activity. Unlike other programs in the organization, such as music and dance, the magazine could not casually involve other Center members in its activities. As the Administrator pointed out, "Magazines are not participatory by nature."

The demand for skill and expertise inherent in producing a magazine also contributed to the insular image. Because it is hard to be an amateur on a magazine, this area of the Center was available to individuals motivated by professional interests in it. As with the theatre, one could participate in the magazine without having to learn an Irish art form or become too involved with any other aspect of the organization. Thus the nature of the magazine's work and the need for specialists tended to segregate it from the rest of the organization.

By the end of 1978, overworked as well as "frustrated and discouraged" by the organization's failure to assist it in distribution, the magazine committee disbanded. However, before dissolving, the Center's Art Director requested the magazine staff to prepare a report on what would be required to revive the magazine and make it a quarterly. The main conclusion of the report was that Ais-Eiri

could not be sustained on a regular basis by volunteers, and recommended hiring a part-time editor and business manager.⁴⁴ The leadership, out of practical necessity, heeded this advice, even though it was contrary to organizational policy, and the membership concurred.

In March of 1979, Richard Wiley was hired to edit and manage Ais-Eiri. He reorganized the magazine's operations and attempted to systematize the business side of it, eventually receiving permission to accept paid advertising for the first time. Initially, he worked alone, but eventually was able to recruit some volunteers to assist him. During Wiley's tenure as editor, from 1979 until 1982, only six issues of Ais-Eiri were produced. This was due both to the limitations of a volunteer staff and to the Center's financial problems which often prevented the magazine from being published.

Wiley's period as editor of Ais-Eiri was marked by controversy. His strong interest in politics and labor issues was reflected in the magazine, and offended many members who felt such views and subjects were inappropriate for an Irish arts magazine. As one member said, reflecting the attitude of some in the leadership:

[We] believed that the magazine had gone adrift of what it was supposed to be. It was a sounding board for Wiley. It was highly political, had a definite point of view which was a Marxist-socialist kind of point of view, extremely labor oriented. Not that I'm against any of these kind of things, but it had a definite point of view. It was certainly not a cultural-traditional magazine in any way. It didn't reflect traditional Irish arts.

According to these members, Wiley's overt political stance in the magazine violated the organization's original commitment to

political neutrality. From its inception, the Irish Arts Center had defined itself as a non-political cultural organization. Throughout the years, it has attempted, with varying degrees of success, to avoid being identified with any political view, especially as it relates to Northern Ireland. These members argued that the politicalization of the magazine had undermined the organization's credibility in claiming to be outside of politics.

Judging from its content, the magazine was not much different with Wiley in charge from what it had been the previous five years when other editors were in control. There had been at least as much space devoted to politics, labor, and various other issues of social concern such as feminism and the Irish Catholic Church. The magazine's content had not really changed much during Wiley's tenure, but the Center's membership and the attitude of some of its veteran leaders had. During the late 1970's and the early 1980's, the Center's membership had changed from a relatively politicized and activist-oriented group to one consisting mainly of young urban professionals. Although some of these later members were former social and political activists, they were chiefly concerned with the Center as an arts organization, and believed the magazine should represent this. As one said:

There was a feeling that we wanted something that really reflected what was going on more at the Center. We don't have to have a labor magazine . . . or a magazine that rants and raves about politics.

In addition, these members, as well as some older activists, were worried about the amount of money Ais-Eiri was losing, its

limited audience, and what they saw as its lack of focus. In 1982, by invoking the Center's original aim to be a non-political organization, this coalition succeeded in abolishing Ais-Eiri, with the intention of creating a new magazine, one more indicative of their conception of the Arts Center.

By the spring of 1982, a group of volunteers came together to create a new magazine for the Center, called An Gael. The new title was more easily identifiable as Irish and, according to the new volunteer editor, Tom Lenihan, signified a break with the past. To ensure that the magazine would not lose its focus on the traditional Irish arts and stray into political matters, the group produced a "mission" and "content" statement to guide them. The mission statement was simply a reiteration of the Center's cultural aims and the content statement was an attempt to keep politics out of the magazine. It declared that: "An Gael is published for all who want to maintain or actively pursue Irish arts, history, and language."⁴⁵

The beginning of An Gael coincided with a general attempt to restructure the Irish Arts Center and make it more efficient by using business practices. As part of this process, a more rationalized system was introduced to produce the magazine. It had a hierarchical structure that reflected strict accountability. Job categories and their responsibilities were clearly defined and individuals with the appropriate experience were recruited for them. For the first time, the magazine had a staff with the full range of experience and skill

to produce a professional quality magazine. Led by an editor, who made a living as an administrator, this group succeeded in making the magazine a quarterly for the first time and almost eliminated its operating deficit the first year. Lenihan attributes their success to the support of the membership, talented, hard-working volunteers, and his business-like approach to producing the magazine:

My job primarily was to choreograph these people in some way to put out a product. I did not care what people felt or thought in terms of their feelings about each other, in terms of the communal experience that I went through for the last four years. I wanted at the end of the day to publish a magazine. And I tried to enforce on everybody that that was our goal. And hopefully, to make some money from it. It didn't mean that we couldn't have a lot of fun in doing it, that we couldn't develop strong friendships, we couldn't socialize. But I was not going to allow it to go off into feuds and feelings, to some kind of sensitivity group and lose the purpose of what we were brought here to do.

However, Lenihan and his fellow volunteers could not maintain the workload required to produce a quarterly magazine on time for more than one year. The demands were just too great. As he explained his brief success as editor:

I think that was because there was one hundred and fifty percent given by everybody and that level of course can't be maintained. But it could have been sustained if we had the mechanism of paying people. We were trying to make that next.

Initially Lenihan had resisted calls from his staff for remuneration in deference to the Center's commitment to voluntarism, its limited finances, and a general fear of professionalization prevalent in the organization at that time:

While recognizing that the contributions made by department coordinators is considerable in terms of time, energy, and even finance, I believe that in keeping with the volunteer spirit and tradition of ACS; and due to the recent political turmoil concerning staff; and due to a growing concern on the part of the membership that ACS is becoming "professionalized," and due to the potential budget constraints of ACS, that the issue of consultant fees/salaries for departmental coordinators should be postponed until the fall.⁴⁶

However, Lenihan's experience in running the magazine convinced him that long-term success could be achieved only through a salaried staff. By the fall of 1983, Lenihan, along with other volunteers, left the magazine, primarily because they were exhausted or wanted to pursue other interests. With less support, An Gael continued to be published, but not on a quarterly basis. Aside from a decline in volunteers, this was also due to the Center's recurring difficulty in finding the money to pay the printer. It may also have been related to the time it takes a new editor to establish his or her imprint on a magazine.

One problem with the changeover in editors was the reorganization process that had to be repeated. Often the new editor ignored or discarded structures and procedures employed previously in favor of his or her own. For example, Lenihan's successor found the businesslike approach to producing An Gael to be constraining:

When I joined the magazine, it was run a lot differently. It was very bureaucratic, endless meetings at which nothing got done and I couldn't figure out the purpose of. . . . My approach was to be a little more centralized.

Thus frequent turnover in editor and volunteer staff, and disregard of established procedures of operation, inhibited the efficiency of the magazine.

The change in editors in 1983 was eventually reflected in the content of the magazine, which expanded from a more limited focus on the folk arts to include discussions of contemporary Irish culture, literature, and politics. There was little opposition to the return of social and political issues to the magazine because the change was gradual and did not begin until the fall of 1984, when few members were working on the magazine or concerned about its content or direction.

From 1983 until 1986, An Gael continued to be published intermittently under the aegis of two volunteer managers. The addition of paid staff elsewhere in the organization in 1986 prompted them to demand fees for their services. After some negotiation, the Center agree to pay them a fixed sum for each issue of the magazine produced. Thus, the increase in paid workers weakened the moral claims the organization could make on its volunteer magazine staff, resulting in their call for salaries.

By 1987, An Gael was under the tutelage of a new team of editors and, reflecting their interests, began covering more contemporary Irish subjects. For example, a great deal of attention was paid to the growth of a large pool of young illegal Irish immigrants in the United States and its impact on the Irish-American community.

In addition, Northern Ireland, culture, and politics returned to the magazine as central areas of concern. An Gael's more topical focus and livelier tone was also an attempt to compete with a new rival publication, Irish America Magazine.

Like the theatre, An Gael today operates independently of the membership (of which there really isn't any), relying on professionals for its content and production. The magazine has evolved from a small amateur arts journal which rejected advertisements and fees for writers to one that commissions articles from professional authors and systematically solicits paid advertising and subscriptions. The magazine's circulation has climbed from a few hundred in its early years to over 4,000 today. Although still struggling to establish itself and its identity, and a financial drain on the organization, the magazine is viewed by the leadership as serving some important functions, such as providing the Arts Center with national exposure and with helping to raise money through subscription fees and grants.

Because of its need for specialists and the technical nature of its production, the magazine has always stood apart from the community of the Arts Center. The magazine's susceptibility to self-interested individuals fostered its professionalization and reinforced its isolation and independence from the rest of the Center. The magazine could not be sustained by volunteers on a regular basis, partly because of the great effort required, but also because of the

membership's overall lack of participation in it. In addition, its frequent changeover in editors left it with no enduring identity. Its political content, or lack thereof, reflected changes in the Center's membership and the shifting interests they represented. The magazine's shifting identity, along with its irregular publication, made it difficult to attract advertisers or loyal subscribers. Like the theatre, the magazine today is essentially an operation run by professionals with little or no input from volunteers.

Irish Language Program: Enthusiasm Confronts Discipline

The Irish language has always been an important component in the Irish Arts Center's program for reviving Irish culture in America. Two of the Center's founders were fluent Gaelic speakers who believed that language was the cornerstone of culture. In the Center's ideology, articulated in 1975, language forms the basis for Irish culture and identity:

. . . the Irish language developed over thousands of years, not only as a means by which the Irish people communicated with one another, but also as a means by which they expressed their inner life and dreams. Having developed along with the Irish people, the Irish language therefore most truly was able to express and transmit the spirit of that inner life and those dreams in a way that the language of a foreign people never could and never will.⁴⁷

In establishing its membership criteria in 1975, the Center stated that prospective members should recognize the "central place" of Gaelic in restoring Irish culture and be willing to commit themselves to learning and using the language. Nonetheless, over the

years the Center has not had much success in making its members or participants fluent in Gaelic. There are a number of reasons for this. First, there is the inherent difficulty in learning any new language, especially a little-used one such as Gaelic. Learning Irish⁴⁸ requires a high degree of commitment and discipline over an extended period of time, and there is little reward outside the classroom. That is, there are few opportunities to speak Gaelic outside the classroom.

These practical limitations to learning Gaelic are partly reflected in the composition of the Irish language workshop program. Beginning Irish classes tend to be much larger than the advanced classes, indicating the declining commitment of students.⁴⁹ This long-term trend prompted one recent director of the Irish language program to wonder if it were aiming its resources at the appropriate audience:

The question is, who should we be catering to? Last year [1983], we had four beginning classes. We had enormous registration. I had to go seek out additional teachers to accommodate them all. And it looks great on paper. It looks great for funding organizations. And we had a great sticking rate; these people stayed with it right through. But most of them didn't come back this year? Now, why didn't they come back? Is it because of the way we're teaching? Is it because that's all they wanted out of it? Did they go elsewhere? Should we have been putting all that energy and all those teachers into a beginning level, or should we have been offering something on a more intensive, more advanced level for people who are truly serious about speaking a language as opposed to just studying it for a term or two.

That the Irish language program has been characterized by a preponderance of introductory courses indicates the superficial

interest of its students. This director suggests that the program is wasting its limited resources in serving those with little enthusiasm for learning Gaelic, rather than focusing on more serious students of Irish. However, it is questionable whether the Irish language program would attract many participants if it were directed at the more dedicated students of Irish. First, there is a relatively small number of serious students of the language in the city, and they have alternative programs from which to choose. Secondly, the Irish language program has not had very much success in engaging the membership which is expected to have a strong commitment to learning Gaelic.

The limited zeal of the Center's members for learning Irish was apparent as early as 1976, when the organization tried to establish a language department. As the leadership noted:

There is a need for an Irish committee; and that is to develop a language department. But we feel there is insufficient support from the areas under the present structure, and that there are interested people who would join the committee on a nonrepresentational basis.⁵⁰

By 1978, there was enough support to establish the language program as a separate entity within the organization. Nonetheless, it has remained a struggle for language enthusiasts to interest the rest of the membership in learning Gaelic. A number of attempts have been made to prod the membership in that direction. For example, a "compulsory study" program was set up in which Gaelic was to be integrated with learning the Irish arts, but the program failed from lack of membership participation. Periodically, a few members have

waged unsuccessful campaigns to have membership meetings conducted in Irish. Eventually the membership did accept the use of some Gaelic terms in its meetings. There have also been "poster campaigns" during which signs explaining the derivation and meaning of Gaelic words were put up throughout the Center building. Finally, there have been "Irish dinners" and "weekends," as well as informal evenings of Irish conversation at the Arts Center to encourage the use of the language.

