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Irish responses to Fascist Italy, 1919–1932

by

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

This project assesses the impact of the first fascist power, its ethos and propaganda, on key constituencies of opinion in the Irish Free State. Accordingly, it explores the attitudes, views and concerns expressed by members of religious organisations; prominent journalists and academics; government officials/supporters and other members of the political class in Ireland, including republican and labour activists. By contextualising the Irish response to Fascist Italy within the wider patterns of cultural, political and ecclesiastical life in the Free State, the project provides original insights into the configuration of ideology and social forces in post-independence Ireland. Structurally, the thesis begins with a two-chapter account of conflicting confessional responses to Italian Fascism, followed by an analysis of diplomatic intercourse between Ireland and Italy. Next, the thesis examines some controversial policies pursued by Cumann na nGaedheal, and assesses their links to similar Fascist initiatives. The penultimate chapter focuses upon the remarkably ambiguous attitude to Mussolini's Italy demonstrated by early Fianna Fáil, whilst the final section recounts the intensely hostile response of the Irish labour movement, both to the Italian regime, and indeed to Mussolini's Irish apologists. The thesis itself revolves around a number of central themes. These include the validity of the 'Fascist Revolution' and the subsequent dictatorship; the ethos of 'totalitarianism'; the irredentist aims and ambitions of Italian foreign policy, and the relationship between Catholicism and Fascism. In focusing upon these issues, this thesis illustrates Irish attitudes to such matters as legitimacy and structures of governance; international affairs and order; social harmony and cohesion; and freedom as the concept applies to the individual and state.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	i
List of abbreviations	ii
Introduction	1
1. The Catholic apologia for Fascist Italy	11
1.1. Explaining political violence	11
1.2. Explaining dictatorship	15
1.3. Witnessing Fascist piety	17
1.4. Fascist Italy and moral values	29
1.5. Freemasonry	45
1.6. Chapter summary	62
2. The Catholic indictment of Fascist Italy	65
2.1. Ethnic and religious minorities under Fascism: background	65
2.2. Irish criticism of Fascist actions in the South Tyrol	70
2.3. Fascism and Protestantism	77
2.4. Fascism V Catholic Action: background	80
2.5. Irish response to the Lateran Agreements	81
2.6. Rupture between church and state in Italy	83
2.7. Irish response to papal appeals	87
2.8. Resolution	93
2.9. Chapter summary	95
3. Fascist Italy and Irish foreign policy—two studies	98
3.1. Gabriele D’Annunzio & Fiume: background	98
3.2. D’Annunzio & the Irish Republic	102
3.3. The role played by Mussolini	106
3.4. D’Annunzio for Ireland?	110
3.5. The Corfu Crisis of 1923: background	115
3.6. Mixed Irish attitudes toward the League of Nations	117
3.7. Irish republicans support Mussolini	120
3.8. The Free State delegation at Geneva	123
3.9. Italians in Ireland make an appeal to public opinion	127
3.10. Eoin MacNeill at Geneva	129
3.11. Chapter summary	132

4. The spectre of Fascism? Elements of Cumann na nGaedheal policy	135
4.1. Establishment of the Fascist Militia	135
4.2. Prospective Irish Militias in the Civil War era	137
4.3. The Volunteer Reserve	147
4.4. Local Government reform	161
4.5. Conflicting responses to the reforms	164
4.6. Opposition to the Cork and Dublin Municipality Acts	168
4.7. Proportional Representation: Ireland	177
4.8. Proportional Representation: Italy	178
4.9. Conflicting responses to the Acerbo Law	180
4.10. The labour movement defends P.R.	190
4.11. Chapter summary	196
5. Fascist Italy and Fianna Fáil	199
5.1. Security legislation	199
5.2. The British Fascisti	202
5.3. Fascist frugality	205
5.4. Agronomics & demographics	209
5.5. Self-identification with Fascist Italy	217
5.6. Chapter summary	226
6. The labour critique of Fascist Italy	228
6.1. Documenting the Fascist assault upon Italian labour	228
6.2. Co-operativism	233
6.3. The Fascists Abroad Organisation	235
6.4. Fascist corporatism	238
6.5. Fascist-inspired vigilantism	243
6.6. Censoring the heirs to Sinn Féin	247
6.7. Chapter summary	255
Conclusions	257
Bibliography	264

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.C.A.	Army Comrades' Association
C.C.C.A.	Cork City and County Archives
C.D.F.	Citizens' Defence Force
C.I.D.	Criminal Investigation Department
C.I.N.E.F.	Centre International d'Etudes sur la Fascisme (International Centre of Fascist Studies)
C.T.S.I.	Catholic Truth Society of Ireland
C.Y.M.S.	Catholic Young Men's Society
D.D.A.	Dublin Diocesan Archives
DFA	Department of Foreign Affairs
D.I.D.A.	Dublin Industrial Development Association
DT	Department of the Taoiseach
G.A.A.	Gaelic Athletic Association
I.F.T.U.	International Federation of Trade Unions
I.F.U.	Irish Farmers' Union
I.J.A.	Irish Jesuit Archives
I.L.P. & T.U.C.	Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress
I.N.T.O.	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
I.R.A.	Irish Republican Army
I.R.B.	Irish Republican Brotherhood
I.T. & G.W.U.	Irish Transport and General Workers' Union
I.T.U.C.	Irish Trade Union Congress
I.T.W.	International Transport Workers' Federation
I.W.L.	Irish Worker League
K.G.C.B.	Knight's Grand Cross, Order of the Bath
M.V.S.N.	Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale (Voluntary Militia for National Security)
M.D.D.C.	Moral Dress and Deportment Crusade
N.A.I.	National Archives of Ireland
N.L.I.	National Library of Ireland

O.P.	Order of Preachers (Dominicans)
O.T.C.	Officer Training Corps
P.I.C.R.A.	Pontifical Irish College Rome Archives
P.N.F.	Partito Nazionale Fascista (National Fascist Party)
P.P.I.	Partito Popolare Italiano (Italian Popular Party)
P.R.	Proportional Representation
P.S.A.	Public Safety Act
P.R.S.G.B.&I.	Proportional Representation Society of Great Britain and Ireland
P.S.I.	Partito Socialista Italiano (Italian Socialist Party)
R.D.S.	Royal Dublin Society
R.T.É.	Raidió Teilifís Éireann (Irish broadcasting service)
S.I.C.	Special Infantry Corps
S.J.	Society of Jesus (Jesuits)
T.D.	Teachta Dála (member of the Irish Parliament)
U.C.C.	University College Cork
U.C.D.	University College Dublin
U.C.G.	University College Galway
U.C.D.A.	University College Dublin Archives
U.V.F.	Ulster Volunteer Force
W.P.I.	Workers' Party of Ireland
W.U.I.	Workers' Union of Ireland

INTRODUCTION

Why Fascist Italy?

