

CONFLICT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The Great Famine

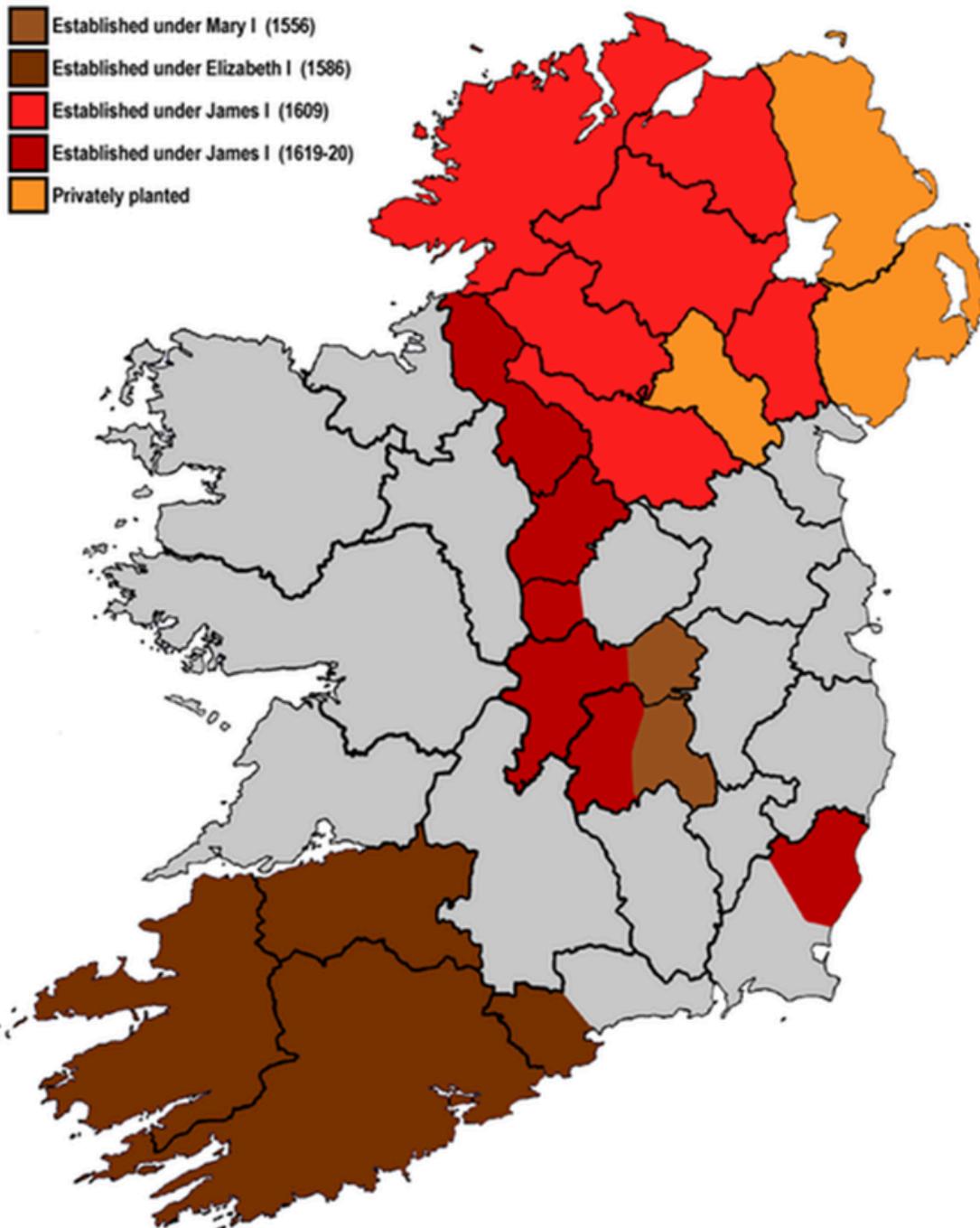
**WAS THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT TO BLAME FOR THE
DEVASTATING IMPACT OF THE GREAT FAMINE IN IRELAND?**