Despite these efforts, the membership at large did not embrace Gaelic. This was highlighted in 1981 in a debate over the organization's proposed sponsorship of an Irish language school in Ireland. Known as the Curraun program, for its location in Ireland, it was conceived as a language immersion program, and was suggested by a number of Center members who had spent part of the summer of 1980 in a Gaelic-speaking part of Ireland. Having enjoyed their stay and exposure to the language in a natural setting, they returned to the Arts Center urging that a formal program be established. This proposal caused great controversy, not only because of the membership's general lack of passion for the language, but also because of the cost. Even some language enthusiasts thought the project ill-conceived. Despite the opposition, the Curraun program ultimately was approved.

There were a number of reasons why a program that was not very popular and which would require substantial funding was ratified.

First, the program had the support of some key leaders in the organization, leaders who were adept at mobilizing support for their cause. Secondly, some members felt the Center was in a downturn and thought that a new program might create some excitement and attract new members. Finally, there was the romantic appeal of having access to a house in a rural hamlet on the coast of Ireland.

The Curraun program ran for two years as a Center-funded activity and was cancelled in 1983 because it ultimately could not attract enough participants. The first year the program did well, with a total enrollment of eighty people, participating for a week at a time throughout the summer. Its success was due largely to the active support of interested members and paid staff.

However, there were also problems. For example, an evaluation of the program in 1981 found that it was poorly run and generally disorganized.⁵¹ In 1982, initially participants in the Curraun program were required to have some knowledge of Gaelic. This stipulation was later dropped due to poor response. The course was extended to two weeks, but this too was reversed for want of interest. Finally, only fifteen students enrolled. The program suffered again from management problems in Ireland and from a decline in enthusiasm and staff in New York. The Curraun program was cancelled in 1983, because, as the Center's Artistic Director said: "We have not gotten the response we hoped for and the organization is not able, financially and personnel-wise, to support it this summer."⁵² A committee formed

in 1982 to analyze the financial condition of the Curraun program basically came to the same conclusion. Although divided on whether to continue the language school, the committee agreed that even operating at full capacity, the enterprise could not pay for itself. The committee additionally noted the "marked decrease" in membership participation in the program.⁵³

Another element in the failure of the Curraun project was its inability to attract enough participants from the Irish-American community. According to the Curraun committee report, the language immersion program was too narrowly conceived and could not compare with similar programs already offered in Ireland. The committee suggested that in order to appeal to a larger audience, the program (if continued) should be presented as a "mini" Irish Arts Center, in which Gaelic would be only part of a larger curriculum on the Irish arts. Paradoxically, this would dilute the original goal of the program, to produce fluent Irish speakers, some of whom were expected to teach for the Center in New York. In addition, by broadening the scope of the Curraun program to include other cultural activities, the chances of attracting people less committed to the language were increased. Although the language program in Ireland was never revived, it does illustrate the contradictions posed in creating successful programs that also serve organizational aims.

The Curraun program is also an example of the overall difficulty the Center had in supporting its growing activities. In

its first year, the Irish language school had some success, largely because of the temporary availability of CETA-funded staff in New York. By the second year, the program no longer had the funding, staff, or volunteers to support it. As the Artistic Director pointed out, the organization had spread itself too thinly:

It is questionable whether or not we should direct all the time and energy required to make this program succeed financially and programmatically. . . . rather than direct that energy to projects here in New York City.⁵⁴

The lack of membership participation in the Curraun program symbolized the membership's weak commitment to learning Gaelic, which led an irritated Artistic Director to declare in 1983:

At our next meeting I recommend that we review our attitudes toward the language and the criteria for membership. One of our principles states that we have an "active participation in the language." We should make that commitment or drop it from our principles because we don't want to.⁵⁵

Throughout 1984-85, those few members active in the language area continued to sponsor events and tried to integrate Gaelic with the other programs in the Arts Center. They were not very successful, and in 1986 the director of the language program announced that it had collapsed. In other words, there were no longer any members active in the program. In addition, the director said, despite initial large enrollments, there was a high dropout rate in the language classes. In her opinion, those who came for instruction in Gaelic had no serious interest in the language and wanted to learn only some words and phrases. She urged the organization to hire a

consultant to create a curriculum to produce fluent Gaelic speakers. This was resisted by the leadership, which was resigned to the demise of the language program and who felt that there were other programs around the city to serve Gaelic enthusiasts. As a result, the leadership decided to offer only introductory classes in Gaelic, which would be taught exclusively by paid instructors.⁵⁶

Generally speaking, the membership's resistance to learning Irish was not based on philosophical grounds. The membership frequently endorsed motions declaring the significance of Gaelic to the restoration and maintenance of Irish culture. For example, in 1980 it approved an amendment to the Center's "mission statement" recognizing the equal importance of the language to the art forms in reviving Irish culture.⁵⁷ In addition, the membership has supported the limited use of Gaelic in its activities and magazine.

The membership's unwillingness to learn Gaelic was based on its difficulty and limited application. While many members affirmed Gaelic's theoretical importance to Irish culture, they also felt it was virtually a dead language. As one said, "If you can't revive the language in Ireland, how can you do it here?" Even some of the organization's most dedicated language enthusiasts have faltered in their quest to attain fluency. As one said:

I started to learn the language because I felt that if I'm going to be a member of this organization, and if I'm going to be representative of what the culture's supposed to be, I should learn the language. And I tried. I went to Curraun and so forth and really worked at it for years. But just simply because of life

circumstances, I haven't stuck with it. I'm hoping one day I'll just go back to it.

The language program in the Center was also undermined by those who did not believe Gaelic was essential to Irish culture. As one said, "There are other things, the music, the dance." Another said: "There are a lot of people in Ireland who never had the language and who continue to love the culture."

Even though it had the moral support of most members as well as of the leadership, the language program was never able to attract enough members to become a viable part of the Irish Arts Center. As it once reported to the membership:

Gaeilge has been a virtually invisible area in Center operations. This is disproportionate to its prominent status in the goals of An Claidheamh Soluis. . . . The area needs the help and support of the membership to implement its future plans and fulfill its goals.⁵⁸

Because it never drew much support, the language area, unlike other programs, was less apt to grow apart from the rest of the organization. For the most part, it sought to involve itself with other programs to increase its visibility and survive. It was almost too weak to stand alone. The attempt to incorporate itself with other activities was done for ideological reasons as well, since the integration of the language and the arts was a goal of the organization.

Despite its overall weakness as a program, the language area did display a propensity toward professionalism. For example, there were several plans to rationalize its curriculum, emphasizing teaching techniques and the use of specialized equipment. In addition, for

several years the program had been paying a few of its teachers. Ultimately, the abandonment of the language program by the membership led its director to request that a professional consultant be hired to revitalize the program by creating a new curriculum. As the Center's Administrator implied, this signalled the end of Gaelic as an ideological concern for the organization: "Language was once an issue for the whole organization, then it became an issue for Gaeilge, then for an outside expert."

Two major processes have been at work in the development of the Center's various programs. One has been the growth of professionalism in the artistic areas. The emphasis on technique required in learning an art form created a tendency to focus on the art itself, which was at the expense of communitarian goals. Thus, for many members, improving their skills as dancers, musicians, actors, or even as magazine staff became more important than the Center's goals. The result has been a series of unsatisfactory compromises reflected in varying degrees by the programs which contain elements of amateurism and of professionalism. Ultimately, pressures toward professionalism from within the programs and without and the membership's abandonment of them led to the appointment of professional managers or consultants.

A related process affecting the Center's programs has been their autonomous development. As they evolved, these activities established their own agendas, which often were at variance with the organization's. Over time, the participants in the different programs

became more responsive to them than to the wider aims of the Center. This resulted in fragmentation as the individual programs sought to advance their particular interests.

Thus, each of the programs contained within them the counter pressures of professionalism and amateurism, of participatory democracy and bureaucratization, of a commitment to Irish culture as a whole and a special interest in one aspect of that culture, of Irish nationalism and an apolitical attitude toward Irish culture. At the level of organization, these counter-pressures were expressed as tendencies toward professionalization, specialization, and bureaucratization in the rationalization of activity.

Notes

1. Minutes, May 3, 1975, "History of Music Area of ACS."
2. Ibid.
3. The workshop program is the Center's curriculum of classes in music, dance, language, and history. Because most of the Center's workshops have been in music and dance, especially at the beginning, we have considered them synonymous with the workshop program in general.
4. Minutes, October 23, 1977, "Report to the Membership from Rince Ceol [Music and Dance]."
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Minutes, November 4, 1978, "Rince Ceol Report to the Membership."
8. Minutes, October 7, 1978. "Report to the Membership from Rince Ceol."
9. Minutes, November 12, 1977, "How to Check Our Dwindling Membership," p.8.
10. Minutes, February 3, 1979, "Report to the Membership from Rince Ceol."
11. Minutes, September 8, 1979, "Director's Report to the Membership."
12. Minutes,
13. Rince Ceol Minutes, August 28, 1980.
14. Rince Ceol Minutes, September 30, 1980.
15. Coiste Stiurtha [Steering Committee] Minutes, December 24, 1981.
16. Ibid.
17. Minutes, June 19, 1982, "Director's Report to the Membership."
18. Coiste Stiurtha, Minutes, June 30, 1985.

19. Diana Barth, "The Irish Rebel Theatre: The First Ten Years," Ais Eiri.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Minutes, May 3, 1975, "Report of the Theatre Committee."
24. Theatre Committee Minutes, December 5, 1976.
25. Theatre Committee Minutes, February 5, 1977.
26. Theatre Committee Minutes, February 3, 1977.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Theatre Committee Minutes, January, 1976.
30. Minutes, January 22, 1977.
31. Minutes, Coiste Stiurtha, October 8, 1978.
32. Minutes, Coiste Stiurtha, February 9, 1979.
33. Minutes
34. Theatre Minutes, March 30, 1977.
35. Minutes, April 3, 1982.
36. Ibid.
37. Minutes, June 20, 1981, "Theatre Report."
38. The Administrator of the Irish Arts Center had changed his title to that of Executive Director in 1981. For the sake of clarity and to distinguish him from the group's volunteer Artistic Director, we shall still refer to him as "Administrator."
39. Minutes, June 19, 1982.
40. Minutes, April 16, 1983, "Director's Report to the Membership."
41. Personal notes taken at membership meeting January 19, 1985.

42. Rosanne Martorella has described how, in the rationalization of the management of performing arts organizations, economic concerns can take precedence over artistic values in casting and repertoire. "Rationality in the Artistic Management of Performing Arts Organizations," in Jack B. Kameron, Rosanne Martorella, et al., Performers and Performances: The Social Organization of Artistic Work, with an introduction by Joseph Bensman (South Hadley, Ma.: Bergin & Garvey, 1983).
43. Editorial: "Why the New Name, New Format, New Emphasis?", Ais Eiri, Summer, 1975, vol.1, no.3.
44. Minutes, December 15, 1979.
45. An Gael records, January, 1982.
46. An Gael records, "Memo to Publishing Board."
47. Minutes, May 3, 1975.
48. Irish people use the term "Irish" interchangeably with Gaelic. We do the same, while recognizing that other cultural groups also have claim to the language.
49. Since Irish classes are the only way in which members can learn the language at the Center, they are also a measure of their interest in it.
50. Minutes, April 10, 1976, "Organizing Committee Report to the Membership."
51. Minutes, October 16, 1982, "Report to the Membership from the Temporary Curraun Committee."
52. Minutes, May 15, 1983, "Director's Report to the Membership."
53. Minutes, October 16, 1982.
54. Minutes.
55. Minutes, May 15, 1983.
56. From personal notes taken at membership meeting on June 7, 1986.
57. Minutes, September 27, 1980. "Gaelige: Report to the Membership."
58. Gaelige [Gaelic Committee] Minutes, December 7, 1981.

Chapter 4

ORGANIZATIONAL ROUTINIZATION AND ITS EFFECTS

When the Irish Arts Center began in 1972, it consisted of a few social and political activists who had a common understanding of what kind of organization they wanted to build. Over the next few years they were able to attract followers who shared their vision and worked to make it a reality. This small, close-knit group grew to around twenty individuals and operated in a communal fashion, with its members spending most of their free time together in the pursuit of common goals.

As the Center's programs became more popular, they brought in many more participants to the organization. The growth of its activities and participants meant that the group no longer could function efficiently on an informal basis. By 1975, with many participants calling for representation in the organization, it became clear that some structure would have to be set up to absorb these new people and to formally define the organization and its agenda.

The Beginning of Participatory Democracy

In the transition to a more formal organization in 1975, the leaders of the Arts Center were guided by their desire to create a participatory democracy. To facilitate this, an executive body called an "Organizing Committee" was established. Made up of the leaders

of the various programs, plus the Artistic Director of the Center and one member-at-large, its task was "to lead and strengthen the organization between membership meetings."¹ The organizing committee proved to be relatively weak because its authority was limited and poorly defined. For example, instead of giving it clear authority, the membership asked the organizing committee to "clarify procedures protecting the right of each member of the organization to access to all areas and committees."² The membership's primacy in running the organization and its reluctance to delegate power created immediate problems.