This project has its origins in Fearghal McGarry's *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*.¹ Therein, because of the central role played by Mussolini during the Spanish imbroglio, McGarry included a brief synopsis of conflicting Irish responses to Italian foreign policy in the mid-1930s. In 1935, Mussolini made a bid for empire by invading Abyssinia. A year later, he followed Hitler's lead by dispatching military aid to Franco's army. Both acts dealt fatal blows to the League of Nations, in the process disrupting what one historian has coined "De Valera's Heyday at Geneva".² Equally, Italian aggression caused some discomfort to the Fianna Fáil government at home. By choosing to support the principle of collective security, a choice that meant backing London's proposals for League sanctions against Italy in 1935 and the Non-Intervention Agreement intended to limit the fallout from Spain, De Valera exposed himself to intense criticism from the main opposition party. Disregarding the party's pro-Commonwealth position, a plethora of Fine Gael figureheads attacked de Valera for humiliating Mussolini in accordance with the selfish demands of British foreign policy.³ Notwithstanding the obvious intention to score political points by challenging de Valera's republican-nationalism, some interesting insights into contemporary perceptions of Fascist Italy emerged. For speakers like Sir Osmond Esmonde and William Rice Kent, the *Duce* was an abolitionist-evangelical. According to the former, 'Signor Mussolini is the Abraham Lincoln of Africa ... [who] ... is out to abolish the slave trades in spite of the sentimental sympathy of Great Britain.'⁴

¹ Fearghal McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War* (Cork, 1999).

² Michael Kennedy, 'De Valera's Heyday at Geneva, September 1933–July 1936' in idem, *Ireland and the League of Nations, 1919-1946: International Relations, Diplomacy and Politics* (Dublin, 1996), pp 189–226.

³ McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, pp 191–3.

⁴ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lix, 531 (6 Nov. 1935), cit. in McGarry, p.191.

Similarly, Kent claimed that he would ‘not agree to the application of sanctions against Italy, who is going out to civilize and to Christianize a pagan race ... I sincerely hope that the Italian race, and Mussolini, the great leader of the Italian people, and defender of our faith in Italy, will be successful in this war.’⁵ Other speakers thought Italian Fascism had universal aspects worth celebrating. The future Supreme Court judge, Cecil Lavery, for instance, declared that ‘Fascism has done much good in countries that have adopted it and may prove a satisfactory government for other countries in time to come.’⁶ In a similar vein, George Coburn, a proud working-class member of Fine Gael, railed against William Norton for criticising Italian intervention in Spain. Losing his temper in the Non-Intervention Agreement debate, Coburn stated that:

... if I had a choice between Mussolini as leader, as President of the Irish Free State; if I had to make my choice as between him and the man representing Labour, that representative of sloppy sentimentalism in the form of cheap sloppy democracy, I would vote a thousand times for Mussolini. I am a trade unionist and a working-man, and I know that under a man like Mussolini you will have protection and law and order and nothing will be taken by the waster from the thrifty section of the community.⁷

In his earlier study of Ireland at the League of Nations, Michael Kennedy also noted these outbursts in support of Fascist Italy. Commenting upon the plaudits levelled at Mussolini in 1935, he concluded that ‘crude racism and over-zealous Catholicism’ underlay the assumptions expressed in the Dáil.⁸ Likewise, in his assessment of the Non-Intervention debates, Kennedy remarked that by invoking ‘base religious and political insults that showed the level of misunderstanding, supported by passion, amongst T.D.s’, the Francoists and Mussoliniphiles had demonstrated the worst failings of an introverted political class.⁹ However, and notwithstanding their relevance in relation to the infant Franco regime, these remarks appear inadequate towards

⁵ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lix, 530 (6 Nov. 1935), cit. in McGarry, p. 191.

⁶ *Irish Press*, 22 Oct. 1936, cit. in McGarry, p. 191.

⁷ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lxxv, 710 (19 Feb. 1937), cit. in part by McGarry, p. 195.

⁸ Kennedy, *Ireland and the League of Nations*, p. 213.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

explaining the general sympathy for Italy revealed at the time. Indeed, given that the Italian dictatorship was then *in situ* for more than a dozen years, and that Mussolini's supporters were clearly unembarrassed by the recent retreat from Blueshirtism undertaken by Fine Gael, it seems hard to dismiss the above outbursts as offhand, and by implication, historically insignificant. Instead, they appear to lend extra credence to McGarry's suggestion that Mussolini benefited from the manipulation of public opinion by noisy elements of a Catholic press, which, confused by the ambivalent relationship between Pius XI and the Duce, had long treated the latter as something of a *Fidei Defensor*.¹⁰

Inspired by this observation, this project was originally conceived as a limited attempt, grounded in the 1930s, to clarify the position of Catholic clergymen *viz-à-viz* Fascist Italy. However, at the suggestion of Prof. Ó Tuathaigh, who recognised the value of a general study spanning the lifetime of Sinn Féin and Cumann na nGaedheal, the scope of the project underwent a significant alteration. A subsequent survey of Irish interest groups, both secular and religious, and their attitudes to Italian Fascism from the time of its inception to the advent of Fianna Fáil power and Blueshirtism, suggested new and interesting questions the answers to which might provide fresh insights into the understudied subject that is 1920s Ireland. For example, how did Kevin O'Higgins earn the sobriquet "The Irish Mussolini", and why did Italian observers consider Ernest Blythe something of a closet fascist?¹¹ Why did some Irish clergy ignore, indeed applaud, the darker aspects of Fascist Italy, and how did ultramontane Ireland react to the advent of the Vatican State (est. 1929)? What little known services did Mussolini provide to the Republic during the Anglo-Irish War? Who were the Black Shirts, Irish and Italian, that appeared each Armistice Day? How did national, regional and party political papers report upon the Fascist project, and to what ends? Why did the Irish labour movement fear the evolving Fascist Corporate State, and why did some

¹⁰ McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 136.

¹¹ Dermot Keogh, *Ireland and Europe: a diplomatic and political history* (Dublin, 1990), p. 47.

trade unionists identify common threads between Mussolini's movement and the successor parties to Sinn Féin? Indeed, why was the label "fascist" so quickly applied to O'Duffy and the Blueshirts, and was the Fianna Fáil position of 1933-1934 entirely consistent with the party's earlier stance when in opposition?

This project attempts to answer these questions by tracing the curious parallels between Ireland and Italy at a time of enormous social, political and economic change. In revealing the diverse and often quite reflective commentary provoked by the early Mussolini regime, the intention is to demonstrate that 1920s Ireland was, as McGarry remarked in relation to Ireland and the Spanish Civil War, 'less detached from European events and ideologies than is often assumed.'¹²

Methodology

The methodology involved a critical reading of select organs of public opinion (newspapers, journals, pamphlets) contextualised by reference to primary source materials (personal papers, letters, official documents). The thesis did not require quantification of data and its processing. Rather, the study was empirically based but theoretically informed (e.g. the state, corporatism and confessional politics). As such, the project incorporated a broad range of personal papers located in both Irish and Italian repositories. Government files as held by the National Archives of Ireland complemented this material. Proper contextual analysis required a thorough review of the Free State print media. This review involved national and regional newspapers alike. Partisan political journals (viz *The Star*, *The Nation*, *Voice of Irish Labour*, etc.) were also examined and deployed as appropriate. So too were key organs of confessional opinion, including radical publications like the *Catholic Bulletin*, the *Irish Rosary* and the *Catholic Mind*, all of which assessed Mussolini and Fascism according to the standards of a hawkish Catholic nationalism. Less

¹² McGarry, preface remarks to *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*.

populist journals like the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, *Studies* and the *Irish Monthly* provided valuable insights into Catholic socio-political thought. Because *Studies* in particular encapsulated the economic, political and social aspirations of the state-building Catholic bourgeoisie, it features heavily throughout.¹³ Immersive reading of a broad range of survey texts relating to Ireland, Italy and the wider world provided context and perspective. Lastly, the project benefited from the use of electronic resources. The Irish Newspaper Archive and the Historical Irish Times Archive helped expedite the press review already outlined. Other digital resources used on a regular basis included the Dictionary of Irish Biography, Houses of the Oireachtas (Historical Debates), and Documents on Irish Foreign Policy websites.