British misrule created the conditions for the Famine

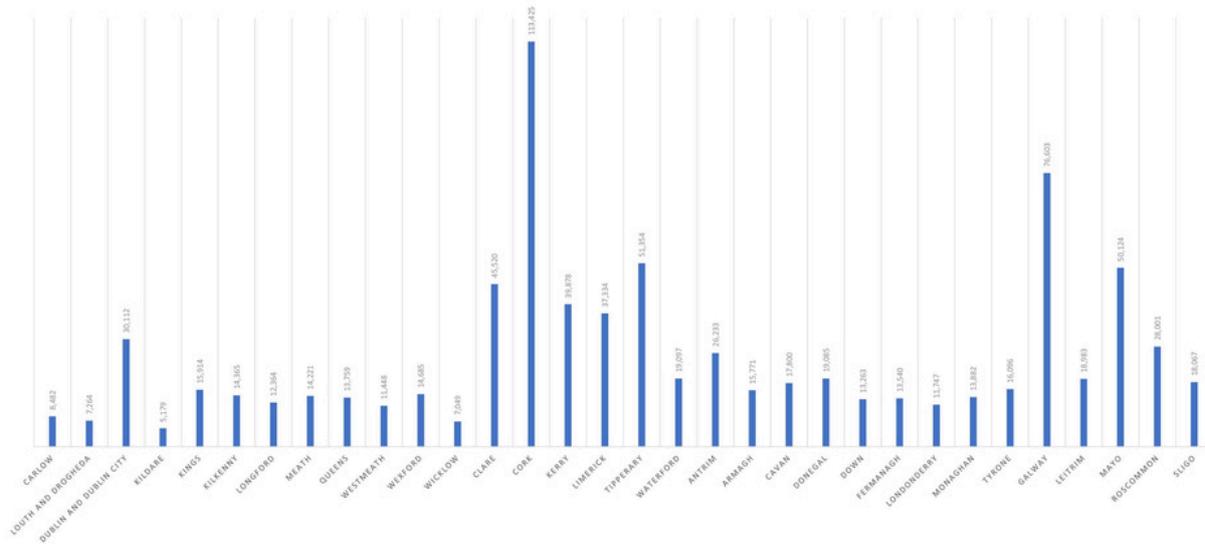
Source 1: Map of forced plantations in Ireland. Plantations were handed to English/Protestant settlers after being confiscated from the original Catholic Irish owners





British misrule created the conditions for the Famine

Source 2: Population loss during the Famine by county





The British Government was not responsible for Ireland's dependence on potatoes

Source 3: Extract from Dr Maureen Murphy's book review of 'Feast and Famine: Food and Nutrition in Ireland 1500-1920', 2002

The Irish diet of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was reflective of their cattle economy: meat and milk products for the gentry and meat scraps, offal and milk products for the poorer Irish. They had long cultivated cereals and legumes. Potatoes made their appearance during this time, but they were meant only to supplement other foods, and were not intended to be the primary, indeed the only, food source...

Post-Cromwellian settlements brought some changes based on population growth, the extension of settlement boundaries and labour surpluses that made it possible to move from a pastoral to a tillage economy. The commodification of food was also a feature of the seventeenth century. The population of Ireland rose from about 2 million in 1700 to about 8.5 million on the eve of the Famine (1845).