The most visible sign of difficulty with participatory democracy in 1975 was the membership meetings which were marked by confusion and disorganization. Almost every aspect of the Center's operation was subjected to detailed examination and discussion by the membership. This resulted in overloaded agendas which tended to overwhelm the membership. At one meeting in the spring of 1975, after two hours of discussion twenty-six items still remained on the agenda. This situation was aggravated by the membership's inexperience with and reluctance to use established procedures to limit discourse. The effect was membership meetings which often would last all day and continue into the next. In fact, the length and spirited nature of these early meetings have made them a part of the folklore of the Arts Center.

Examination of the minutes of membership meetings at this time also reveals confusion regarding the structure of the Center. For example, the lines of authority between the Organizing Committee, the membership, and newly formed committees to represent it, were not delineated. These initial problems were met with efforts to clarify procedures at membership meetings by adopting some rules of order and by attempts to explain the organization's structure.³

In spite of these endeavors, the Arts Center was still having trouble operating with its organizational structure at the beginning of 1976. Many committees established in 1975 were no longer functioning, and attempts at structural reform were unsuccessful. In an analysis of this situation later that year, the Center's Artistic Director characterized it as a shift from excessive democracy to "extreme centralization." As committees ceased to function, he said, increasing responsibility was assumed by the Center's executive board, the Organizing Committee. According to the Director, the organization's original structure as set up in the spring of 1975 contained too many (ten) committees for the thirty Center members to adequately support. He proposed fewer committees with more members, along with other refinements of the Center's structure.⁴

While the Arts Center had more success with structural reform this time, there were still problems with its operation. One was the question of attaining efficiency through participatory democracy and another was gaining "recognition that responsibility for operating

our structure rests equally with all members."⁵ The Artistic Director's emphasis on the need for all members to do their share of the organization's work points to difficulties it was having motivating them. For example, there were complaints that the various programs within the Center were failing to meet their obligations to the organization. Attendance at membership meetings and payment of membership dues were cited as other duties neglected by too many members. The members in turn were disenchanted with the administration and maintenance of the Center. They charged that its office was inadequately staffed, its files in disarray, and that there was a general failure of communication within the organization. There were also complaints about the physical deterioration of the Center's building and its unkempt appearance.

Various measures were instituted to correct some of these problems. For example, a series of "workdays" was established for which members and students were recruited to do clerical, cleanup, and repair work. Those programs failing to satisfy their organizational responsibilities were threatened with curtailment of their activity and those members having missed a specified number of meetings or dues payments were to be suspended or removed from the membership roll. These attempts to enforce an equitable sharing of the administration and maintenance of the Arts Center were not effective. This was primarily because the organization was so badly in need of volunteers that it tended to allow members to participate in their own

fashion. Burdened with meeting its daily requirements, the Center found it difficult to identify and penalize the members who were not contributing fully to the organization.

The Arts Center's difficulty in inducing many of its members to participate in its communitarian democracy can be traced to the diversity of motives people had for joining the organization. For a variety of reasons, many members were drawn chiefly to the Center's programs and did not want to participate further in the organization. This was implicitly recognized in the Center's threat to reduce the activities of those programs not fulfilling their obligations to the organization. Thus, even at this early stage in its development, the Arts Center was confronted with the problem of relatively passive members or those who wanted to pursue a particular activity exclusive of the Center's participatory democracy.

A Crisis in Participatory Democracy

As the number of activity minded members increased, more of the organization's work fell to its social and political activists, and their burden became even greater as the Center's overall level of activity increased. Thus by 1977 the decline in fully participating members became so acute that it was made the subject of a report entitled "How to Check Our Dwindling Membership." This document noted the threat to the Center's participatory democracy posed by the diminishing number of "working" members:

It is not a healthy process because the fewer members we have, the greater the burden becomes for that core of people without whom the Center would not function. As they do more and more administrative work, they have less time for artistic activities. The result is often demoralization, fatigue, and a directing of negative feelings at other members of the Center. Perhaps people withdraw, perhaps not, but either way the situation is not healthy. . . . It is time we analyze this situation carefully so we can reverse this destructive trend. If the erosion of our internal structure is not checked we should not be surprised if it collapses, or at best functions poorly.⁶

The report found a number of related factors associated with the decrease in active members. Foremost among them was membership meetings:

Meetings are the single thing members complain about the most. . . . This is because our meetings are often inefficient, frustrating, and a waste of time. The agenda is rarely, if ever, known in advance. This obliges people to do their thinking about these items right on the spot. What often results is not a careful and clear consideration of alternatives, but a rap session in which people "think out loud," repeat themselves, repeat what each other have said, and generally use the time inefficiently.⁷

The report also pointed out that decisions reached in membership meetings often had little impact because of insufficient membership support and follow-through:

Decisions made at these meetings, particularly on important issues, sometimes have very little weight because there has been no real time for the proposal to take root and be carefully examined. Many of the ideas fail to get solid support once approved or never come off at all. We have many gifted individuals in our organization whose capacity to come up with exciting ideas seems unlimited. But our capacity to make these ideas a reality is limited, especially now, given our small numbers.⁸

Finally, this account of the decline of active members noted the vulnerability of the Center's programs to self-interested individuals. For example, in areas such as the theatre and the magazine, it was possible for members to participate in them without having to learn an Irish art:

The study of acting, magazine production, etc., are not Irish per se and should not be looked at as such. Play production and magazine production are an important means of implementing an awareness of Irish art. To ensure a growing Irish consciousness and content in the work of these areas and the Center as a whole, it is necessary that members in these areas be studying Irish art and its background. This will also act as a check on opportunistic individuals who are interested solely in theatre for theatre's sake, or solely in putting out a magazine without being too concerned about the Irish content of it.⁹

As it grew, and its programs became more popular, the Arts Center had to cope with the increasing problem of members who wanted to acquire some skills without immersing themselves in the Irish arts. In addition, the excesses of the Center's democracy were alienating some of its more committed members, who either left the organization or reduced their participation. To reverse this situation, the report on the loss of membership recommended another reformation of the Center's structure to reflect a stronger, more centralized leadership: "For us to make any real progress as an organization we must learn to delegate responsibility and authority to our members who are most ready for it." In addition, the report suggested clarification and stricter enforcement of the membership criteria in order to distribute the organization's work more equitably.

Although the Center reorganized its structure from 1977 to 1978, and stressed the obligations of membership, it was unable to appreciably resolve the problems of administration and disorganization.

The Development of Bureaucracy, Professionalism, and Specialization

The expanding activity and growing complexity of the Arts Center, without a corresponding increase in working members, created pressure to bureaucratize and professionalize the staff. For example, between 1976 and 1978, the music and dance workshop program, which contained the bulk of the Center's classes, experienced a dramatic rise in its number of students, from 67 to 200. This led to a demand not only for more teachers, but for more expert instruction because the students (who also included members) were seeking to advance in their particular art form. Because the music and dance program was unable to produce enough of its own skilled instructors as originally intended, it decided (with membership approval) to hire five paid teachers. Although this contradicted the Center's principle of voluntarism and its fear of bureaucracy, the move caused little debate at the time. This was mainly because employing more proficient music and dance instructors was announced as an interim measure to help provide the organization with its own staff of trained volunteer instructors after two years, a compromise supported by some of the Center's most committed activists, thereby defusing potential opposition. Also, the money for this would not come from the organization's

current budget, but from additional funding sources, which ipso facto were regarded as desirable.

Periodically the Arts Center had paid a few artists modest fees over the years, but the systematic hiring of five instructors in 1978 indicated a more pronounced tendency toward professionalism in the music and dance area. In 1976-77, similar calls by some musicians for more advanced instruction had been rejected as inimical to the Center's goal of encouraging amateur participation in the Irish arts. The growth of professionalism was indicated not only by the addition of paid staff, but also in the greater emphasis on reaching higher levels of proficiency in music and dance. By temporarily suspending its policy of voluntarism to improve the quality of its teachers, the Arts Center was attempting to strike a balance between its principles and the demands of its members and students. The Center was also inadvertently responding to those members interested only in music and dance activities and not in the communitarian aims the organization wanted them to serve. Thus, in revoking its policy against salaried teachers, the Center was trying to accommodate the different motives members had for their participation in the organization.

The tendency toward professionalism in the music and dance program and its declaration to raise its own funds to pay for salaried instructors reflected the growing autonomy of the program and pointed to the developing independence of the Center's other programs. Concern

over the separate development of its programs in which particular interests were beginning to compete with the general purposes of the organization was expressed by the Director as he outlined the role of the Center's executive body, known as the Organizing Committee:

Members of this committee must represent the entire membership -- not sectors or groupings -- if it is to avoid having its decisions plunge the organization into wasteful wrangling and foot dragging. The structure must reflect our mandate that each individual on the committee must cast each vote for the good of the entire membership without conflicting loyalties to any constituency or grouping within the membership.¹⁰

By 1978, steps toward professionalizing the Center's administration also began. For example, the organization hired its first full-time administrator. The Center's Artistic Director, who was a volunteer, declared this to be the most important staffing decision made that year:

One of our wisest decisions this year (if not the wisest) was the hiring of an administrator. His presence relieved the membership of many small problems which continually plagued us over the last three years and seemed to keep us from making any great headway. Boiler, telephones, tax returns, etc., are no longer problems that not only aggravate but also cost us money again and again. . . . Our experience this fall, it seems to me, tells us that we have reached a point in our development where we will always need a full-time administrator. In our financial planning, therefore, we will have to take this into account.¹¹

The demands of meeting day-to-day needs as well as the growth in the Center's activity meant that its administration no longer could be left in the uncertain hands of volunteers, but required the appointment of a salaried official who could be held accountable.

In its earlier history, the Arts Center had sporadically paid a few members small sums for administrative work, but this marked the first formal establishment of a paid position at the organizational level, with a job title (Administrator) and a written description of its duties. Even though this was another violation of the Center's commitment to volunteer staff, the move was generally welcomed because the group was being overwhelmed by administrative needs to which many members were either unable or unwilling to attend. In addition, there was a consensus that the hiring of an administrator represented an exception to the Center's policy of maintaining itself mainly through the effort of volunteers. Finally, the new administrator's long history as a committed activist in the organization tempered the effect of this deviation from principle.

However, in 1978-79, increasing organizational needs and the availability of grant money combined to add five full-time paid workers to the Center's staff. This growth in paid staff also caused little controversy because most of its time was to be directed toward teaching music and dance. Since a paid teaching staff was considered a temporary measure to provide the Center with a core of volunteer instructors, there was little opposition to it. A CETA grant which supported the additional staff, plus other moneys obtained by the music and dance program and the magazine, marked another departure for the Arts Center, namely in the way it supported itself. Traditionally, the Center had been largely self-supporting, but in order to finance

future development, the organization decided to seek more outside funding. As the Director stated:

Since I became director, I have had a number of indications that there is money available for the support of our work. At the same time, it is evident that we have reached a point in our development where we are capable of going after this money in a systematic way. . . . In the last few years, we have sustained ourself through our productions: theatre, siamsas, ceilis, seisuins, and magazine. We can continue to do so. However, we are moving now to a position where we are going to need funds for growth. We will need funds for a new building, for new programs in New York, and most importantly, for support of our organizing efforts in other communities. . . . This year, we have begun to reach out for funds made available by different agencies and groups: NEA, NYSCA, CCLM, AOH, and Con Ed.¹²

The Center's growing awareness of, and search for, funding was another sign of the development of bureaucracy and professionalization within the organization.

Moves toward professionalizing its staff and increasing its share of outside funding did not mean the Center had abandoned its commitment to participatory democracy. The membership was still the acknowledged ruling body of the organization. In addition, other attempts at promoting professionalism within the Center were rejected. For example, some members proposed charging students fees for classes as a way of providing funds for teachers' salaries. This was rejected because it ran counter to the organization's belief in freely sharing cultural knowledge. Further, the goals of maintaining unity of purpose among its different sectors, of spreading a renewed interest in Irish

culture, and of linking up with other ethnic and racial groups, were reaffirmed.

The Arts Center's reassertion of its aims in 1978 also highlights problems it was having in achieving them. For example, because of the limited participation of many members, numerous attempts were made to reemphasize and specify the membership's responsibilities to the organization. These efforts often took the form of motions passed at membership meetings, such as: "That the criteria for membership of sharing the work be interpreted as including maintenance, office duty, seisuin cleanup, ceili, theatre productions, mailings and all work required to proceed with ACS activities."¹³ The limited participation of the membership in sustaining the organization was exacerbated by a large turnover in members, which reduced the effectiveness of the group, according to the Director: "Out of the original thirty or so members, only seven remain. This means that experience gained over the years is lost. Many mistakes have been repeated. This has been discouraging at times."¹⁴

In analogous fashion, the Center was having difficulty motivating students to become members or even to participate in the Center's "Work Program" requiring one hour of unpaid work for the organization in exchange for free classes. Advanced students had so ignored this stipulation that a ruling was passed requiring them to take part in Center performances in return for free instruction.

Another elusive organizational goal stressed in 1978 was the integration of the Center's art forms. In the Center's view, a viable cultural revival could not take place without an understanding of the interrelationship of the Irish arts. With this in mind, as well as the tendency of the various departments to go their separate ways, the "Compulsory Study Program" was revived. This program required members to participate in weekly exercises blending the art forms together. "Consolidation" of the various programs which were taking off in their own various directions was also a major topic of discussion within the group.