Contribution to scholarship

A large part of this project reflects upon the policies and pronouncements of Cumann na nGaedheal. As such, it complements extant studies of the treatyite regime. In recent times, Regan and Meehan have produced comprehensive surveys of the Government party.¹⁴ In addition, Valiulis, McGarry and McCarthy have produced political biographies of individual Cumann na nGaedheal figureheads.¹⁵ Accordingly, scholars of modern Irish history have benefited from new insights into the key personalities, internal politics and external challenges that affected the Cosgrave ministry. Yet none of these works treats with a central theme of this research project: namely, that the treatyite elite were widely perceived to be sympathetic to Fascism many years before the emergence of the Blueshirts and Fine Gael. In examining and contextualising these charges, this project makes an original contribution to our understanding of 1920s Ireland. Moreover, as the first empirical study of Irish responses to the ethos and propaganda of Mussolini's Italy, this research

¹³For more on the influence of *Studies*, see, Bryan Fanning, 'Unfinished Revolution: *Studies*, 1912-1939' in idem, *The Battle of Ideas 1912-1986* (Dublin, 2008), pp 67–113.

¹⁴ J. M. Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution, 1923-1936* (Dublin, 2001); Ciara Meehan, *The Cosgrave Party: A History of Cumann na nGaedheal, 1923–33* (Dublin, 2010).

¹⁵ Maryann G. Valiulis, *Portrait of a Revolutionary: General Richard Mulcahy and the founding of the Irish Free State* (Princeton, 1988); Fearghal McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy: A Self-Made Hero* (Oxford, 2003); John P. McCarthy, *Kevin O'Higgins: Builder of the Irish State*

provides a resource to scholars who may wish to add to the conflicting views of historians about the fascist sensibilities of the Blueshirts.¹⁶

Similarly, the project hopes to provide fresh insights into the aspirations and methods of early Fianna Fáil (1926-1932). Scholars are somewhat divided about the party *modus operandi* at this time. Garvin, for instance, has emphasised the “spiritual” appeal of a rural party that gradually subverted the liberal-urban state apparatus inherited by Cumann na nGaedheal.¹⁷ Sceptical of an argument that fails to incorporate urban voting patterns, other scholars have analysed the party in class terms. For Allen and Dunphy, Fianna Fáil was primarily the party of the Irish *petit-bourgeoisie*.¹⁸ Defining the limits of Fianna Fáil radicalism, these authors argue that if republican rhetoric was central to the party discourse (a subject recently covered in great detail by Ó Beacháin),¹⁹ so too was an expert grasp of Catholic Social Theory and a Griffithite commitment to tariffs and subsidies to help middle-class producers. Promising by such means to stymie rural emigration and urban unemployment, Fianna Fáil appealed as a pragmatic alternative to a listless Labour Party and an “imperialist” Cumann na nGaedheal. However, with the exception of Allen, none of these authors, nor indeed the latest biographer of Fianna Fáil, Whelan,²⁰ engages with an important point raised by Lee. Identifying de Valera as the most likely “Irish Mussolini”, the latter noted that ‘isolated resemblances can certainly be detected between fascist and Fianna Fáil rhetoric’ and that ‘Aspects of Fianna Fáil’s economic policies were reminiscent of fascist panaceas’.²¹ By expanding upon Lee’s observations and by contextualising them with reference to the rhetoric of Fianna Fáil when in

(Dublin, 2006).

¹⁶ For an overview of same, see Mike Cronin, ‘Historians, the Blueshirts and Fascism’ in idem, *The Blueshirts and Irish Politics* (Dublin, 1997), pp 39–44.

¹⁷ Tom Garvin, ‘Political Cleavages, party politics and urbanisation in Ireland – the case of the periphery dominated centre’ in the *European Journal of Political Research*, xi, no. 4 (1974), pp 307–27.

¹⁸ Kieran Allen: *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour: 1926 to the present* (Dublin, 1997); Richard Dunphy, *The Making of Fianna Fáil Power in Ireland, 1923–1948* (Oxford, 1995).

¹⁹ Donnacha Ó Beacháin, *Destiny of the Soldiers: Fianna Fáil, Irish Republicanism and the IRA, 1926–1973* (Dublin, 2010).

²⁰ Noel Whelan, *Fianna Fáil: A Biography of the Party* (Dublin, 2011).

opposition—for Allen is concerned with government policy in the 1930s—this study thus hopes to deepen our understanding of the elusive infancy of de Valera’s party.

In addition, by investigating left-wing attitudes to Italian Fascism in the 1920s, the project hopes to contribute to our understanding of Free State class politics. Our knowledge of the Irish left in an international context has suffered due to the natural emphasis placed on the interaction between labour, Irish nationalism and the Catholic Church. In consequence, these themes dominate key monographs about trade unionists and the party-congress, with authors like Gaughan, Larkin, Mitchell, and Puirseil only making perfunctory suggestions (usually under the topic of Blueshirtism) about the impact of continental developments on left-wing thought.²² Moreover, whilst the scholarship of McGarry, English and O’Connor does involve international dimensions, the emphasis is on Irish engagement with either the Soviet Union or Civil War Spain.²³ Of itself, then, the survey of leftist attitudes to the Mussolini regime, contextualised by the stiff challenges posed by internal fracture, employer hostility, an unsympathetic state and a dynamic rival in the form of Fianna Fáil, is an original contribution to the historiography of the post-independence labour movement.

Notwithstanding the trivial and somewhat limited nature of Italo-Irish relations at a bilateral level, the project offers some new insights into the conduct of Irish foreign policy in the 1920s. Currently, the major scholars in this field are Keogh and Kennedy. Building upon the work of pioneers like Mansergh, Harkness, Keatinge and Barcroft, all of whom considered Irish

²¹ Joseph Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 182.

²² J. Anthony Gaughan, *Thomas Johnson* (Dublin, 1980); Emmet Larkin, *James Larkin: Irish Labour Leader 1876-1947* (London, 1989); Arthur Mitchell, *Labour and Irish Politics: the Irish Labour Movement in an Age of Revolution* (Dublin, 1974); Niamh Puirseil, *The Irish Labour Party, 1922-73* (Dublin, 2007).