The British Government was not responsible for Ireland's dependence on potatoes

Source 4: Comparison of the effect of potato blight across Europe

Country/region	Pre-blight daily potato consumption per capita (kilo)	1845 decline in potato yields	1846 decline in potato yields
Belgium	0.5/0.6 kg	-87%	-43%
Denmark	0.2/0.3 kg	-50%	-50%
Sweden	0.5/0.6 kg	-20-25%	-20-25%
France	0.5 kg	-20%	-19%
Württemberg	n/a	-55%	-51%
Prussia	1.0/1.1 kg	n/a	-47%
Netherlands	0.7 kg	-71%	-56%
Highlands of Scotland	high	n/a	-80%
Ireland	2.1 kg	-30%	-88%



The British Government chose free trade over Irish lives

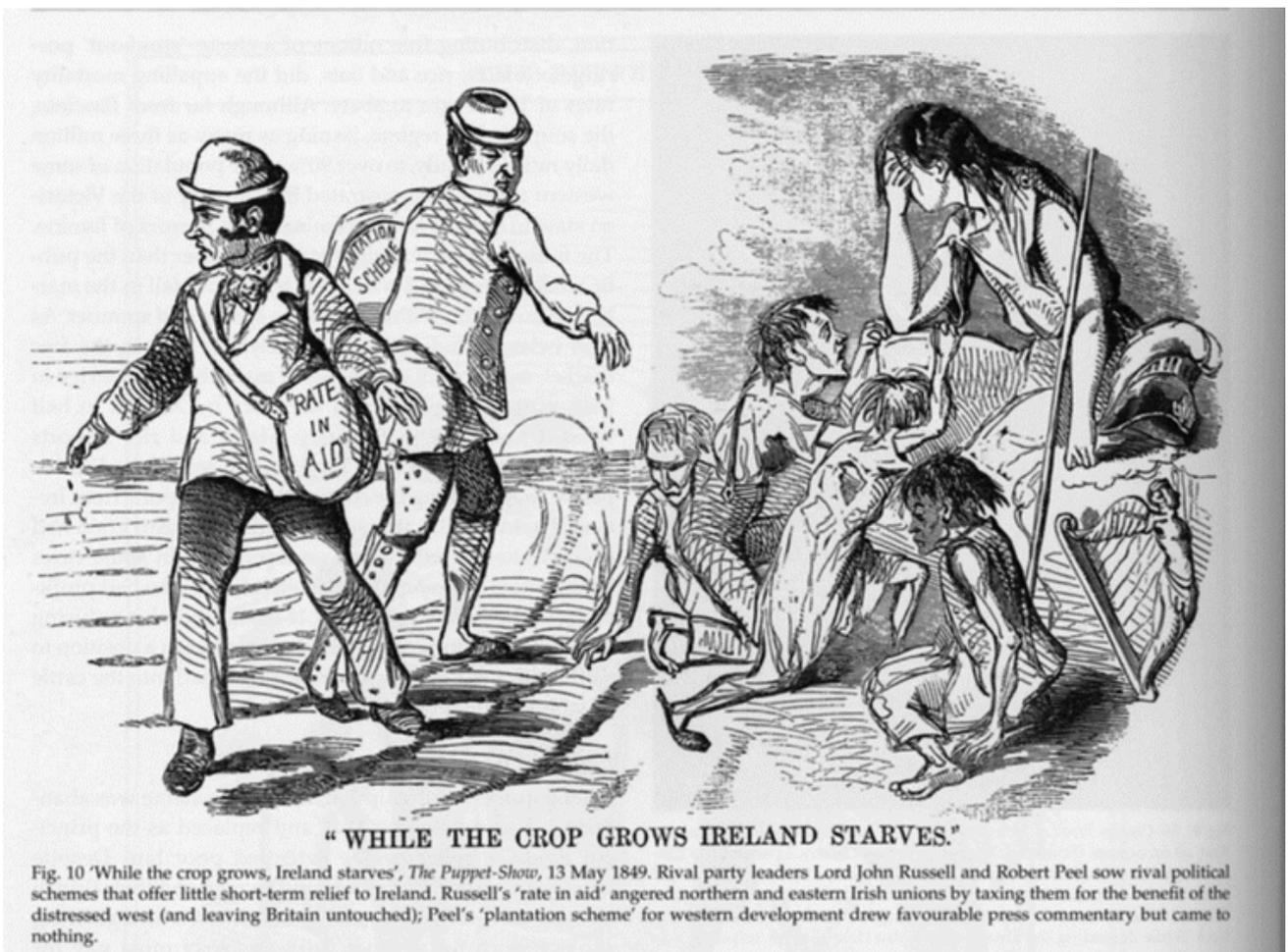
Source 5: Extract from Food Exports from Ireland 1846-47 by Christine Kinealy, 1997