The pull toward professionalism in the Arts Center in 1978 and the increasing independence of the programs from one another, along with a general expansion of activity, indicated changes that could threaten the communal basis of the organization. Thus the Director warned: "As in any transitional period, we must take special care to defend the democratic principle that those who do the work make the decisions."¹⁵

The Expansion of Curricula and Activities in the Late 1970's and Early 1980's and their Ramifications

By 1978, the Center's music and dance classes had grown to forty-six, with an enrollment of more than 200 students, the language program was teaching Gaelic to 75 people, and by the late 1970's the theatre was becoming more active, going from four to five productions a season. There was also a Siamsa (music and dance troupe) in place,

performing around the metropolitan area, and the magazine had acquired a part-time editor to help it develop further. This increase in the organization's activity was accompanied by a similar increase in its budget, which went from \$25,000 in 1978 to \$50,000 in 1979.

This expansion of the organization's activity was not limited to its headquarters in Manhattan, but included attempts to set up other units in the outer boroughs. These outreach efforts were continued through 1980 and 1981. During those two years, the Center began to take on another major organizational and financial commitment, the establishment of a membership-run Irish language summer school in Ireland. In addition, the Center was producing a major outdoor folk arts festival as well as other events and programs. The Center's increasing activity was reflected in its 1981 budget of \$63,000 and its search for larger quarters.

The Center's growth and expansion in the late 1970's and early 1980's was largely facilitated by CETA funding that supported a full-time staff of five people. In addition, there was a small infusion of more active members to lend support for the Center's increasing obligations. Despite the relative success of its programs, the organization also had its share of problems and failures during this period. The CETA program became a mixed blessing because it led to an increasing reliance on the staff its funds provided to do administrative work and to difficulties integrating these paid workers into "the overall perspective of An Claidheamh Soluis." Areas of

new growth, such as creating chapters of the Arts Center in other boroughs, did not succeed because members were either already overtaxed or uninterested in such goals.

The general lack of concern for such outreach efforts reflected not only the membership's lack of enthusiasm for such activist aims, but also the emerging self-interest of the various segments within the Center. This was implied in the Director's remarks in 1979, scolding the membership for its want of initiative in setting up new units of the organization:

The lack of an essential motivation has shown itself in our inability as an organization to launch any sustained effort toward external organizing, in a lack of shared focus for the efforts of individual areas, and in our inability to communicate to new members a sense of the fundamental purpose of the organization.¹⁶

By 1980, confusion over the Center's structure reappeared as a major organizational theme. For example, there was confusion concerning the role of the Administrator as well as other elements in the organization. Because his authority to act was subject to membership approval, the Administrator's effectiveness was limited, while more complex and onerous responsibilities were often left to him by default. As one report on the Administrator's role stated: "Whereas he does not have the authority to make simple decisions regarding building maintenance, he is burdened with major decisions regarding the financial base of the Center."¹⁷ This lack of clarity in the Center's structure included a blurring of the roles of the Administrator and the Artistic Director, and their and other staff persons'

relationship to the rest of the organization. Overall, there was found to be a "lack of delineation of lines of authority within the structure." The Center's difficulty with its structure in 1980 was exacerbated by budgetary constraints. Cash flow problems, which had become a perennial issue for the organization, forced it to temporarily lay off its Administrator and magazine editor.

By 1981, the Arts Center was struggling with its workshop program. Enrollment had dropped off dramatically and, according to one analysis, the program had no overall focus. The declining number of workshop participants was considered a serious problem, because the workshops were the main source of new members and volunteers for the organization. In addition, the workshop program was supposed to provide volunteer instructors for the Center. However, one analysis of the program concluded that it was not very successful in developing or maintaining qualified teachers because its curriculum was poorly organized and administered. In addition, many instructors were either inexperienced or unable to teach well. The screening of teachers and a uniform curriculum with set standards were recommended. Also suggested was hiring a full-time workshop and work program administrator as well as professional artists as consultants.¹⁸

The Arts Center had problems with other aspects of its operation in 1981. For example, while the theatre was successful in that it produced six plays, it did not function as part of the organization's participatory democracy because most of the theatre's

participants were either disinterested or not members of the Center. The Irish language program was in near collapse from lack of membership support. Finally, the magazine, Ais-Eiri, was discontinued, having been considered a failure in regard to both its content and management.

The cumulative effect of these recurring problems and the strain of meeting everyday needs, plus the prospect of the expiration of CETA funding by the end of 1981 (and the loss of five full-time staff members), was an overall sense of weariness among the membership, which was noted by the Director at the time:

The demands of organizing plays, producing a quarterly magazine, ceilis, siamsas, concerts, the seisuin, maintaining the building, teaching classes, attending meetings, not to mention the general administrative work of both the overall organization and the different areas, has, I believe, introduced a feeling of pressure and tension which is opposed to our artistic and social ideals. Does this mean we remove the pressure by ceasing to carry on the activities? Obviously not. What it does mean is that we try both individually as well as organizationally to restore the balance. . . . We must strive for the balance between organizational demands and artistic goals.¹⁹

During the period of expansion from 1979 to 1981, the Irish Arts Center tried to cope with its organizational problems, both old and new. For example, in 1979 it hired a part-time editor for the magazine in the hope of making it a quarterly for the first time. Due to a shortage of funds, the editor was not always employed while the magazine continued to operate at a deficit. In 1980, an attempt to understand the organization's dilemma in clarifying the roles and responsibilities of its constituent parts resulted in a lengthy report

on the organization's structure.²⁰ The report was largely the work of a member who had borrowed extensively from the literature relating to management control in non-profit organizations, and was an abstractly worded document thirty-three pages long, containing twenty-three recommendations, only four of which were accepted. Only one of the ratified proposals implied a substantive change in the way the Center operated which was to "decentralize the workload and responsibility"²¹ in the organization.

There was another report issued in 1980 evaluating the Center's programs which recommended strategies to enable them to meet organizational goals.²² The report cited "overwork of members" as a major weakness and proposed that the organization as well as its respective areas adopt three-year plans in order to retain their focus on the group's aims. In 1981, there were attempts to revitalize and restructure the Arts Center's workshop program, with the Artistic Director promising to take a personal hand in it. At the same time, to revive its volunteer work program, the organization decided to hire someone to oversee it for three months.

Because the Center was offering an average of fifty workshops each semester, it was hard to maintain quality control. Dependence on volunteers to teach most of the classes meant that generally the organization had to accept whoever was willing to teach. The result was a workshop program with disparate levels of instruction and an unpredictable and inconsistent range of classes. This made it

difficult to establish a well-organized curriculum with progressive levels of instruction through which a student could progress. Administering such a program was a complex and demanding job requiring close monitoring, which made it difficult to find a volunteer to supervise the program adequately for any length of time. This was underscored by the necessity of hiring someone to perform this task (although only for a brief period, because of lack of funds) in 1981.

The Center's workshop program in the late 1970's and early 1980's had grown beyond the organization's ability to administer it effectively. This was not only because of a general resistance to professionalizing its staff, but also because of insufficient funds to support the limited concessions toward paid staff the Center was willing to make out of expediency. One reason the Center lacked the financial resources was its policy of free classes. It was the Center's position that Irish culture belonged to the Irish people, and therefore should be freely available to them. Attempts by some members to establish fees for classes as one way to finance salaried teachers during this period were thwarted on these grounds.

The Center's Irish language program in Ireland, which began informally in 1980, was another example of overexpansion. Ultimately the organization had neither the money, the paid staff, nor the volunteers to adequately support such a program. In 1981, the program was judged to be disorganized and poorly administered, and in 1983 it was finally cancelled. Similarly, the Center's outreach program

to develop new chapters in other communities, in keeping with the goal of spreading traditional Irish culture, failed because it could not be sustained by a small core of activists.

The Center's participatory democracy was strained further by growth and development in the late 1970's and early 1980's. The increase in the Center's activities put more demands on an administrative structure that consisted mainly of volunteers. Often the organization's salaried Administrator or volunteer Artistic Director were called upon to make on the spot decisions without benefit of consulting the membership or its representative committees. This resulted in more confusion concerning the particular responsibilities of these two leaders, the membership, and other decision-making bodies in the organization. The 1980 call to "decentralize" authority in the Arts Center was partly a reaction to the growing concentration of decision-making power in the hands of one or two individuals. Thus, with expansion, the organization was becoming more complex, making it more difficult to operate as a participatory democracy. However, the tendency toward more centralized decision-making was resisted as antithetical to the group's aims.

The Center's growing activity and higher public profile brought renewed pressures toward professionalism. For example, the theatre was becoming more sensitive to commercial considerations and audience tastes. As it pointed out in 1981: "As a major financial asset to ACS, theatre must take its audience into consideration on every

production."²³ The magazine had taken on a professional editor and begun to accept paid advertising. The music and dance program began to seek more advanced training, in part to satisfy students and members. However, music and art, like the theatre and the magazine, had to compete for audiences with competitors who offered a high quality product. Thus pressures toward professionalism also came as a result of complaints about the poor artistic quality of the Center's performances by members as well as by observers from outside the organization.

Even though the Center had defined itself as an amateur arts organization whose main aim was to encourage their widespread use, its artists often performed in public, thus inviting comparisons with other artists in the Irish community. In order to remain competitive and reputable as an Irish arts organization, and meet the needs of its members and students, the Center had to raise the artistic level of its program. As a result of these pressures from within and without the organization in 1981, it was agreed that the Center would aspire to become the focus of Irish Arts in America, for professionals as well as amateurs. In order to accomplish this goal, the Center's primary aim in 1981-82, was to improve the artistic quality of its programs.

By the end of 1981, the Irish Arts Center was an organization in transition. It had aspects of a small sect-like group as well as the characteristics of a more complex organization. For example,

even though it relied on volunteers to do much of its work, there was a growing core of professionals on the staff. While participatory democracy was the preferred form of rule, there was an increasing tendency toward centralization of authority. In addition, there was a growing recognition of the importance of business practices in the Center's operation. As the Artistic Director noted in 1980: "The procedures which we are borrowing from business have proved invaluable, lending structure and logic to a process which would otherwise be long, slow and groping."²⁴ Further, the concern for artistic standards led the organization to add professionalism in the arts to its goals, which required more salaried staff and attempts to rationalize its curriculum. This commingling of communal with more complex forms of association created an uneasiness in the Center and a challenge to its participatory democracy, which, according to the Director, was being handled satisfactorily:

We have not yet outgrown many of our weaknesses, and the coming year will demand from us much work and constant evaluation. But the greatest change has already begun, in our character as a group. Traditionally, we have suffered from a sustained tension between the discipline of our decision-making procedures and the indefinable personal dynamic of our ideals, self-expression, and spontaneity, which lies at the heart of our organization: too often have we sacrificed the first for fear of stifling the second. Now, however we have begun to achieve a fine balance between the two, with shared pride and discipline providing a structure within which strident individualism becomes a rich and strengthening individuality.²⁵

Thus, by the end of 1981, the Irish Arts Center, in a delicate balancing act designed to accommodate the various motives of its

members and the pressures of success, was an organization in transition, which was expressed in the tensions between bureaucracy and participatory democracy and between amateurism and professionalism.

The Irish Arts Center: 1982-84, An Organization in Transition

In 1982, the Arts Center reaffirmed its commitment to artistic development by establishing a three-year plan to make it the headquarters of amateur and professional Irish arts in America. Toward this end, each program adopted its own three-year plan. The music and dance department vowed once again to put in place a clearly defined curriculum and hired four instructors to facilitate this. In addition, money was set aside for advanced instruction for teachers and "master" classes for students. Overall, there would be an effort to encourage beginning and advanced students to develop their skills. The Irish language area hired two teachers and promised to improve its curriculum for beginning and advanced students. The theatre declared it would redefine itself as a professional company capable of competing with the best Irish drama in America. To help realize this aim, the Center decided to hire a full-time paid professional director for the theatre.

At the same time as it was promoting professionalism in the art forms and allowing a limited number of its staff to be paid, the Center wanted to preserve its communitarian democracy and remain a membership-run volunteer organization. Thus, most teachers were still volunteers. Since 1980 the music and dance area had stated its intention to return to an all-volunteer staff, and when support

for paid staff emerged on the magazine in 1982, its director postponed discussion of the matter in deference to the "volunteer spirit and tradition of the Arts Center."²⁶

Another indication of the Center's desire to maintain its communal basis in spite of moves toward professionalizing its staff and activities was its continuing defense of the policy of free classes. With the addition of more activity-focused members in the early 1980's there was increasing pressure for more expert instruction and tuition fees to pay for it. This led to intense debate over free classes. On the one side were those members who felt Irish Americans had a birthright to their cultural heritage and thus could not be charged for access to it, and that the establishment of fees for classes would alter the grass roots nature of the Center, turning it into a school for professional artists. On the other side were members who argued that free instruction led to mediocre art and reduced the organization's ability to pay for more experienced teachers and its members' chances of becoming more proficient in the arts. From an organizational standpoint, the declaration to aspire also to professionalism in the arts and the addition of some expert instructors to its mostly volunteer teaching staff represented a compromise between these opposing points of view.

