

THE CORE of Raymond Crotty's book is a story well known in Ireland but largely unfamiliar elsewhere.

In 1986 the governments of countries in the European Community decided to press for further unification. To make these proposals effective, domestic legislation was required from the various member-states. The politicians agreed that this legislation should be submitted to their respective Parliaments and passed into law by the end of the year.

In the Republic of Ireland, the Bill proposed for that purpose was duly submitted to the Oireachtas by the governing coalition, which was dominated by Fine Gael. Fianna Fail, the principal opposition party, did not like the Bill much, and could probably have thrown it out; but that would have precipitated a General Election, which FF did not want. So they did not challenge a division on the Bill, which duly passed the Oireachtas.

To complete its passage, however, ratification by the President was necessary. For constitutional reasons, the President could not sign the Bill before 23 December, but was required either to sign it by Christmas Day or else to refer it to the Supreme Court.

RAYMOND Crotty is a private citizen, not a politician. He considered that the Bill was not merely ill-advised but unconstitutional, and sought to have it referred to the Supreme Court. As the President of the Republic was manifestly unlikely to do anything of the kind on his own initiative, Mr Crotty and his friends sought legal advice. In the end, proceedings were brought before a Judge on Christmas Eve. These resulted in an interlocutory injunction against the President signing the Bill. Thus ratification could not take place by the date proposed.

The question now was whether the injunction could be made permanent. The matter was referred to the Divisional Court in February 1987, and the injunction was discharged. The one remaining hope was to appeal to the Supreme Court. An appeal was lodged, the Supreme Court granted a stay on dismissal of the injunction; but the objectors were only given a very short time to prepare their case. In the end the Supreme Court decided, by 3 votes to 2, that the

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injunction should be restored. The objectors had won.

Yes, the objectors had won the battle, but not the war. In the meantime, there had been a change of government in the Republic. Fianna Fail was in office, and Charles Haughey was Taoiseach.

The only way in which the constitutional position could be altered was by a Referendum. So the FF government ordered a Referendum. All the big guns in Irish politics, and the bulk of the media, were brought to bear for the change. A substantial majority of the electors did not vote. Of those who did about 70% acted as their disparate advisors recommended.

Poor Mr Crotty, whose courage and initiative had played such a large part in not merely holding up the proposals but showing that their supporters were violating the Constitution, still awaits his ruinous bill.

That is the central theme of the book, and it is well told. But it is not the whole of the book, nor even the bulk of it. A large part is an account of Mr Crotty's own life and thoughts. There are many flashes of inspiration and important, but unfamiliar, ideas. That part of the book is highly discursive, and does not tie up very closely with the Irish constitutional story. Yet the thoughts which the reader will take away may influence his own ideas

United defeat

in many ways. Here are three examples:

- "There was much in common between the failure of the Irish to secure a livelihood in Ireland and the widespread, growing and worsening poverty of the Third World. Fewer people get a livelihood in Ireland now than at any time in the past 250 years. More people in the Third World now experience worse poverty than ever before."

- "Every country that had not been capitalist colonized develops, regardless of whether it is market oriented (USA) or centrally planned (USSR); Western (Germany) or Eastern (Japan); large (Canada) or small (Singapore). Every one of the 140 or so former capitalist colonies, containing in all some two billion (sic) people, undevelops, although some of these - those in Latin America - have been independent for a century longer than Ireland; and some of them are centrally planned (India and Tanzania) while others are market oriented (Kenya and Indonesia)."

- "It costs an employer in Ireland now £4.08 to place an additional £1 net of PAYE and PRSI deductions in an employee's pocket. Of that residual £1, the state takes another 15p in VAT. Thus to enable a worker to buy goods and services for which producers receive 85p, an employer..... must pay the worker almost five times as much."

Important ideas, each deserving a book of its own.