Almost 4,000 vessels carried food from Ireland to the ports of Bristol, Glasgow, Liverpool and London during 1847, when 400,000 Irish men, women and children died of starvation and related diseases. The food was shipped under military guard from the most famine-stricken parts of Ireland; Ballina, Ballyshannon, Bantry, Dingle, Killala, Kilrush, Limerick, Sligo, Tralee and Westport. A wide variety of commodities left Ireland during 1847, including peas, beans, onions, rabbits, salmon, oysters, herring, lard, honey, tongues, animal skins, rags, shoes, soap, glue and seed. The most shocking export figures concern butter. Butter was shipped in firkins, each one holding 9 gallons. In the first nine months of 1847, 56,557 firkins were exported from Ireland to Bristol, and 34,852 firkins were shipped to Liverpool. That works out to be 822,681 gallons of butter exported to England from Ireland during nine months of the worst year of the Famine.



The British Government chose free trade over Irish lives

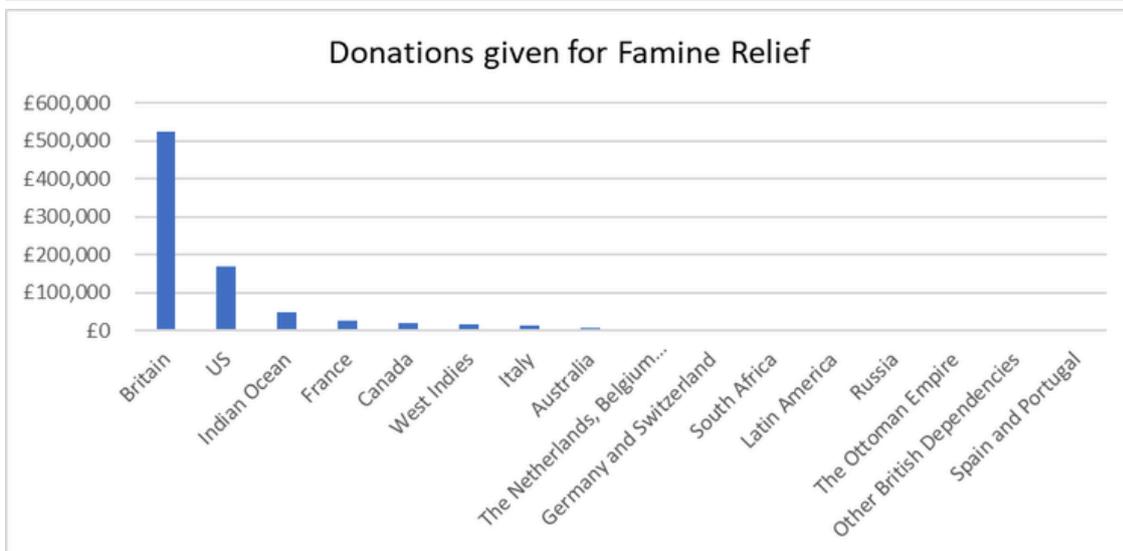
Source 6: Political cartoon from British satirical magazine 'The Puppet-Show' about the different approaches that England took to the Famine, 1849





Each British Government responded to the crisis differently

Source 7: Donations made for relief of the Famine by nation





Each British Government responded to the crisis differently

Source 8: Extract from 'Food Exports from Ireland 1846-47' by Christine Kinealy, University of Liverpool, 1997

...it is argued, by 1847 grain imports to Ireland exceeded exports.