While the Center's adoption of the goal of "artistic excellence" was an attempt to satisfy a growing professional or technical interest in the art forms among its members, it was also a

recognition of the need to improve the quality of its workshop program to stem the decline in enrollments and chances of recruiting new members and volunteers. But the goal of professionalism in the arts was in contradiction to the aims of participatory democracy and amateur participation in the arts. Thus, in improving the artistic quality of its programs to appease some members and students, and to attract new ones, the Center was running the risk of drawing in more self-interested participants seeking only to develop some skills.

By 1982, there were indications that this was happening and that the membership was becoming even more detached from the Center's participatory democracy. Music and dance, the organization's largest area of activity, had little membership support and reported its "continuing efforts to rebuild the area."²⁷ Although the theatre was relying almost exclusively on professional actors, it was "very much in need of technical people and publicity assistance."²⁸ In 1982, the recurring themes of the need to recruit new members and the frequent restatement of the obligations of membership signalled a general failure of the Center's members to meet their responsibilities. This absence of support became so acute that at one point the Director warned it threatened the continued viability of the Center:

. . . it is very important to evaluate the workings behind our activities, as well as the programs themselves. Oftentimes, as in the case of rince ceol [music and dance] and theatre this year, there is no functioning area behind the activities. Rather, a few individuals are keeping things going, but if they get washed out, watch out! because they have no group to fall back on for support, and when they go, everything goes. [Original emphasis.]²⁹

The Center's inability to enlist enough volunteers for its work program also indicated a student body largely indifferent to the Center's participatory democracy. The work program, established to administer the donation of free labor in exchange for free classes, was reinstated once again in 1982, "to better care for the needs and programs of our organization and building."³⁰ But the organization discovered that efforts to mobilize volunteers were fruitless as most of those contacted failed to show up as scheduled. Drained by repeated attempts to enforce its social contract with workshop students, and offended by their resistance, the Center decided to revise its policy and define volunteer work as "a privilege, not an obligation." Thus, workshop participants would no longer be required to contribute their time to the Center in exchange for free instruction. There was a consensus that the ideals of the organization should be enough to motivate a significant portion of the student body to become volunteers. Worn out and wounded by overt attempts to activate its students, the organization resolved to let its work speak for itself as a motivating force.

The membership's overall lack of participation in the Center's communitarian democracy led to a reversion to more centralized decision-making in 1982. Although the organization had announced its intention to decentralize its structure in 1981, "placing workload and day to day decision making in the artistic areas and staff units,"³¹ the failure of the membership to follow through pressed

the Center's leadership to assume more authority. Thus, in June of 1982, the departing Director urged her successor, as well as the other members of the Center's executive body, to take more initiative in running the organization:

I would like to suggest that the function of the Coiste Stiurtha [steering committee] be expanded to include a continuous evaluation of the organization and each of the areas to see if we are on course with our goals, and to provide feedback and direction for the organization when the membership is not meeting. I would encourage the Stiurthoir [Artistic Director] and the Riathoir [Administrator] to make more organizational decisions in accordance with the policies and goals of the membership and utilize the C.S. [Coiste Stiurtha] more as an evaluating and guiding force for the organization.³²

Almost since the beginning of the formal establishment of its participatory democracy in 1975, there has been a tension and shifting emphasis in the Center between more and less centralized decision making reflecting the organization's continuing struggle to engage its membership. The same Director evinced this kind of dualism when, after requesting more concentration of the decision making process, advised the membership to play its assigned role in running the organization:

I would also strongly urge that we utilize the channels of communication we have set up and encourage the free flow of information throughout the organization. The bigger we get, the more there is to know and the more we know, the better decisions we'll make, and the stronger membership we'll be.³³

Another issue that affected the administration of the Center in 1982 was the problem of transmitting the content and operating procedures of the respective areas of activity to their succeeding

directors. Most new directors began their responsibilities with little or no previous orientation to the position.³⁴ In addition, records were often not maintained, or poorly kept, which required the new directors to basically recreate their particular department each year. The Center's Artistic Director cautioned that this cumbersome process retarded the organization's development:

We have come a long way this year, but the only way we can maintain that growth organizationally, is if that knowledge we have acquired is passed on. And so we strongly urge and sincerely request that those of us who have taken on a responsibility for this year, begin to recruit their replacement now. It is also of great importance that this knowledge be recorded in a file, for reference at later times. If we can accomplish this task, we will insure the continued growth of ACS alongside the growth of our people and accomplish smooth transitions from year to year. [Original emphasis.]³⁵

While the Arts Center had taken steps to become more professional in the arts, and had increased its salaried staff to do so, it was still strongly committed to participatory democracy and the use of volunteers for much of its work. But its inability to motivate enough members and workshop students to participate in the organization in this way left it overextended in many areas and resulted in confusion, inefficiency, and disorder in its administration. Despite these problems, there was still fear that with continued development and the growth of professionalism, the Center would lose its character as a grass roots, activist oriented organization. As the Director counseled the membership:

It is also extremely important during periods of new growth in our organization, that we have a clear concept

of what it is we want to preserve or what is our essence or that which makes us who we are. In knowing this, we can foster these principles, and not have to worry that as we grow we may lose something important to us, rather, we'll know what we want to keep. [Original emphasis.]³⁶

By 1983, the growth of professionalism was again creating tension in the organization as some members began to see it as a threat to the communal basis of the Center. The theatre, as the most visible example of professionalism within the Center, was singled out for much of the criticism. By this time it was essentially an Off-off Broadway theatre company with a full-time salaried director for its nine month season. The theatre's autonomy and exclusiveness rankled some members who charged that its participants had no further interest in the Arts Center and its goals. There were efforts to reintegrate the theatre with the rest of the organization, making it accountable to and reflective of the membership's will. For the most part, they involved attempts to restore the theatre as a part of the Center's participatory democracy with new volunteers from the membership. However, they failed, because there were too few members willing to take on the added responsibility. Thus, what might have become a confrontation resulted in criticism with little force behind it.

While the appointment of a theatre director had the prior approval of the membership, his independence from it was viewed as a violation of the Center's participatory democracy. Feeling betrayed, many in the membership turned for an answer to the organization's Administrator, the Center's unacknowledged leader and the one most

responsible for securing a director and promoting professionalism in the theatre. The Administrator argued that the Irish Arts Center had grown too large and complex to be run completely by the membership, and that it was necessary to hire a professional director to maintain a successful theatre. Most members reluctantly accepted this explanation. Those who remained unconvinced were powerless to act because few of them were willing to shoulder the responsibility of remaking the theatre into a viable part of the Center's democracy.

Complaints about the increasing professionalization of the theatre and its growing share of the organization's resources continued through 1983 and 1984. These complaints were echoed in similar criticisms of the Center's magazine. The magazine had two part-time paid staff, one on salary, the other on commission. The magazine required a substantial subsidy, and was seen as increasingly divorced from the rest of the organization. The Center's Administrator defended the growing professionalism of the magazine as necessary to its success and argued that the magazine (like the theatre) was more innovative, in contrast to older sectors of the organization, which were stagnating.

According to the Administrator, the Center's programs had evolved into two separate categories of activity. One he termed "folk arts," which emphasized amateur participation. The other category he referred to as "high art," activities such as theatre

and producing a magazine, activities which lent themselves to professionalization:

It seems to me that there are two sides to the Center, the folk arts side where I'd include music and dance, Gaelic, [and] I think, history. . . . The other side of the Center is the magazine and the theatre. And I think the real difference is, magazines are not participatory by nature. Not anybody can write for a magazine. You have to be a writer to some extent. The theatre — and every time we improve it we hit a new standard of artistic excellence—it becomes less and less something that anybody can do and becomes something that people who are committed to theatre do. . . . The other distinction is, the theatre and magazine are very money intensive. They bring in a lot of money, but they cost a lot of money. The folk arts don't really need any money at all, they need space, period.

Whatever the merits of the Administrator's analysis of the Center's programs, it provided a rationale for deviating from what many members considered the original vision of the organization. Although a professed proponent of participatory democracy, and a long time activist in the Center, his role as Administrator often put him in conflict with communitarian goals. His classification of the Center's programs into two different types served to legitimate his aim to professionalize the magazine and theatre. To gain support for these decisions, he used his noted powers of persuasion, which were buttressed by his singular knowledge of the workings of the organization and his control of information within it. Thus, the Administrator believed that in order to keep the Arts Center viable, the membership would have to cede control of areas such as the theatre and magazine to professional managers.

The increasing professionalization of the Center's staff in other areas of the organization in 1983 and 1984 was also the cause of complaints and confusion among the membership. There were six paid teachers on staff, a full-time administrative assistant, and several part-time employees. There was general discontent over the growth of paid staff because volunteers were performing similar tasks. As a result, the Artistic Director called for the establishment of criteria regarding who gets paid for organizational work: "We have some people being paid for on-going organizational work and some for being artists. I've heard a constant flow of complaints about who should be paid and who shouldn't. We have to clear this up with a set of guidelines."³⁷

Paying some staff while others worked as volunteers caused friction because it contradicted the Center's professed commitment to voluntarism in operating as a communitarian democracy. However, as demonstrated, especially by the dispute surrounding the hiring of a theatre director, the membership was either unable or unwilling to assume responsibility for many of the organization's activities. This created pressure to hire staff to manage those activities.

Not unrelated to the growth of bureaucracy and professionalism were renewed complaints in 1983-84 about the increasing isolation of the Center's various programs from each other and the growing competition among them for the Center's resources. There was a general consensus that the organization had become fragmented and that there

was no longer a clear vision uniting the different areas. There were also charges that the Center's participatory democracy had become ineffective because the decisions of the membership often were not implemented by the Administrator, or that he acted without authorization by the membership. The Administrator responded that the organization had grown about four-fold since 1976, and as a result no longer could be run as a direct democracy. He pointed out that the membership had said as much in a resolution it passed in 1983, stating that it could set overall policy and goals for the organization, but that the day-to-day running of the Center would be in the hands of the Administrator. In addition, he argued that the only alternative would be a return to a more simplified structure requiring fundamental changes in the current operation of the Center. The Administrator also complained about those members who called for more influence in the group but were unwilling to assume the more onerous administrative responsibilities implied by true participatory democracy. He frequently chided the membership for its failure to pay attention to efficient business practices, such as long-term planning, emphasized by large-scale bureaucracies. Thus, while a qualified supporter of participatory democracy, the Administrator's occupational role caused him to focus on rational administration.³⁸

Because there was general agreement among the members that the organization had greatly expanded without a corresponding increase in its numbers, forcing members to focus on one area of activity,

and that the social climate had changed so that more recent members were more career oriented, leaving them with less time for the Center, criticism of the decline of participatory democracy was blunted. The membership's tendency to ultimately concur with the Administrator's views reflected its strong dependence on his opinions and guidance. His years of administrative experience gave him specialized knowledge about the operation of the Center and non-profit arts organizations in general, adding weight to his convictions. Even though his longevity in the position demonstrated a career interest in the Center, and he was often accused of subverting its democratic processes, many members still believed he had a strong general commitment to its principles. Nonetheless, as a result of the challenge to the Administrator's growing authority, there was, once again, an attempt to clarify the relationship between the Center's leadership and its membership, with a report outlining the responsibilities of its constituent parts.

The Arts Center's participatory democracy was not fading simply because of a more assertive executive, a less carefree membership, or expanded activity. There was an awareness that many members were choosing to ignore their obligations to the organization, leading the Artistic Director to ask:

Have we been letting people into the organization too casually without them really understanding what it means to be a member of ACS? Should we be stricter in enforcing our criteria?³⁹

This acknowledgement of a growing number of members whose participation in the Center was limited to a favorite activity brought forth calls from the membership in the form of motions such as:

That we return to a more active membership and to achieve this we meet more often and make sure that members are aware of and committed to the vision and objectives of An Claidheamh Soluis.⁴⁰

However, the organization was too beset trying to meet its daily needs to be able to ensure the full participation of its members, and because of the pressing need for volunteers, the organization felt it necessary to allow members to contribute to the group in their own fashions.

The Decline of Participatory Democracy

By 1985, the Irish Arts Center was a beleaguered organization with a core of professionals and volunteers struggling to maintain its program of activities and to engage a mostly indifferent membership and student body. The dispiriting effect of this situation was noted by the leadership in a letter to the membership in which it vowed to reverse this downward trend:

At the end of this past season, we hit what was perhaps an all time low in our morale. The Coiste Stiurtha has been working all summer so that we go into the fall with a clear sense of purpose. We believe that considerable progress has been made, and that 85/86 may be a turnabout year for us.⁴¹

In an effort to revive the Center, its executive body (Coiste Stiurtha, or Steering Committee) took direct control of the organization during the summer, while acknowledging its ultimate accountability

to the membership. During that time, its four members met several times to assess the problems confronting the organization and to devise strategies to deal with them. Some of the perennial issues that emerged in these discussions were "lack of shared identity and common purpose," "cynicism of members," "lack of control of money," and "general slip shoddiness in running the organization."

In attempting to deal with these and other issues, the group once again focused on a familiar theme, the need to recruit new members and volunteers. The Center's free classes, known as its workshop program, was the main avenue through which people came into the organization, and therefore was considered "vital" to recruitment efforts. An analysis of the program in the summer of 1985 found, again, that it was badly administered and that the level of instruction was generally poor.