²³ Emmet O’Connor, *Reds and the Green: Ireland, Russia and the Communist Internationals, 1919-1943* (Dublin, 2005); Richard English, *Radicals in the Republic: Socialist Republicanism in the Irish Free State, 1925-1937* (Oxford, 1994); McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, pp 85-108.

foreign policy within the framework of Commonwealth politics, Keogh and Kennedy have emphasised the independent and Eurocentric aspects of Irish diplomacy.²⁴ With regard to the League of Nations, Kennedy has developed the concept of “critical support”: committed in principle to the League, Irish diplomats would not refrain from identifying and criticising any shortcomings they beheld in terms of the League’s structures and authority.²⁵ As explained by Kennedy, this policy evolved from the negative Irish experience of the Corfu Crisis of 1923. Expanding on Kennedy’s synoptic overview of the Crisis, this project re-examines the options available to Irish diplomats at Geneva. In addition, it makes an original contribution to scholarship by illustrating the hopes, fears and resentments that Mussolini’s high-handedness aroused within an Irish public that was sharply divided about the merits of the League. Similarly, in providing a detailed account of Irish engagement with D’Annunzian Fiume, this project makes another original contribution to research. Notwithstanding a brief mistreatment by Coogan of the events outlined herein, the entanglement between the I.R.A., Gabriele D’Annunzio, Mussolini and the Italian War Ministry has hitherto remained undocumented.²⁶

Finally, as the Church and her subsidiary organisations were the pre-eminent interest groups affecting Irish society at this time, Catholic values and opinions are to the fore throughout this thesis. Important authors in this sphere include Larkin, Garvin, Keogh and Whyte. Focusing on Irish Catholicism in the late nineteenth-century, Larkin has explored the devotional revolution, the rise of Irish ultramontanism, and the Church’s relationship

²⁴ Nicholas Mansergh, ‘Ireland: External Relations 1926–1939’ in Francis MacManus (ed.) *The Years of the Great Test* (Dublin, 1967), pp 127–37; D. W. Harkness, *The restless Dominion: the Irish Free State and the British Commonwealth of Nations, 1921–1931* (London & New York, 1970); Patrick Keatinge, ‘Ireland and the League of Nations’ in *Studies*, ix, no. 234 (July 1970), pp 133–47; Stephen Barcroft, ‘Irish Foreign Policy and the League of Nations’ in *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, i, no. 1 (1979), pp 19–29; Kennedy, *Ireland and the League of Nations*; Dermot Keogh, *Ireland and Europe: a diplomatic and political history* (Dublin, 1990).

²⁵ Kennedy, *Ireland at the League of Nations*, p. 41.

²⁶ Tim Pat Coogan, *Michael Collins* (London, 1991), pp 169–71.

with Parnellite nationalism.²⁷ Garvin has studied the effects of Catholic fundamentalism between the fall of Parnell and the First World War.²⁸ Emphasising the impact of post-Dreyfus French Catholic thought on Irish priests, he has provided an international context to cultural fears expressed as hatred directed towards Jews, Freemasons and other apostles of “corrupt” liberalism. For his part, Keogh has analysed the triangular relationship between Rome, Maynooth and Irish politics during the inter-war period.²⁹ Whyte, meanwhile, has penned the outstanding survey work of the Catholic Church in twentieth-century Ireland, paying particular attention to the seminal role played by the hierarchy during the formative years of the Irish Free State.³⁰ These authors have paved the way for more recent scholarship that focuses upon the confessional rank-and-file. For instance, O’Driscoll, in conjunction with Keogh, has traced the parallels (or rather, the lack thereof) between the Irish and continental Catholic Action movements during the inter-war period.³¹ Subsequently, Curtis provided a comprehensive survey of the myriad of Catholic vigilance groups that prospered in the 1920s.³² Outlining key campaigns and the relationship between social actionists, the hierarchy, the media and the Irish government, he has exposed the dynamics of the undeclared “Confessional State”. Finally, O’Leary, building upon Whyte and Lee, has unravelled the complexities of the Irish Vocational Movement—including attitudes to state corporatism along fascist lines—during the 1930s and 1940s.³³ In short, a wealth of scholarship exists that traces the views,

²⁷ Emmet Larkin has published extensively in each of these fields. His essential arguments are outlined in ‘The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850–75’ in the *American Historical Review*, lxxvii, no. 3 (June 1972), pp 625–52.

²⁸ Tom Garvin, ‘Priests and Patriots: Irish Separatism and Fear of the Modern, 1890-1914’ in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxv, no. 97 (May 1986), pp 67–81.

²⁹ Dermot Keogh, *Ireland and the Vatican: The Politics and Diplomacy of Church–State Relations 1922–1960* (Cork, 1995).

³⁰ J. H. Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland, 1923–1979* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1980).

³¹ Dermot Keogh and Finin O’Driscoll, ‘Ireland’ in Tom Buchanan and Martin Conway (eds), *Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918-1965* (Oxford, 1996), pp 275–310; cf. O’Driscoll, ‘The Irish Social Catholic Movement, 1919-39’ (M.A. thesis, University College, Cork, 1994).

³² Maurice Curtis, *The Splendid Cause: The Catholic Action Movement in Ireland in the Twentieth-Century* (Dublin, 2008). A revised second edition of this book has recently appeared as Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy: Militant Catholicism in Modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2010).

³³ Don O’Leary, *Vocationalism & Social Catholicism in Twentieth–Century Ireland* (Dublin,

concerns and influence of Catholic figureheads, both lay and clerical, during the inter-war period. However, apart from allusions made by the aforementioned McGarry, the dynamic confessional response to Fascism in the 1920s remains undocumented. Accordingly, as the first empirical study of how this constituency interpreted the ethos and practices of Italian Fascism at that time, the project hopes to provide fresh insights into the wider impact of confessional politics and Catholic social theory in the early Free State era.

2000); Whyte, 'The Catholic Social Movement becomes a force in Ireland, 1931–1944' in idem, *Church and State in Modern Ireland, 1923–1979*, pp 62–95; Joseph Lee, 'Aspects of Corporatist Thought in Ireland: The Commission on Vocational Organisation, 1939–43' in Art Cosgrove and Donal McCartney (eds), *Studies in Irish History* (Dublin, 1979), pp 324–46.

CHAPTER 1:

THE CATHOLIC APOLOGIA FOR FASCIST ITALY

1.1. Explaining Political Violence

Invited to form a government by his king in October 1922, Mussolini succeeded to the premiership of Italy through a combination of constitutional means and insurrectionary behaviour. Nevertheless, the violent circumstances that surrounded the so-called “seizure of power” raised immediate questions as to the legitimacy of the incumbent regime. Consequently, the first challenge confronting Irish confessional observers of Fascism was how to reconcile their apprehensions about revolutionary violence with a movement that so blatantly relied upon the use and threat of force as a lever to political power.

In part, a common belief that the actions of the radical left provoked Fascist violence helped to overcome the problem of legitimisation. Very broadly, commentators were satisfied that Fascist violence was an inevitable, albeit distasteful, response to the chaotic period of left-wing agitation more commonly known as the *Biennio Rosso*. Throughout the “Two Red Years” of 1919 and 1920, strikes, lockouts, riots and gang warfare dominated Italian proletarian life, culminating in the infamous month-long “occupation of the factories” of September 1920.¹ Agrarian unrest accompanied the urban discord, with ex-servicemen’s associations, socialist agricultural unions and even Catholic peasant leagues all engaged in land agitation that posed a direct challenge to property and management rights.² A remarkable feature of this period was the intense anti-clericalism that accompanied socialist and

¹ Martin Clark, *Modern Italy, 1871–1995* (2nd ed., London, 1996), pp 207–8.