The debate has tended to juxtapose John Mitchel's emotive assertion regarding ships laden with food leaving Ireland against Austin-Bourke's pioneering and frequently cited tabulation of the Irish grain trade in the 1840s. Whilst the former is impressionistic and anecdotal, Bourke's statistics are based on contemporary government returns. The latter is used as evidence of the net inflow of grain in 1847 and thereby dismisses Mitchell's claims. More recently, Jim Donnelly amongst others has refined this argument, suggesting that grain imports only really became significant after the spring of 1847 (HI 1.3, Autumn 1993). In the months prior to this there had been a shortfall in food imports which contributed to a 'starvation gap' in Ireland



Callous disregard for Irish lives permeated British policy

Source 9: Skibbereen is a town in the south of Ireland that was severely hit during the Great Famine. Skibbereen is also the title of this folk song in which a father tells his son about the Famine

*"O father dear, I oft-times hear you talk of Erin's Isle,
Her lofty scenes and valleys green, her mountains rude and wild.
They say it is a pretty place wherein a prince might dwell.
And why did you abandon it, the reason to me tell."*

*"My son, I loved our native land with energy and pride,
Until a blight came on my land, my sheep and cattle died.
The rent and taxes were to pay, I could not them redeem,
And that's the cruel reason why I left old Skibbereen."*

*"Oh it's well I do remember that bleak December day,
The landlord and the sheriff came to drive us all away.
They set my roof on fire with their demon yellow spleen,
And that's another reason why I left old Skibbereen."*

*"Your mother too, (God rest her soul) lay on the snowy ground.
She fainted o'er in anguish with the desolation round.
She never rose, but passed away from life to immortal dream,
And found a quiet grave, my boy, in dear old Skibbereen."*

*"And you were only two years old and feeble was your frame.
I could not leave you with your friends, you bore your father's name.
I wrapped you in my cota mór at the dark of night unseen.
I heaved a sigh and bid goodbye to dear old Skibbereen."*

*"It's well I do remember the year of forty eight,
When I arose with Erin's boys to battle against the fate.
I was hunted thro' the mountains like a traitor to the Queen,
And that's another reason why I left old Skibbereen."*

*"O father dear, the day will come when vengeance loud will call,
And we will rise with Erin's boys to rally one and all.
I'll be the man to lead the van beneath our flag of green,
And loud and high will raise the cry 'Revenge for Skibbereen.'"*



Callous disregard for Irish lives permeated British policy

Source 10: Extract from the Chancellor of the Exchequer's comments in the debate on the Famine in Ireland in the House of Commons, 25 May 1849

The CHANCELLOR OF the EXCHEQUER did not think it expedient, on the present question, to enter upon a discussion on free trade. But he must say, that so far as Ireland was concerned, he was convinced that the free-trade principle had contributed very largely to the preservation of life in that country by cheapening the food which was imported....he took the opportunity of warning Gentlemen not to believe all the statements that were made of the distress and misery in Ireland to their full extent...it was unreasonable to expect any further grants should be made from the Treasury for the purposes of relief. Advances might indeed be made, but it was indispensable that they should look to Ireland for the repayment of them.



The Irish also bore some responsibility for the crisis

Source 11: Extract from the Chancellor of the Exchequer's comments in the debate on the Famine in Ireland in the House of Commons, 25 May 1849

It was an opinion which had been expressed by several Irish Members, that the property of Ireland should support the poverty of Ireland...The opposition to granting relief came not from him [The Chancellor of the Exchequer], but from many of the Irish Members. Why, the hon. Member for Limerick himself voted against the imposition of the income tax and the rate in aid—both of which measures were intended to relieve the distress of the people in Ireland—and now he turned round and complained of the Government and of their hardhearted conduct towards that country.



The Irish also bore some responsibility for the crisis

Source 12: Extract from 'The Politics of Enmity 1789-2006', by Paul Bew, 2009

But what of nationalist Ireland? How did it respond to the growing humanitarian crisis? What is striking here is the way which, both for O'Connell and more particularly, Young Ireland, politics remained in command. For Young Ireland there was no question of subordinating everything to a massive humanitarian effort, because this involved supplicants upon English generosity.