Haphazard administration of the workshops has caused more frustration, ill-feeling and embarrassment than anything contained in them. This is the most crucial and immediate need: we can improve our curriculum over time, but we can't afford to keep living with dirty classrooms, classes cancelled without notice, missing folders, etc., etc.

. . . the quality of classes varies wildly. There is no consistent progression from level to level, and a great burden is placed on the teacher. . . . We have reached the point where our "teach what you know" philosophy is catching up to us. Many people around the organization know a little, but no one knows enough to establish artistic authority or standards.⁴²

In response to these problems, the leadership decided to hire a part-time administrator to oversee the program and an artistic consultant

to devise a properly structured curriculum. In addition, the leadership vowed to "monitor" the workshop program itself.

As before, there was also a sense of frustration and resentment among Center activists over the relative indifference of workshop participants to the aims of the organization. The passivity of workshop students was most evident in their reluctance to donate time to the Center in exchange for free classes. There was a feeling, at least as expressed by the Administrator, that the organization was being exploited by its students and should be more aggressive in asking for their help:

. . . actual recruitment has always been a rather furtive process. After all, we don't want to frighten people off. Instead of openly confronting people with a choice, we have relied on vague assumptions that are at once naive and arrogant. First among these is the idea that people will be inspired by our activities (and the high ideals they obviously embody) to lend their active support. Thus, our activities become a matter of unconscious strategy, of calculation and seduction, in the guise of principled operation. . . . But the underlying necessity is that these activities bring people to us. And to achieve this, we make a great show of giving, but (openly) ask nothing in return.⁴³

Despite the Administrator's analysis, earlier direct appeals for volunteer help had failed. Indeed, in 1982, this led to a passive policy of volunteer recruitment in which the Arts Center decided to rely on the idealism of its goals to draw people in. However, whether approached directly or indirectly, most workshop students tended to ignore the Center's need of support. In addition, because of its limited resources the organization has always found it difficult to

administer a volunteer work program. Thus in the fall of 1985 reinstatement of the work program for students, as a way of recruiting new members and volunteers, was rejected.

As before, in an attempt to explain the organization's inability to recruit student volunteers, a consensus began to emerge within the leadership as well as the membership (who themselves were most often not participating fully in the organization) that students did not fully understand or appreciate the goals of the Arts Center. There was an assumption that a proper understanding of the goals of the Center would be sufficient to motivate many participants to take a more active role in the organization. It was agreed that one way to convey the Center's aims would be through informal exchanges between members and students. Since these did not occur naturally, some space was set aside where students and members could socialize before and after classes. In addition, an "After Hours" program was set up, providing guest artists and speakers after classes. Thus, by fostering a sense of community among its members and participants, the Center hoped to revive its participatory democracy.

In the fall of 1985, the Arts Center reverted to a more direct approach in soliciting support for its efforts, but with a different twist this time. For the first time, those registering for classes were required to become "National" members of the organization. This form of officially sanctioned passive participation was available for an annual fee of twenty dollars. The concept of national

membership was essentially a fundraising device, which at the same time enabled people to receive the Center's magazine and discounts to its events in exchange for a subscription fee. In addition, those receiving the Center newsletter were invited to assist the organization:

We also ask for your active support. By contributing in the best way you can — time, talent, money, or ideas— you'll help assure the growth of An Claidheamh Soluis, while becoming a part of it.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, these renewed efforts to recruit new members and volunteers were unsuccessful, and by 1986 the Center's paid staff had assumed most of the work formerly done by members. To cope with the added responsibilities the organization hired more staff. By now the Center had a full-time administrative staff of three, a full-time theatre director, and two part-time workers (one on the magazine and the other doing fundraising), as well as several paid instructors. In addition, the Center had contracted the services of three artistic consultants.

At this point, the Arts Center had little choice but to rely on salaried staff to carry out the bulk of its activity. This did not involve a dramatic change, because the organization had been gradually professionalizing its staff, primarily in response to the membership's declining participation. As a result, there was an increasing dependency on funding to support its activity. The Center had a professional fundraiser working on its behalf two days a week, and put more effort into its National Membership Drive to raise money through subscriptions. By 1986, several of the Center's major events

had originated with and were still largely underwritten by grants. About two-thirds of the group's income came from grants and other contributions. In fact, the Administrator claimed that the Irish Arts Center was the highest funded white ethnic organization in New York State.⁴⁵

Despite the Center's growing reliance on a professional staff, its leadership was still committed to running the organization as a participatory democracy. Thus, for example, the Administrator cautioned against the danger of the Center becoming staff run, and suggested that one of the duties of staff be to promote a more activist membership. This belief in participatory democracy is also illustrated by the leadership's response to a request from the membership asking for a clarification of membership criteria. Many individuals participated in the organization in a variety of ways, which made it difficult to determine precisely who was a member. Despite the contributions of many participants to the organization, the leadership concluded that an indispensable condition of membership was participation in policy making through attendance at membership meetings. As the Administrator said:

Voting is the only thing that differentiates a member from a non-member in reality. So, in my mind, the people who come to membership meetings, vote, and participate in the organization, are the members. . . . There's people who don't have the time or desire, who don't want to join. I'm quite comfortable with them working and contributing and will value their contribution. But if the definition of membership is participating in the democratic process, anybody who decides not to, or doesn't want to, is not a member.

By 1987, the Irish Arts Center's participatory democracy had effectively ended. While its leadership, the Coiste Stiurtha (Steering Committee) met occasionally, organization-wide membership meetings had stopped completely. The organization was essentially being run by its administrator and two other salaried staff persons, all of whom were strong supporters of participatory democracy.

In the routinization of its activity, the Irish Arts Center has continually struggled to balance its organizational needs with its ideological principles. The result has been a peculiar blend of communitarianism with bureaucracy and professionalism. For example, the attempt to operate as a participatory democracy proved unwieldy with the group vacillating between more or less centralized decision-making process. Over time, the membership's general abdication of responsibility for running the organization resulted in the appointment of salaried administrators. Despite this, the leadership maintained its ideological commitment to participatory democracy.

In addition, in the development of its artistic programs, the Center attempted to strike a balance between the conflicting demands of its members and the pressures to maintain standards, with its populist approach to the arts. As a consequence, in their evaluations the various programs reflect recreational, professional, and communitarian interests. These competing interests have been the source of conflict within the programs and the organization in general.

Throughout its history, the Arts Center's ideological and nationalistic commitments have been at odds with its bureaucratic and professional requirements. In the attempt to mediate between these two opposing forces, the organization became trapped between two worlds: that of a commune and that of a bureaucracy. As a result, as it grew, the organization lacked the resources to support its expansion. This left the group in a constant struggle trying to catch up with its activities and administrative responsibilities. Thus, in the process of routinization, the Irish Arts Center was confronted with the classic problem of transforming ideological principles into a viable organization.

Notes

1. Minutes, August 9, 1975.
2. Minutes, November 2, 1975.
3. Up to one-half of some early membership meetings were devoted to procedure.
4. Minutes, October 9, 1976, "Director's Report on Structure."
5. Ibid.
6. Minutes, "How to Check Our Dwindling Membership," p.1.
7. Ibid., p.2.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p.9.
10. Minutes, January 22, 1978.
11. Minutes, December 2, 1978, "Director's Report to the Membership."
12. Minutes, May 6, 1978, "Director's Report to the Membership."
13. Minutes, May 6, 1978.
14. Minutes, October 7, 1978, "Director's Report to the Membership."
15. Minutes, January 22, 1977.
16. Minutes, September 8, 1979, "Director's Report to the Membership."
17. Minutes, Minutes, December 15, 1979.
18. Coiste Stiurtha [Steering Committee] Minutes, December 24, 1981.
19. Minutes, April 25, 1981, "Director's Report to the Membership."
20. Minutes, October 25, 1980, "Structure Report."

21. Ibid., p.4.
22. Minutes, June 28, 1980, "Planning Committee Report to the Membership."
23. Minutes, February 7, 1981.
24. Minutes, June 28, 1980, "Director's Report to the Membership."
25. Ibid.
26. An Gael Records, April 23, 1982, "Memo to Publishing Board."
27. Minutes, October 16, 1982, "Director's Report to the Membership."
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Minutes, October 25, 1980, "Report on Structure."
32. Minutes, April 3, 1982, "Director's Report to the Membership."
33. Ibid.
34. This was compounded by the Center's policy of rotating its leadership annually. While this was intended to strengthen the group's participatory democracy by enabling as many members as possible to gain leadership experience, it also led to administrative inefficiency.
35. Minutes, April 3, 1982, "Director's Report to the Membership."
36. Minutes, June 19, 1982, "Director's Report to the Membership."
37. Minutes, May 15, 1983, "Director's Report to the Membership."
38. Rosanne Martorella, among others, has pointed to "the conflicting role of the administrator in organizations that serve communal needs and that have traditionally dissociated themselves from 'vulgar' and economic considerations." "Rationality in the Artistic Management of Performing Arts Organizations," in Jack B. Kamerman and Rosanne Martorella et al., Performers and Performances: The Social Organization of Artistic Work, with an introduction by Joseph Bensman. (South Hadley, Ma.: Bergin & Garvey, 1983), p.95. See also Victor J. Baldridge, Power and Conflict in the University (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1971).

39. Minutes, February 20, 1983, "Director's Report to the Membership."
 40. Minutes, April 16, 1983.
 41. Minutes, September 15, 1985.
 42. Coiste Stiurtha [Steering Committee], Minutes, June 30, 1985.
 43. Minutes, March 23, 1985.
 44. Litir Nuachta [Newsletter], Fall, 1985.
 45. More than half (\$86,000) of the Center's income (\$157,000) in fiscal 1985-86 came from government grants.
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Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONCulture and Politics

The Irish Arts Center was born in the early 1970's out of a desire to rekindle Irish identity and nationalism in America through the arts. However, its politics went beyond Ireland since its founders and organizers were also active in political and social causes in America and were strongly influenced by the countercultural movement here. One result was that the Arts Center was organized as a participatory democracy with its members taking direct responsibility for running the organization as volunteers. In addition, its goals called for reaching out to other cultural groups, especially minorities, and to the labor movement. Thus, to a large extent, the organizers of the Center wanted to use the arts as a vehicle to express their politics. As one early activist said: "The Irish Arts Center was founded as a non-political organization for political ends."

In focusing on the arts, the Center had great success. Overall, its cultural programs were popular, attracting members, participants, and audiences, and its theatre received much critical acclaim. However, despite this success the organization was unable to achieve many of its goals. For example, the Arts Center was unable to spark

an Irish cultural or nationalist revival in America, sustain itself as a participatory democracy, or cement ties with other cultural groups. Ultimately the organization fell into disarray, losing the support of its membership and becoming dependent on government grants.

There are a number of reasons why the Arts Center failed to achieve many of its goals and today faces an uncertain future. First, the Center's cultural programs attracted many members and participants who did not share the ideological motives of the organizers. For example, they were drawn to the activities for entertainment, escape, the search for roots, an interest in an art form, and the like. These differences in motives led to conflicts over the nature, purpose, and direction of the organization. Thus, almost from its inception, the Arts Center was divided and weakened by its inability to define itself as an organization. Unity of purpose could not be achieved because members could not reach a consensus on the nature of Irish culture, that is, whether it is political, artistic, or recreational.

Division within the Center was also a byproduct of the development of its programs. For example, there was a tendency to concentrate on the technique of a program, which created a pull toward the separate activities, undermining communitarian goals. This process was compounded by the tendency toward separate development in the Center's programs. Thus, as each area grew, it developed its own autonomy, and people in the area became more responsive to the area than to the communitarian motives underlying it. As a result, the various programs

tended to assume directions of their own, which led to conflict as the special interest became more important than the general interest.

The tendency of the Center's programs to develop their own agendas and the increase in members who wanted only to work in one area, or develop some skills, or simply enjoy the activities, undermined the Center's participatory democracy. For example, in pursuit of their own interests, many members devoted little time to the administration and maintenance of the organization. While the activists in the organization viewed democratic participation as a privilege, others saw it as a burden. Thus, the effort to integrate means and ends in culture and politics did not work because of membership indifference. As a result, decision making became concentrated, which created confusion regarding the Center's structure and membership's role in it. This led to numerous attempts to reform and refine the structure, in search on an elusive democracy.

Aside from membership apathy, operating as a participatory democracy produced problems of its own. Direct democracy almost always leads to inefficiency and disorganization. This was certainly the case for the Arts Center. Collective decision making hampered its ability to function smoothly. The reliance on volunteers meant that frequently things just didn't get done, which created friction within the organization. The Center's difficulty in producing well-organized activities led to some embarrassing situations and tarnished

its image in the Irish community. Thus, the goal of participatory democracy was incompatible with other organizational aims.

Organizational expansion and the membership's continuing failure to participate in the Center's democracy created pressure to professionalize its management, which resulted ultimately in the appointment of artistic and administrative managers. This led to further conflict, as more ardent members argued that it subverted communitarian aims. According to these members, what the Center was becoming in terms of its professional activity was increasingly at odds with its ideology. Thus, the professional and organizational needs of the Arts Center were in tension with its ideological principles.