² Philip Morgan, *Italian Fascism, 1919–1945* (London, 1995), pp 24–5.

anarchist demonstrations. According to one contemporary Carmelite author, whose observations appeared in the influential Jesuit run periodical, *Studies*, the Italian left were ‘at one in making a war, hardly disguised or palliated upon the Church—nay, upon the Saviour Himself, upon God’.³ Offering a portent of things to come should the P.S.I. (*Partito Socialista Italiano*) triumph on a national level, the correspondent also inferred widespread corruption, embezzlement and nepotism amounting to tyranny in the various localities under socialist control. Satisfied that the basis of the *Biennio Rosso* was irreligion and that socialists/anarchists were incapable tyrants, the author was able to qualify Fascist violence as episodic and reactionary rather than systematic.⁴ Such views may have been historically incorrect, but they were symptomatic of a confessional mindset which believed that nascent Fascism had prevented that which an inept and discredited Italian parliament could not—a Mediterranean sequel to the Russian Revolution.

Leaving aside the obvious bias against the Italian left, events in Ireland and Mussolini’s response to these events also affected confessional attitudes toward the Fascist movement. It is important to bear in mind that the decisive and violent period of Fascist expansion, i.e. between the late summer of 1920 and the spring of 1921, occurred at precisely the same time that the Anglo-Irish war reached its climax. Thus, although the Black Shirts were themselves largely responsible for the frequent acts of murder, arson and robbery then afflicting much of northern and central Italy, an understandable pre-occupation with events closer to home tended to offset any meaningful engagement with events in southern Europe. Moreover, long before the advent of Fascist violence, Sinn Féin activists in Italy and their supporters among the Irish clerical community had forged a close working relationship with Mussolini, whose paper, *Il Popolo d’Italia*, acted as an important outlet for

³ O.C.D. (pseudo.), ‘Some Recent Developments in Italy’ in *Studies*, x, no. 33 (Mar. 1921), p. 123.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

Irish propaganda.⁵ Consequently, before the trappings of power provoked a change in attitude toward the British Empire, Mussolini's opportunistic support for Irish freedom meant that an influential body of confessional opinion was seldom prepared to make unqualified pronouncements against the worst excesses of the Fascist Squads.⁶ The comments of the Reverend Dr Charles F. Ronayne, who was then Professor of Moral Theology at the prestigious *Collegio San Alberto* and an instrumental figure in the clerical–Sinn Féin alliance, capture the sense of gratitude felt by the extensive Irish colony in Rome itself:

Although I find myself unable to subscribe to much of its fierce and passionate journalism, in gratitude and in honesty I must place on record one persistent fact in its history for which as an Irishman I am deeply thankful: in these intense years of our own country's struggle against England, the *Popolo d'Italia* has been the one paper here on whose justice we could confidently rely ... Mussolini would seem to have been no man's tool. He studied the Irish problem for himself; indeed, he seems to have made his own the Sinn Féin method of solution.⁷

A combination of bias, confusion and gratitude therefore affected Irish attitudes toward the early Fascist movement. Yet these factors alone could not excuse the questionable methods by which Mussolini came to power. By late 1922 the subversive intent of Fascism was plain for all to see, and the so-called “March on Rome”—although, to quote the editor of the *Irish Catholic*, Patrick J. Fogarty, ‘thankfully bloodless’—did little to reconcile Mussolini to Irish confessional opinion.⁸ Ultimately, therefore, it was reference to Catholic teaching on the divine origin of political power that disabled Irish apprehensions about the insurrectionary aspect of Fascism. According to Catholic political theory, because man evinces a natural inclination to society, and because society (expressed as family, tribe, economic organisation or the

⁵ See below, pp 108–9.

⁶ 'Interviews with Mgr Michael J. Curran' (U.C.D.A., Military Notebooks of Ernie O'Malley, P17/b/117).

⁷ Stannous (pseudo.), 'Notes from Rome' in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xii, no. 12 (Dec. 1922), p. 753. Involving a number of anonymous authors, the 'Notes from Rome' column spanned the lifetime of the *Catholic Bulletin*. Mgr Michael J. Curran, then vice-rector of the Irish College Rome, identified “Stannous” as Ronayne. (U.C.D.A., Military Notebooks of Ernie O'Malley, P17/b/117).

⁸ *Irish Catholic*, 4 Nov. 1922.

state) exhibits the same conventions of order and hierarchy as govern the heavenly host, the civil power of the state is authorised and commanded by God.⁹ As such, the Church will always condemn revolution in its active and operative phase. During periods of revolutionary upheaval, conditions of anarchy prevail; and where anarchy reigns, human society is opposed to the divine plan, fundamentally unsound, and therefore invalid.¹⁰ Nevertheless, even if violent insurrection “has no rights”, the same doctrinal logic means that the Church must always recommend obedience to post-revolutionary governments. As explained by no less an authority than the Italian priest-politician and implacable opponent of Fascism, Don Luigi Sturzo, whose observations appeared in the *Catholic Bulletin*:

The cessation of hostilities, followed by the victory of the revolutionaries, creates in the victors the right to constitute a government, to restore order, to assume public responsibility, not because the victorious party now possesses a right acquired by force, by arms, by civil war, by insurrection and slaughter, but simply and solely because the people, or rather society itself, has the right to have an established order of things, the right not to be left prey to anarchy.¹¹

In other words, because all authority comes from God and because anarchy cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely, once established, by constitutional means or otherwise, all governments are automatically sanctified by the Catholic Church.¹² Sturzo’s comments should nevertheless be considered in their proper context. His appraisal of Catholic political theory appeared at the height of the Matteotti crisis.¹³ At a time when Fascist propaganda sought to excuse ongoing political violence due to the supposed “rights of revolution”, Sturzo argued that if the revolution had not ceased, then by implication the regime was invalid.¹⁴ This caution notwithstanding, Sturzo’s observations

⁹ Martin Gibbons, ‘The Function of Civil Authority According to St. Thomas’ in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* (5th series), xx (July–Dec. 1922), p. 163.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Don Luigi Sturzo, as quoted in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xiv, no. 9 (Sept. 1924), p.754. The leader and one of the founding members of the P.P.I. (*Partito Popolare Italiano*), Sturzo is considered one of the fathers of Christian democracy.

¹² Pope Leo XIII, *Encyclical Letter, Au Milieu Des Sollicitudes: On the Church and State in France* (Rome, 16 Feb. 1892), pars. 18–20.

¹³ See below, pp 229–30.