Young Irelander Richard O'Gorman impressed O'Connell with a speech at the Repeal Association at the end of October 1845:

'They had plenty of means for the support of their people. They wished not to appear as beggars, as they did in 1822, when England preserved from perishing in the west three of four thousand persons.' (The Nation 1 Nov 1845)

The decisive message here is the rejection of any concept of dependence on Britain, even if British aid saved lives. The political imperative of maintaining Irish self-respect was considered more important than the actual feeding of the Irish people.



British greed cost lives and was motivated only by profit

Source 13: Poem published by The Nation magazine in 1847. The poem was written by Jane Elgee under the penname 'Speranza'

*Weary men, what reap ye?
Golden corn for the stranger.
What sow ye?
Human corpses that wait for the avenger.
Fainting forms, hunger-stricken, what see you in the offering?
Stately ships to bear our food away, amid the stranger's scoffing.
They guard our masters' granaries from the thin hands of the poor.
Pale mothers, wherefore weeping?
Would to God that we were dead
Our children swoon before us, and we cannot give them bread ... We are wretches, famished,
scorned, human tools to build your pride,
But God will yet take vengeance for the souls for whom Christ died.
Now is your hour of pleasure
bask ye in the world's caress;
But our whitening bones against ye will rise as witnesses,
From the cabins and the ditches, in their charred, uncoffin'd masses,
For the Angel of the Trumpet will know them as he passes.
A ghastly, spectral army, before the great God we'll stand,
And arraign ye as our murderers, the spoilers of our land.*



British greed cost lives and was motivated only by profit

Source 14: Extract from a letter from Lord Clarendon, Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland to Prime Minister John Russell, 26 April 1849

Especially in the winter, the work available in the Public Works scheme “compelled a semistarved population to toil for ten hours per day for a meager relief wage” (Nally, “That Coming Storm” 729). These ten hours were too long for the already starved out Irish, and forced them to work harder and harder. A large part of the Irish population depended on the money made from this work...



Ireland benefitted from the Union and from British governments' reforms

Source 15: Extract from “The Establishment of the National School System in Ireland, 1831” by John Coolahan, 1983

State involvement in elementary education in Ireland was very comprehensive from 1831. It demanded that the schools which benefited from public funds must be operated on a multi-denominational or « mixed basis » in which children would be combined for « moral and literary instruction » and receive separate religious instruction at times set apart. A State inspectorate was set up in 1832 in Ireland. The State established a model school in Dublin in 1832 and a full training college for males under its sole control in 1838, and for females in 1845. These were followed later by provincial model schools funded and controlled by the central authority. These institutions were all run on the mixed denominational principle. The central Board of Control also published its own scheme of textbooks for the use of schools and, while these were not obligatory, they were State subsidised and used by the vast majority of schools.



Ireland benefitted from the Union and from British governments' reforms

Source 16: Table comparing the GDP growth of colonial Ireland to other European countries

Table 4: Average Growth of Real GDP Per Capita in Europe (%), 1842-1913

	Average Growth Rate
Ireland	1.8
Sweden	1.6
Denmark	1.5
Norway	1.3
France	1.3
United Kingdom	1.0
Netherlands	0.8
Italy	0.5
Greece	-0.1
Average	1.1

Source: Bolt and van Zanden (2014).



The British Government was racist against the Irish

Source 17 : "Mr G.O'rilla, The Young Ireland Party, exulting over the insult to the British flag. Shouldn't he be extinguished at once?" Cartoon by John Leech in British satirical magazine, Punch in 1861

And here is a portrait of the Author,



MR. G-O'RILLA, THE YOUNG IRELAND PARTY, EXULTING OVER THE INSULT TO THE BRITISH FLAG. SHOULDN'T HE BE EXTINGUISHED AT ONCE?