The ongoing conflict over the purposes of the Arts Center was also reflected in its various programs. This conflict led to a series of unsatisfactory compromises in which amateurism and professionalism, participatory democracy and bureaucracy, political and social activism and an apolitical attitude toward the arts coexisted within the organization. Eventually, these dualities trapped the Center in a transition state between its sect-like origin and that of a fully developed organization. In other words, these opposing forces prevented the organization from taking a clear direction.

The Center had all the prerequisites to become a successful arts organization. It was able to develop an appealing program of activities, some of which were quite successful financially, and a

professional core to support them. However, the organization became overburdened because it expanded beyond its resources, owing to an ideology that rejected professionalizing its management, despite concessions in that direction. If the Center had gone further in bureaucratizing and professionalizing its operation and concentrated on more profitable activities, it would have been more successful. However, the activists in the organization were reluctant to go in the direction in which success was pulling them. And with good reason. Professionalizing and bureaucratizing the Arts Center would have required considerable money. Where would it come from and would there be conditions attached to it? In addition, how would the organization retain its original vision with the growth of professionals whose outlook and self-interest would appear to be antagonistic to it? Thus, these ideologically committed members were fearful of losing control of the organization and its mission to the imperatives of paid staff.

However, communitarian democracy was compromised by membership indifference, expediency, and the developing interests of the leadership. Thus, some ideologists of participation have become bureaucrats and whole programs have come under the jurisdiction of professionals. In the end, the Arts Center lost its communal basis, despite its ideological stance in defense of it.

In sum, then, the Irish Arts Center is the product of a number of contradictions. Its emphasis on cultural activities to convey

its ideals brought in members and participants attracted by the activities themselves and not their ideological undertones. In other words, what were means for the leaders were ends for the followers. Thus, in developing a successful program of activities, the Arts Center undermined its own ideology. Good activities brought in members attracted to the activities and not the original motives for them. As a result, the organization's workload was thrust upon a small group of professionals and amateurs who in fact became unpaid professionals, overworked and overextended, and because of expanding activity, forced to work in only one area. The Center's leadership, faced with the dilemma of trying to impose a participatory democracy and communitarian pattern of organization on a largely indifferent membership, was forced to professionalize and bureaucratize its staff and management, despite an ideology opposed to it.

The Irish Arts Center as a Social Movement

Because of its emphasis on social change, the Center can be seen as one example of a social movement. Social movements are organized attempts to bring about or resist social change. Because of their grass roots nature, they tend to have a common structure. For example, a social movement usually contains a small central "core" of leaders and other activists. Beyond that core is usually a wider circle of members and participants who play a greater or lesser role in the movement's activities. Further beyond that is a general constituency of relatively passive supporters.¹ The Arts Center

reflected this model of concentric circles of lessening commitment and participation.

While such an arrangement may facilitate the growth of a movement attempting to widen its base of support, it can also be a source of weakness. For example, depending on the efforts of a small group of activists to keep a movement going may result in its collapse if they abandon the cause. The Center struggled in a near state of collapse because of an overburdened core of activists. Thus, maintaining membership commitment and participation is a central problem for many social movement organizations. In other words, the ideals of the organization must be deeply felt by the members if it is to succeed in persuading them to make personal sacrifices for it in the face of competing demands from family, friends, and work.² This was a crucial issue for the Arts Center. The weak commitment of the membership to the Center's goals, and the values they represented, undermined the organization.

Many social movements also follow a similiar life course from an early stage of unrest and conflict to a final period of stability. In its transformation from a loosely knit group of activists to a formal organization, the Arts Center approximated what has come to be known as the "natural history" or life cycle of a social movement. Although different terms are used, a number of observers have noted four major phases in the life course of a social movement.³ The first phase is marked by unfocused discontent over

some issue or social condition. In the case of the Center, it was the alienation of some young Irish and non-Irish Americans from mainstream culture and society.

During the second phase of a social movement, disaffected individuals begin to recognize that there are others who share their feelings. Leaders emerge, often of the charismatic type, to articulate the discontent, explain its source, and provide a solution. Thus, Jim Dowd, a forceful personality, with the message that traditional Irish culture offered a solution to the malaise of some Irish Americans, was able to attract a group of supporters. During this period, spreading the message to other potential supporters becomes essential in building the movement. Thus, the Arts Center utilized the media and established a newsletter and cultural programs to publicize its goals.

If a social movement is able to succeed in mobilizing sufficient resources, such as money and members, it usually enters a third phase in which it develops into a formal organization. Ideals, beliefs, and goals become codified and charismatic leadership is supported or replaced by an administrative staff. In meeting the challenges of survival, the leadership becomes less ideological and more practical, focusing on the means to attain the group's goals. The development of a bureaucratic core keeps the organization going when the members are not actively involved.⁴ The Center followed a similar path in the mid-1970's when it established a formal structure.

Rules of procedure and participation were set up and a professional core of administrators and teachers emerged, despite an anti-bureaucratic stance.⁵ Success during this phase also depends on avoiding conflict within the movement. Centralization of power and the emergence of a dominant group or leader tends to solve the problem of conflict within a movement.⁶ Although the Center had a major conflict in 1975, it survived intact. In the battle for control of the organization, the activists formed an "Executive Committee" to consolidate power against an emerging opposition.

The final phase in the development of a social movement that becomes an organization is its institutionalization in which it achieves a measure of stability and its survival is more or less assured. At this point, the organization's attention is usually focused on achieving recognition as a legitimate representative of its goals and maintaining the commitment of members.⁷ Thus, in the early 1980's, the Center concentrated on improving the artistic quality of its programs, with the goal of becoming the headquarters of amateur and professional Irish arts in America. This was also done to stem the decline of enthusiasm among the membership.

However, the success and acceptance of a social movement organization can create problems of its own. For example, in focusing on day-to-day administrative tasks and maintaining its formal structure, the organization may lose sight of its original purpose. In the process, power may become concentrated, activism may decline

even further, and goals may become narrowed. Conflict arises as some members criticize the organization for abandoning the original aims.

To some extent, this is what happened as the Arts Center began to mature as an organization. For example, in the routinization of its activity it became less concerned with the objectives of spreading Irish culture through outreach efforts and linking up with other ethnic groups. The Center became more concerned with legitimating itself as an arts organization. Direct democracy gave way to a more representative form of democracy in which the Administrator and other leaders assumed more decision making power, and an increasing share of the Center's budget went toward organizational maintenance.⁸ In response, some members criticized the organization for betraying earlier goals, undermining participatory democracy, and moving toward professionalism.

However, because the Arts Center retained a strong ideological thrust and overexpanded, it did not develop into a full-scale bureaucracy. Indeed, it was criticized for not going far enough in that direction. Thus, while the Center displayed many of the signs often associated with the process of routinization in social movements organizations, such as tendencies toward administrative rule, goal displacement, and increasing conservatism, they were checked by a lingering ideological resistance and ultimately by the lack of resources to rationalize the management any further.

One enduring problem for the Arts Center which became more acute as it matured was maintaining the commitment of members. This is a common problem for social movement organizations that rely on volunteers for their support. Such groups require not only dedication to the cause from their members, but a vast amount of participation as well. However, the Center, like other social movements, became the focus for the expression of very diverse interests and aspirations. Thus it attracted many members who did not share the motivations of the founders and organizers.⁹ As a result, the Center had to contend with what one analyst has called the "free rider problem," in which a number of individuals are able to benefit from the efforts of a social movement without any cost to themselves.¹⁰ Thus, the Center established and supported a program of cultural activities from which many members and participants gained without contributing to the maintenance of the organization.

Ultimately, the Center's communitarian democracy collapsed because of the growth of a membership with little or no commitment to it. This was a reflection not only of the membership's attachment to the activities alone, but also of changing social conditions that reduced the Center's potential base of support. In other words, there were fewer single young people, with limited commitments to career or family, who were willing to take up a cause. However, while losing the support of its membership diminished the Center's activity, it did not bring about its demise. This is mainly because

the Arts Center, through grantsmanship, was able to develop a support base independent of the membership. Thus, as the membership became less active, the organization acquired the funding for a paid staff to maintain itself and its activities. However, in this process, which involved the professionalization of the Center's administration, the organization became heavily dependent on grants for its survival. Thus, the Arts Center today lives a precarious existence, especially in an environment where government funding for the arts has been decreasing.

In sum, while the Irish Arts Center has been unable to fulfill many of its goals and faces an uncertain future, it has not been a complete failure either. It has been in continuous existence since 1972, and still provides a range of cultural programs that attract participants, and maintains an Off-off Broadway theatre. In addition, the Arts Center has helped redefine what it means to be an Irish American for a number of individuals and found a place for itself in the Irish community in New York City. In its adjustment to changing conditions, the Center may have become what some observers have called a "becalmed" social movement:

Many MO's [Movement organizations] do not represent either successes or failures. They have been able to build and maintain a support base; they have waged campaigns which have influenced the course of events; and they have gained some positions of power. In short, they have created or found a niche for themselves in the organizational world but their growth has slowed down or ceased.¹¹

The Irish Arts Center and the Problem of Community
Construction and Ethnic Revival in Contemporary America

The Irish Arts Center represents an attempt by a group of Irish Americans to carve out some space for themselves in New York City in the early 1970's. They wanted to use Irishness as the basis for community and as a medium for the expression of their cultural politics. However, they had difficulty achieving their aims, in part because of the demands of meeting day-to-day needs. In addition, the Center became the focus for a variety of interests. This led to conflicts over the purposes of the organization, undermining its community and resulting in fragmentation. The organization struggled to accommodate its competing interests while at the same time remaining true to its principles. While the idealism and energy of its members supported the group for a number of years, allowing it to prosper against great odds, it was hard to sustain, and the Center declined under the weight of a series of recurring problems. Thus, attempts in community may be fragmentary, contradictory and in conflict, and subject to a variety of pressures from within and without.

In its attempt to build a viable ethnic organization, the Arts Center also raises questions concerning the limits and possibilities of recreating ethnic culture and community in contemporary American society. For example, is it possible for a group of third- and fourth-generation Irish Americans with very tenuous ties to their cultural past to create the basis of a lasting ethnicity through a voluntary association? Can a viable ethnic culture be reconstructed

using vestiges from the past? Finally, are such attempts at ethnic renewal fatally flawed because they may be less a positive pursuit of a culture than a response to the alienation and anomie so often associated with living in urban mass society?

For most participants, the Arts Center was a place to go and enjoy Irish culture and feel ethnic once in a while. Indeed, it was this sort of tangential involvement that contributed to the organization's decline. However much these individuals enjoyed and appreciated Irish culture, it was not integrated into their lives. For most, their participation in the Center was their only ethnic activity. This marginal role of Irish culture in the lives of these individuals gives it a fragile base. For if ethnicity is not part of the pattern of everyday activity and subject to the whims of individual choice, it could easily fade away. Lawrence McCullough, in his analysis of Irish dancing schools in Chicago, noted the problem of maintaining an ethnic culture that is not embedded in the routine of daily life:

Although ensemble dances are also taught in the schools, there are no opportunities to integrate these or the solo dances into any other areas of the dancer's life outside of competitions and exhibitions. Thus, when an Irish dance school pupil retires from competition and ceases to take lessons, the likelihood of the pupil continuing to practice or use the knowledge acquired over several years is extremely slight, due to the fact that Irish dancing is only a compartmentalized activity unrelated to the rest of the individual's life. How, then, can dance pupils gain any significant or lasting understanding of a cultural heritage if that heritage is exposed to them in piecemeal fashion and remains completely unintegrated with their other daily activities in home, school, and play?¹²

As McCullough suggests, the prospects of retrieving a culture based on fragments that are not rooted in the life of the individual are not good. The Center is an apt example of the problem posed by McCullough because its activities are not only isolated from the rest of its members' lives, but they are taught as discrete units which distorts their original role as integrated aspects of a larger, unified culture. The Center recognized the problem of restoring a culture in this fragmentary way and made various attempts to integrate the art forms in its activities. For example, its siamsa production, which is a dramatic reading of Irish history and culture, incorporates music, song, dance, and, to a lesser extent, Gaelic. In addition, it has attempted to blend the art forms in a classroom setting for its members and students. However, these efforts have not been successful because most people prefer to focus on one activity at a time. This would indicate a more personal interest in a particular activity rather than any concern for such wider organizational aims as restoring a culture intact.