¹⁴ Sturzo, as quoted in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xiv, no. 9 (Sept. 1924), pp 753–6.

serve to illustrate the manner in which most confessional analysts reacted to the Fascist seizure of power. Informed by Catholic political doctrine, and irrespective of Fascism's role in reducing post-war Italy to a state of political paralysis and social anarchy, Irish commentators could not but acknowledge Mussolini's "retrospective right" to accomplish his proclaimed intention of making Italy 'a strong, industrious, disciplined, and peaceful nation'.¹⁵

1.2. Explaining dictatorship

Just as the violent origins of Fascism could be understood in theological terms, so too could the one-party dictatorship subsequently established by Mussolini. The Catholic Church sanctifies political power as part of the divine plan for life on earth. However, it is important to realise that Catholic political theory only maintains that the *right* to govern comes from God. As far as the Church is concerned, the historical nations and the different models of government through which they express their statehood (for nation and state are not the same thing) are purely human constructs that reflect natural influences such as physical environment, common language, shared historical experience, etc.¹⁶ Because nations, states and systems of government are creations of the natural world, they will invariably rise and fall—it is only the necessity of political authority to satisfy the needs of society that remains constant.¹⁷ Accordingly, the Church has no special preferences as to *forms of political organisation*. With regard to popular participation in government, Catholic political theory fully admits of democracy as an acceptable means toward the end of social equality. However, because all power comes from God, and because not all people are born with the same abilities, the Church does not accept that all individuals have a natural or indefeasible right to partake in the convention or administration of government.¹⁸ Indeed, from a

¹⁵ Mussolini speech to the Italian Senate, as reported in the *Irish Catholic*, 4 Nov. 1922.

¹⁶ See, Stephen J. Brown, 'What is a Nation?' in *Studies*, i, no. 3 (Sept. 1912), pp 496–510.

¹⁷ Michael Browne, 'The Source and Purpose of Political Authority', *ibid.*, xxv, no. 99 (Sept. 1936), p. 394.

¹⁸ On Catholic political theory and democracy, see, for example, Denis O'Keefe, 'Democracy: An Analysis' in *Studies*, xxviii, no. 110 (June 1939), pp 185–94; *idem*, 'Catholic Political Theory', *ibid.*, xxx, no. 118 (Dec. 1941), pp 481–7; Alfred O'Rahilly, 'The Catholic Origin of

doctrinal perspective, whether a state defines itself as an absolute monarchy, a democracy or a dictatorship is largely irrelevant so long as the civil authority recognises God's authority and governs in accordance with his laws.¹⁹ Once these conditions for just rule are satisfied, all forms of government through which the state may become manifest are "lawful authorities" that command obedience.²⁰

Not prepared to endorse one form of political organisation over another, the Church was certainly convinced that the key political assumptions of nineteenth and twentieth-century Liberalism had perverted an idealised Christian social economy of the late Middle Ages. Indeed, for many Catholic intellectuals, the fifteenth-century *Ständesstaat* (a title misappropriated by Dollfussian Austria in the 1930s) or 'polity of Estates' remained the preferred model of statehood. Briefly, citizens in the *Ständesstaat* were supposedly protected from tyrannous rule not only by the unchallenged mantra that all authority came from God—and hence the implied duty to govern according to his laws—but also by the legislative and judicial rights of semi-independent provinces, city municipalities (organised along democratic lines), Estates (convened as Diets, Parliaments, Cortes, etc.), universities, trades Guilds, and the Catholic Church.²¹ All told, Catholic apologists were satisfied that the *Ständesstaat* model was based on principles of consent and a decentralised power base, both of which were understood to be legacies of the pre-Reformation Church and scholastic philosophy, and both of which combined to ensure that political power was exercised in the interest of the common good.²²

The series of concomitant social upheavals known as the Renaissance,

Democracy', *ibid.*, viii, no. 29 (Mar. 1919), pp 1–18.

¹⁹ Pope Leo XIII, *Encyclical Letter, Diuturnum: On the Origin of Civil Power* (Rome, 29 June 1881), par. 7; *idem*, *Encyclical Letter, Immortale Dei: On the Christian Constitution of States* (Rome, 1 Nov. 1885), pars. 4–5.

²⁰ Otto Futterer, 'A New Type of Man and State in Modern Times' in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* (5th series), xxxix (Jan.–June 1932), p. 499.

²¹ O'Leary, *Vocationalism and Social Catholicism*, p. 5.

Reformation, Enlightenment and Anglo–French Revolutions, however, interrupted the continued evolution of this “corporative” or “functional” Christian democracy. According to Catholic historicism, each successive age or event had introduced “false” philosophies such as individualism, mercantilism, naturalism and pantheism. Exemplified by the Jacobin tradition of the French Revolution, these new philosophies combined to disestablish God’s authority by introducing the revolutionary concept of an “absolutely sovereign” people.²³ Answerable to the people alone, the modern state increasingly defined itself as conventional, utilitarian, nationalistic and secular. Hence, where Christian values once dominated European society, when relegated to the individual conscience they enjoyed no more than a minimal role in relation to politics, jurisprudence and economic practice.²⁴ With the state no longer responsive to God’s authority or bound by the precepts of the moral law, all aspects of social life thus became subordinate to the demands of *laissez faire* capitalism and the crude mechanisms of universal suffrage. From a Catholic perspective, this translated into massive social inequality, exaggerated nationalism, and an all-pervasive state apparatus that confessional commentators were wont to condemn as the “tyranny” of bureaucracy. From here it was a short passage to plutocratic rather than democratic government, the rise of atheistic-socialism (culminating in the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution), and the catastrophe of the First World War.²⁵

1.3. Witnessing Fascist piety

Because the state’s failure to acknowledge religion and the moral law explained the crises of the Liberal era, a militant determination to restore Christian values to all aspects of public and private life defined the post-war

²² O’Rahilly, ‘The Catholic Origin of Democracy’, p. 17.

²³ J. P. Corrin, *Catholic Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democracy* (Notre Dame, 2005), pp 67–8.

²⁴ E. J. Cahill, ‘Notes on Christian Sociology: Liberalism’ in the *Irish Monthly*, lv, no. 646 (Apr. 1927), p. 197.

²⁵ See, for example, George O’Brien, ‘Religion and Capitalism’ in *Studies*, xv, no. 58 (June 1926), pp 217–29; cf. Michael Tierney, ‘Ireland and the Reform of Democracy’, *ibid.*, xxiii, no. 91 (Sept. 1934), pp 369–82.

Catholic Church.²⁶ Anxious to pursue this mission without hindrance or persecution, and not bound by any immovable conviction that democracy was expressly required to define the legitimate functions of political authority, Catholic commentators the world over, taking their lead from Pope Pius XI, were quite content to judge Mussolini's government on its actual practice rather than its ill-defined philosophical foundations.²⁷

Moreover, if the Church was content to judge Fascism on its actual practice, then she was immensely pleased to discover that Mussolini was prepared to abandon the secular principles that had regulated Italian political affairs for more than half a century. Ever the pragmatist, the new Prime Minister understood that the alienation of Catholic opinion had been a key factor that contributed to the ultimate failure of the Liberal regime. Anxious to avoid the mistakes of his predecessors, he therefore announced a series of material concessions designed to ingratiate his government with the Holy See. Within a few months of the March on Rome, crucifixes had reappeared in schools, law courts, and most visibly, high above the Colosseum.²⁸ Compulsory military service no longer applied to the clergy, whilst the armed forces now employed chaplains. Laws against blasphemy, provided for by the Law of Guarantees but thereafter neglected by successive governments, were enforced and penalties increased.²⁹ Much to the satisfaction of the higher Church authorities, Fascist propaganda announced the regime's determination to suppress vice, maintain public morality and protect the family unit. The Church also benefited

²⁶ P. C. Kent, 'A Tale of Two Popes: Pius XI, Pius XII and the Rome–Berlin Axis' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, xxiii, no. 4 (Oct. 1988), p. 591.