The British Government was racist against the Irish

NO IRISH NEED APPLY.

Written and sung by Miss KATHLEEN O'NEIL.

WANTED.—A smart active girl to do the general housework of a large family, one who can cook, clean plates, and get up fine linen, preferred.
N. B.—No Irish need apply. *London Times Newspaper, Feb. 1862.*

I'm a simple Irish girl, and I'm looking for a place,
I've felt the grip of poverty, but sure that's no disgrace,
'Twill be long before I get one, tho' indeed it's hard I try,
For I read in each advertisement, "No Irish need apply."
Alas! for my poor country, which I never will deny,
How they insult us when they write, "No Irish need apply."

Now I wonder what's the reason that the fortune-favored few,
Should throw on us that dirty slur, and treat us as they do,
Sure they all know Paddy's heart is warm, and willing is his hand,
They rule us, yet we may not earn a living in their land,
O, to their sister country, how can they bread deny,
By sending forth this cruel line, "No Irish need apply."

Sure I did not do the like when they anchor'd on our shore,
For Irish hospitality there's no need to deplore,
And every door is open to the weary stranger still,
Pat would give his last Potato, yes, and give it with a will,
Nor whisky, which he prizes so, in any case deny,
Then wherefore do they always write, "No Irish need apply."

Now what have they against us, sure the world knows Paddy's brave,
For he's helped to fight their battles, both on land and on the wave,
At the storming of Sebastopol, and beneath an Indian sky,
Pat raised his head, for their General said, "All Irish might apply."
Do you mind Lieutenant Massy, when he raised the battle cry?
Then are they not ashamed to write, "No Irish need apply?"

Then they can't deny us genius, with "Sheridan"—"Tom Moore?"
The late lamented "Catharine Hays," and Sam Lover to the fore,—
Altho' they may laugh at our "Bulls," they cannot but admit,
That Pat is always sensible and has a ready wit,—
And if they ask for Beauty, what can beat their nice black eye?
Then is it not a shame to write, "No Irish need apply?"

Och! the French must loudly crow to find we're slighted thus,
For they can ne'er forget the blow that was dealt by one of us,
If the Iron Duke of Wellington had never drawn his sword,
They might have had "Napoleon Sauce" with their beef, upon my word,
They think now of their hero, dead; his name will never die,
Where will they get another such if "No Irish need apply."

Ah! but now I'm in the land of the "Glorious and Free,"
And proud I am to own it, a country dear to me.
I can see by your kind faces, that you will not deny,
A place in your hearts for Kathleen, where "All Irish may apply."
Then long may the Union flourish, and ever may it be,
A pattern to the world, and the "Home of Liberty!"

Source 18: 'No Irish Need Apply' was a song written in response to the many advertisements for employment that barred the application of Irish individuals. The ad at the top of the image is an example of the discrimination faced in employment for the Irish in the 19th century



Despite a recession, the British did intervene

Source 19: Extract from 'A great-grandfather's account of the Irish potato famine' (1845-1850), by J.D. Cantwell

It had been raining a lot, even more than usual for Ireland. In October 1845, almost overnight, a dense blue fog settled over our puddled potato fields. An odor of decay permeated the air. When the wind and rain died away, there was a terrible stillness. The potato crop was ruined, destroyed (we learned later) by the fungus *Phytophthora infestans*...

In an effort to earn some money, I joined a public works labor force, sponsored by the British, building roads and digging ditches that seemed to have little purpose. It did pay 10 pence per day (12 pence equals 1 shilling), almost double my salary as a potato farmer. By August 1846, many of my countrymen had joined me in this endeavor, as the labor force increased fivefold to 560,000.

We tried planting potatoes again in 1846, but stalks and leaves of the potatoes were blackened, accompanied by a sickening stench, and within only 3 to 4 days the whole crop was obliterated...



Despite a recession, the British did intervene

Source 20: Plaque in Birkenhead, England about how Irish famine refugees found shelter there