The Irish Arts Center is typical of many volunteer cultural organizations that have cropped up in the recent past with the purpose of preserving tradition. However, their very form, which is associational, meaning that participation is optional and intermittent, subverts their aim to maintain traditional life which is all-inclusive.¹³ Put another way, the Irish Arts Center is trying to recreate an ethnic culture divorced from the institutional foundations

of family, church, pub, neighborhood, and organizational networks that supported older Irish communities. It is attempting to recover cultural forms that were based in "natural areas" — that is, territorial communities in which ethnicity was woven into the fabric of social and economic life. In perhaps a bit of an overstatement, Marjorie R. Fallows has described the older all-embracing Irish community:

Many an Irish American went from cradle to grave without ever venturing outside the ethnic community, bounded by its familiar network of activities with relatives and friends, served by the parish church, the parochial school, the neighborhood saloon, and the Irish social clubs.¹⁴

However, economic and social mobility has resulted in the breakup of the old Irish urban enclaves whose inhabitants left the city for the more privatized and homogenized lifestyle of the suburb. In the process, much of the institutional underpinning that supported Irish identity fell away. As a result, the Irish, like other assimilated ethnic groups in America, must rely on scattered voluntary associations to maintain ethnic identity and solidarity. However, because by definition participation in these groups is not binding, and for most episodic, they provide a weak foundation for a lasting ethnic culture. In a similar vein, Lawrence McCullough has commented on the ephemeral quality of Irish organizations in Chicago:

For some Irish Americans in Chicago, the Irish social organizations provide a Cinderella community that comes into being for a day or a night once a week, once a month, or perhaps only once a year before vanishing again upon the conclusion of the particular event. These organizations and their functions are but a dim reflection of

the now dismantled network of Irish stores, bars, restaurants, churches, schools, and youth groups that formerly existed and played a significant role in shaping the social and cultural environment of the community.¹⁵

Like these organizations, the Arts Center is detached even from the remnants of Irish communal life and could dissolve very quickly. Also like them, it lacks the institutional prerequisites for the ethnic culture or community it seeks to recover. Thus the Arts Center's plight is symptomatic of a dilemma that confronts many of America's older immigrant groups. Left only with fragments of cultures that have been abandoned, they are trying to reconstruct them outside of the communities in which they emerged as part of the routine of existence. This amounts to what one observer has described as an "ethnic crisis" confronting America's older immigrant groups:

The ethnic crisis only begins with the fact that core elements of traditional culture have been modified, diluted, compromised, and finally relinquished. The additional problem is that those elements of traditional culture that have been preserved are removed from the social and cultural matrix in which they once belonged. It is fundamentally a crisis of authenticity. Cultural patterns that were once rooted in the exigencies of life are increasingly found to be either irrelevant or dysfunctional in the society to which they have been transported. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that ethnicity in American society has become culturally thin. It consists mainly of vestiges of decaying cultures that have been so tailored to middle-class patterns that they have all but lost their distinctive qualities.¹⁶

However, there are those who argue that it is incorrect to judge organizations like the Arts Center, or any other form of ethnic expression in America, in terms of its correspondence to Old World or ghetto cultures. For example, Yancey, Erickson, and Juliani have

put forth the concept of "emergent ethnicity" to describe new ethnic forms that emerge under a variety of conditions and assume many shapes, even within the same national group. Instead of measuring the strength of ethnic behavior against the yardstick of a common heritage, they contend that ethnicity is the ongoing product of residues of immigrant culture and American experience. According to this construct, ethnicity is viewed as an innovative and dynamic phenomenon that can adapt to a variety of conditions and evolve into new cultural forms:

Rather than a constant trait that is inherited from the past, ethnicity is the result of a process which continues to unfold. It is basically a manifestation of the way populations are organized in terms of interaction patterns, institutions, personal values, attitudes, life styles, and presumed consciousness of kind. The assumption of a common heritage as the essential aspect of ethnicity is erroneous. Ethnicity may have relatively little to do with Europe, Asia or Africa, but much more to do with the exigencies of survival and the structure of opportunity in this country. In short, the so-called "foreign heritage" of ethnic groups is taking shape in this country.¹⁷

Thus, for Juliani et al., ethnic identity need not be founded on a genuine native tradition at all, but can be described as a process of adaptation to new situations through the revision or revival of traditional customs, or the development of new customs out of old traditions. From this perspective, new cultural forms should not be viewed as diluted versions of original cultures on their way to extinction (as the assimilationist position would have it) but as creative responses to changing conditions and circumstances.

According to this view, the Arts Center represents the emergence of a new cultural form in the Irish American community to meet the needs of a specific group of people. For example, it began as an expression of radical discontent by young Irish Americans looking for a solution to their sense of malaise in the early 1970's.¹⁸ This gave their brand of Irishness a distinctive cast¹⁹ which itself evolved into something else as conditions and circumstances changed. Thus, the Center would appear to be a prime example of emergent ethnicity.

However, the notion of emergent ethnicity leaves many unanswered questions. For example, what is the capacity of these new ethnic forms to endure? To what extent are they rooted in the community? How central a role do they play in the lives of their participants? If they are evolving, what are they evolving into--stronger or weaker ethnic forms? Also, how much accommodation can an ethnic culture sustain before it atrophies? Finally, it would be important to know what motivates people to retain cultural ties. Is it simply a cultural quest or perhaps a reaction to some spiritual void they feel in their lives?

Such questions are relevant in making a final assessment of the Irish Arts Center. It began with a group of activists with a strong sense of idealism and purpose, who made the organization the focus of their lives. Because of their dedication, they had great success in building a cultural community. However, it was hard to

sustain and many of them went on to pursue other interests. Thus, even among the zealots, Irish culture had its limits as a central organizing principle in their lives. This was partly because their pursuit of Irish culture was also a response to their sense of estrangement from American society. Such mixed motives, even at the core of the organization, made it difficult to maintain the initial enthusiasm and hence, the cultural movement.

In addition, many others who became attached to the Center had little appetite for its cultural politics. Thus, later members and participants had few of the ideological commitments of earlier ones. For the most part, they wanted to pursue a casual interest in Irish culture and were attracted by an "aura" of ethnicity and community they found at the Center. These individuals were part of a wider return of assimilated Americans to their cultural roots. As Herbert J. Gans has pointed out, these "new ethnics" were primarily motivated by a nostalgic desire to reconnect with their past, which was reflected in their limited commitment:

Most people look for easy and intermittent ways of expressing their identity, for ways that do not conflict with other ways of life. As a result, they refrain from ethnic behavior that requires an arduous or time-consuming commitment, either to a culture that must be practiced constantly, or to organizations that demand active membership.²⁰

Thus, with the influx of individuals who were looking to Irishness as a casual embroidery on their lives, the Center lost much of its sense of mission and purpose. Perhaps it was inevitable.

Except for a few individuals who are willing to give their lives to one activity, the segmented nature of modern life demands that we be part of many "worlds." Community in this sense may exist only as a potential and temporary condition. As a result, it can be argued that the form of urban association into which the Center evolved is the only way Irish culture can be retained today. Still, the question remains, what is being retained? In other words, does the Arts Center represent a viable form of ethnic renewal or one more stage in the long-term assimilation of the Irish in America?²¹ Do organizations like the Center, that have no organic ties to the Irish community and are susceptible to collapse, represent the future for the Irish in America? If so, then we may be witnessing the demise of the Irish in America as a distinctive subculture.

Notes

1. Ian Robertson, Sociology (Second edition) (New York: Worth, 1981), p. 586.
2. Mayer N. Zald and Roberta Ash, "Social Movement Organizations: Growth, Decay and Change," Social Forces, 44: 328.
3. See Rex D. Hopper, "The Revolutionary Process," Social Forces, 28 (March, 1950): 207-109; and Mayer N. Zald and Roberta Ash, "Social Movement Organization," in Barry McLaughlin, ed., Studies in Social Movements (New York: Free Press, 1969), pp.461-485. See also Herbert Blumer, "Social Movements," in Serge Denisoff, ed., The Sociology of Dissent (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1974), pp. 74-90. [Much of the literature on social movements and their conversion into formal structures is derived from the work of Max Weber, especially his concepts of the routinization of charisma and the transformation of the sect into a church.]
4. Max Weber and Robert Michels argued that in the process of routinization there is a tendency toward oligarchy and goal displacement in social movement organizations. Cf. Max Weber, From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds./trans. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp.297-330; Robert Michels, Political Parties, trans. Edan and Cedar Paul (New York: Collier, 1962). Seymour Martin Lipset found a similar process at work in the labor movement. See Seymour Martin Lipset, et al., Union Democracy: The Inside Politics of the International Typographic Union (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1956).
5. A study of "crisis centers," organizations that originated in the counterculture of the 1960's to offer counseling and support to people under stress, found that despite their initial commitment to less bureaucratic and nonhierarchical structure, they increasingly shifted to written job descriptions, organization charts, and written policies concerning treatment of cases and clients. Richard Senter, et al., "Bureaucratization and Goal Succession in Alternative Organizations," Sociological Focus, 16 (October, 1983): 239-253. Joyce Rothschild-Whitt in "The Collectivist Organization: An Alternative to Rational-Bureaucratic Models" presents another view.
6. William A. Gamson, The Strategy of Social Protest (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey, 1975).
7. Ibid.

8. The membership's declining commitment also contributed to the concentration of power and a narrowing of goals. According to Zald and Ash, "A necessary precondition for leaders to become concerned with organizational maintenance is a change in member sentiment -- a growing lack of interest." Zald and Ash, 1969, p.339.

9. Anthony P. Cohen, citing the work of Charles Tilly, has made the point that:

A rigorous distinction has to be drawn by the analyst between the ideological rhetoric of the movement -- say, its aims and aspirations as enunciated by its leaders-- and the actual motivations of its individual members.

Anthony P. Cohen, The Symbolic Construction of Community (London: Tavistock, 1985), p.108. Charles Tilly, "The Analysis of a Counter-Revolution," History and Theory, III, no.1 (1963), and "Forward," in A. Blok, The Mafia of a Sicilian Village (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974).

10. Mancur Olson explains that social movements often provide solutions to problems shared by many others outside of it. As a result, many passive supporters stand to gain from the efforts of activists. Mancur Olson, The Logic of Collective Action (New York: Schocken Books, 1968). Walsh and Warland noted the same problem with regard to the efforts to close down the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant in Pennsylvania in 1979. Edward J. Walsh and Rex H. Warland, "Social Movement Involvement in the Wake of a Nuclear Accident: Activists and Free Riders in the TMI Area," American Sociological Review, vol. 48 (December 1983): 764-780.

11. Mayer N. Zald and Roberta Ash, "Social Movement Organizations: Growth, Decay and Change," p.334.

12. Lawrence McCullough, "The Role of Language, Music, and Dance in the Revival of Irish Culture in Chicago, Illinois," Ethnicity, 7 (1980): 436-444.

13. Brigitte Berger has made this point with regard to ethnic organizations in African and Indian cities:

Even traditional beliefs are forced in the urban situation to organize themselves in associational forms. ... But the new, self-conscious form has a nontraditional effect, even on the traditional content. It is one thing to belong from birth to a tribe that effectively organizes all important aspects of its members' lives; it is quite another to belong to a tribal association that meets in a clubhouse on Tuesday evenings. The associational form itself weakens tradition, even if such tradition is the avowed aim of an association.

Brigitte Berger, Societies in Change: An Introduction to Comparative Sociology (New York: Basic Books, 1971), pp.161-163.

14. Marjorie R. Fallows, Irish Americans: Identity and Assimilation (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1979), p.45.

15. McCullough, pp.439-440.

16. Stephen Steinberg, The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity and Class in America (Boston: Beacon, 1981), p.63.

17. William L. Yancey, et al., "Emergent Ethnicity: A Review and Reformulation," American Sociological Review, 41 (June 1976): 391-403. For a similar view, see: Kathleen Neils Conzen, "Immigrants, Immigrant Neighborhoods, and Ethnic Identity: Historical Issues," The Journal of American History, vol. 66, no.3 (December 1979): 603-615. However, Conzen finds the "redefinition of ethnic consciousness on a nonecological basis" problematic for the Irish because their "neighborhood-based communities either failed to develop or were quickly submerged in a religious subculture" (p.611). See also Kathryn Vance Staiano, "Ethnicity as Process: The Creation of an Afro-American Identity," Ethnicity, 7 (1980).

18. It is interesting to note that had the organizers of the Arts Center been able to recreate a genuine traditional Irish community, they could not have lived in it, for such rebels would not have been tolerated in such a society. Indeed, they, too, would have found it intolerable. As the historian Herbert J. Muller noted: "Those who are cursed by consciousness cannot become unconscious by an effort of will." Herbert J. Muller, The Uses of the Past (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p.27.

19. Brigitte Berger has noted that revival movements, because they inevitably signal some disenchantment with the present, assume a very different character from the previous tradition:

Resurgent traditions are imbued with new meanings by the very fact that they are consciously maintained where once they were taken for granted as the unconscious background of social life. Rather, traditions are now marched out precisely because they are no longer taken for granted. They are intensively reflected upon. What is more, their worth and superiority are supposed to have articulated purposes -- for a better life, for political independence, or even for economic development.

Brigitte Berger, Societies in Change, p. 14.

20. Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America," Ethnic and Racial Studies (January, 1979), vol. 2, no.1, pp.8-9.

21. Indeed, some have argued that attempts to reestablish old traditions actually announce their demise. For example, Richard Stivers contends that Ireland's cultural revival movement at the end of the 19th century indicated "not the regeneration of this folk culture but actually its death knell. Self-conscious cultural revitalization movements invariably belie the fact that the culture has already died." Richard Stivers, A Hair of the Dog: Irish Drinking and American Stereotype (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), p.59. Stephen Steinberg sees the ethnic resurgence in America during the 1960's in a similar light:

The ethnic revival was a "dying gasp" on the part of ethnic groups descended from the great waves of immigration of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. That is to say, the revival did not signify a genuine revitalization of ethnicity, but rather was symptomatic of the atrophy of ethnic cultures and the decline of ethnic communities.

Stephen Steinberg, The Ethnic Myth, p.51.

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