²⁷ Pope Pius XI, *Apostolic Letter, Ora sono pochi: On the Day of the "March on Rome"* (Rome, 28 Nov. 1922). It is worth emphasising that a decade would lapse before an authoritative Fascist self-definition appeared. The Italian Encyclopaedia of 1932 contained an extensive essay by Mussolini, 'La Dottrina del Fascismo', which exposed the fundamental differences between Catholic and Fascist social doctrine. It would be a further three years before an English translation—*Fascism: Doctrines and Institutions* (Rome, 1935)—appeared.

²⁸ Stannous (pseudo.), 'Notes from Rome' in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xiv, no. 12 (Dec. 1924), p. 1050.

²⁹ Christopher Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870–1925* (London, 1967), pp 632–3. A gesture that prescribed honours, privileges and diplomatic immunity for the pope, the Law of Guarantees was passed by the Italian Parliament in 1871. It was ignored by

financially. For renovations and new building projects, Mussolini established a fund of three million lira. Furthermore, the state doubled its contribution to clerical stipends, while the preferred Bank of the Vatican, the *Banco di Roma*, avoided imminent collapse by means of a generous loan.³⁰ Finally, the Italian Church made enormous gains in the realm most dear to her heart—that of education. Not alone did Catholic secondary schools and the Catholic University of Milan (est. 1921) achieve parity with their state counterparts, the new regime also reintroduced compulsory religious instruction in elementary schools (abolished since 1877), announcing that it was thenceforth to be the principal foundation of public education.³¹

Not surprisingly, Irish commentators greeted these gestures with great satisfaction. Compared to the bureaucratic pettiness or violent anti-clericalism of the First Portuguese Republic, Herriot's France, Callist Mexico or Stalinist Russia, not to mention the preceding Liberal regime or the short-lived Roman Republic of 1848, Fascist religious policy was a cause for celebration. Capturing the sense of relief shared by many, the Vincentian priest and future vice-rector of the Irish College Paris, Fr Timothy O'Herlihy, explained that:

The *Italia Nuova* is the work of Mussolini, who, with his blackshirts, marched on Rome at the opportune moment, not shouting, that the populace might hear, *Roma O Morte*, not stirring up discontent in the heart of democracy, and stimulating the people to orgies of slaughter and rapine in the name of the rights of man ... it was all so different when compared with other revolutions; democracy did not run riot in a frenzy of blood lust, dynamitards did not blow up public monuments, the torch did not serve to fire imaginations by burning Rome, priests did not hang from lamp-posts, the God of Reason was not installed by an arch-impresario.³²

Pius IX and his successors, who refused to recognise the right of the Italian government to make laws affecting the Holy See.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.; H. L. Hughes, 'The Catholic University of Milan' in the *Irish Rosary*, xxxiii, no. 1 (Jan. 1929), p. 25.

³² Timothy O'Herlihy, 'Italy' in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* (5th series), xxx (July–Sept. 1927), pp 225–6. A native of Knocknagree, County Kerry, two of O'Herlihy's siblings, Michael J., who was shot and wounded by British Auxiliaries in 1920, and Donal, the future Rector of the Irish College Rome, long-serving Bishop of Ferns and G.A.A. stalwart, were seminarians in Rome during the Fascist era. See, Fr John Breen to Mgr John Hagan, 18 Aug. 1925 (P.I.C.R.A., Hagan papers, HAG1/1925/366); Fr J. Casey to Mgr John Hagan, 25 Mar. 1926 (ibid.,

Importantly, Irish commentators had many opportunities to witness the newfound piety of Italian officialdom at close quarters. In addition to the substantial Irish community in Rome itself, large numbers of pilgrims travelled to and from Fascist Italy during the 1920s. The testimonies of returned pilgrims revealed a common theme. With rare exception, Irish visitors, appreciating the Church's struggles elsewhere and acutely sensitive to the recent Liberal past, did not overly scrutinise the motives behind the improved relations between the Italian Church and the Italian State. Indeed, for the vast majority of those who journeyed to and from Rome, it would have seemed absurd to suggest that the basic philosophy of this pro-clerical regime was anti-Christian. On returning to Ireland, the pilgrims disseminated their impressions through the organs and forums of Catholic opinion. Whether confided by eminent ecclesiastics, members of the governing elite or prominent journalists, these reports combined to advance Mussolini's desired impression of Fascist Italy as a benevolent regime that was sensitive to Catholic interests.

For example, on 1 September 1923 some 300 Irish pilgrims and members of the expatriate clerical community came together in the small Emilia-Romagnan town of Bobbio to commemorate the thirteenth centenary of St Columbanus.³³ Archbishops Edward J. Byrne (Dublin) and Thomas P. Gilmartin (Tuam) led the Irish party. Other guests of honour included President William T. Cosgrave, Professor Eoin MacNeill and the Marquis MacSwiney of Mashonaglas, all of whom were en-route to Geneva to oversee Ireland's accession to the League of Nations. Throughout the celebrations local Fascists and representatives of the Italian government were everywhere in attendance.³⁴ Directing the Black Shirts was Camillo Pellizzi, Professor of Law at the London University, holder of the rank of "General" in the Fascist

HAG1/1926/84); *Irish Independent*, 18 May 1929.

³³ *Irish Catholic*, 8 Sept. 1923.

³⁴ L. J. Stafford, 'Ireland at Bobbio' in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* (5th series), xxii (July–Dec. 1924), p. 456; *Southern Star*, 8 Sept. 1923; Fr M. J. Curran to Mgr John Hagan, 29 Aug. 1923 (P.I.C.R.A., Hagan papers, HAG1/1923/447).

Militia, friend of the Free State Minister for External Affairs, Desmond Fitzgerald, and Chief Inspector of the *Fasci Italiani all'Estero* (Fascists Abroad Organisation) in Great Britain and Ireland.³⁵ Indeed, in preparation for the Columbanus celebrations, this organisation—discussed in detail elsewhere—acted as an interface between Fitzgerald’s subordinates and the Italian authorities.³⁶ The cavalcade that transported the Cosgrave party to the ceremonies was provided and manned by the Genoese militia, while Bobbian Black Shirts and the Bersaglieri regimental band heralded their arrival with renditions of *Amhrán na bhFiann* and the Fascist hymn, *Giovinezza*.³⁷ Uniformed Fascists were also conspicuous at a Pontifical High Mass, which, because the Roman Question remained unresolved, was celebrated in the pope’s absence by a Cardinal legate, Franz Ehrle. A subsequent reception at the Bobbian Episcopal Palace witnessed much complimentary speechifying from Irish and Italian representatives alike. Acknowledging the courtesies extended to the Irish gathering by the civil authorities, Archbishop Byrne, for instance, was full of praise for the Italian government. So too was the Marquis MacSwiney, who suggested that the people of Italy were most fortuitous to have a figure like Mussolini at the helm of the ship of state.³⁸ The next evening, an enthusiastic throng of well-wishers with arms raised in the Roman Salute surrounded the departing Irish pilgrims. Overcome by the friendship shown them, one section of the Irish party left Bobbio lustfully chanting the infamous Squadrist battle-cry *Ejà, Ejà, alalà*.³⁹ Speechifying and ribaldry aside, the observations imparted by the academic, barrister and socialite, Dr Con. P. Curran, whose elder brother, Michael J., was both vice rector (1919–1930) and rector (1930–38) of the Irish College during the Fascist era, provide an

³⁵ Claudia Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism: Italian Fascists and Britain’s Italians in the 1930s* (New York & Oxford, 2003), p. 9; *Irish Statesman*, 15 Jan. 1927.

³⁶ Memorandum on protocol for use by the Free State delegation to the Fourth Assembly of the League of Nations (U.C.D.A., MacNeill papers, LA1/G206).

³⁷ Eoin MacNeill to Agnes MacNeill, 6 Sept. 1923 (U.C.D.A., MacNeill papers, LAI/G/215); John Canon Breen, ‘The Bobbio Pilgrimage’ in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xiii, no. 12 (Dec. 1923), p. 864.

³⁸ Mgr M. J. Curran to Mgr John Hagan, 3 Sept. 1923 (P.I.C.R.A., Hagan papers, HAG 1/1923/460); *Irish Catholic*, 8 Sept. 1923.

³⁹ Breen, ‘The Bobbio Pilgrimage’, p. 864. A meaningless incantation that defies translation, ‘Ejà, Ejà, alalà’ is not unlike ‘Hip Hip Hooray’.

accurate reflection of the sympathetic attitude generated toward Fascism by the Columbanus celebrations. According to Dr Curran,

The changed attitude of the Italian State since the days when the Liberals held office and Nathan⁴⁰ ruled Rome is evident in the cordial co-operation of the Italian government and the civil authorities in these celebrations. A common pride in Italy is resurgent in Church and State alike, and the vulgarity, which characterised political and civil manifestations since 1880, has disappeared with anti-clericalism.⁴¹

Participants in the “Great Irish National Pilgrimage” to Rome of 1925 were likewise impressed. A Jubilee Year and a Holy Year, Rome in 1925 was the centre of a major religious festival that attracted tens of thousands of visitors from across the Catholic world. As such, the celebrations were a propaganda opportunity not to be missed by a regime still striving to incorporate Catholic opinion and anxious to project an image of consensus to outside observers. Accordingly, the 800 or so Irish pilgrims who journeyed to Italy that October enjoyed all the obsequious attention granted to the pope’s foreign visitors.⁴² For instance, anticipating the positive impact his actions would have on Irish public opinion, Mussolini sent a state sleeping carriage across the French border to greet the pilgrim dignitaries at Chambéry.⁴³ Amongst the “very important pilgrims” were nine members of the Irish bench of bishops, including the Primate of All Ireland, Patrick Joseph O’Donnell. President Cosgrave attended this religious gathering also, but on this occasion travelled in a private capacity. Those less fortunate than O’Donnell and Cosgrave received a special “pilgrim’s pass” which allowed them to travel to and from Rome for all but a nominal fair. In Rome itself, the Irish party were privy to such edifying scenes as members of the Fascist Militia acting as interpreters, baggage handlers and tour guides. The pilgrims were also glad to take

⁴⁰ Ernesto Nathan served two consecutive terms as Mayor of Rome between 1907 and 1911. An Englishman attracted to Italy by the revolutionary politics of Mazzini, Nathan arrived in Rome shortly after the Piedmontese conquest of 1870. Reviled in Ireland as a Jewish Freemason, Nathan’s otherwise remarkable administrative skills were overshadowed by constant disputes between his office and Roman religious bodies. See, Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, pp 278–9; Scottus (pseudo.), ‘Notes From Rome’ in the *Catholic Bulletin*, iii, no. 12 (Dec. 1912), pp 950–2; Not Stannous (pseudo.), *ibid.*, xvi, no. 8 (Aug. 1926), p. 843.

⁴¹ *Irish Independent*, 4 Sept. 1923.

⁴² *Irish Catholic*, 31 Oct. 1925.

advantage of a temporary tram system that the regime had installed to ferry the foreign faithful to and from the Vatican. Also noted with approval was a state-sponsored hospice, erected in the shadows of St Peter's itself to cater for the needs of indigent pilgrims.⁴⁴ Not unlike the experience at Bobbio, pomp and ceremony surrounded the Irish, who constituted one of the largest foreign pilgrimages of the Holy Year. Military guards of honour attended their arrival and departure from Rome, while a detachment of the Fascist Militia accompanied the pilgrims on their northward journey. By all accounts worthy gallants, the Fascist escorts eventually took their leave at Modena, but not before inspiring their newfound friends with a choral rendition of the popular Lourdes anthem, *Ave Maria*.⁴⁵ All of this prompted one of the correspondents charged with following the pilgrims' progress, John Ryce, to wax lyrical about a revived and youthful Italy 'marching boldly forth under the banner of religion'.⁴⁶ Arriving back in Dublin with the main body of the pilgrimage on 31 October, President Cosgrave concurred, expressing the opinion that, 'The very courteous action of Signor Mussolini won the admiration of the whole party. The conduct, gentlemanly and unfailingly attentive of the Fascisti won many new admirers for these volunteers in their country's service'.⁴⁷

Perhaps the most convinced of these new admirers was the Dominican priest, Fr Michael P. Cleary. A long-serving member of his order's community at *San Clemente* during the Liberal era, Cleary had returned to Ireland in the aftermath of the World War. In his capacity as national organiser for the Catholic Young Men's Society (an organisation with very strong links to the

⁴³ *Irish Independent*, 17 Oct. 1925.

⁴⁴ 'A. W.' (pseudo.), 'Italian Politics' in the *Irish Rosary*, xxix, no. 12 (Dec. 1925), p. 912; Michael P. Cleary, 'Rome Revisited in the Holy Year', *ibid.*, xxx, no. 3 (Mar. 1926), pp 161–5.

⁴⁵ *Irish Independent*, 31 Oct. 1925.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* Otherwise known as "Jacques", Ryce was the *Independent's* colourful commentator on religious and political affairs. At the time, he was also deputy editor of the *Irish Catholic*. See, Patrick Maume, 'Rice (Ryce), John ('Jacques') in James McGuire & James Quinn (eds) *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009) [note: all citations from this source refer to the online edition; URLs are included in the bibliography]; cf. correspondence between Ryce, Frank O'Reilly and Edward J. Byrne, July 1925 (D.D.A., Byrne papers).

⁴⁷ *Irish Independent*, 2 Nov. 1925.

Dominicans),⁴⁸ he established himself as an important figurehead within the emerging Catholic social action movement.⁴⁹ Embittered by the adverse conditions that affected clerical life in pre-Fascist Rome, Cleary was pleased to inform readers of the *Irish Rosary* that Mussolini's credentials as a devoted Catholic were beyond question, and that as far as he was concerned, the *Duce* was nothing less than a man of providence:

Of this extraordinary personality, the most remarkable feature is his reverence for religion and his efforts to restore it to its rightful place in the life of the nation ... through personal conviction he has taken his courage in his hands and declared himself the official champion of the Church. ... There is something more than a mere coincidence in having such an intrepid ally as helmsman of the ship of State in the year of the Jubilee.⁵⁰

Not every Dominican pilgrim, however, held Mussolini in such high regard. Described by one admirer as an important commentator with 'well-travelled eyes and a profound philosophical sense',⁵¹ another pre-1922 veteran of *San Clemente* and likewise a regular correspondent in the *Irish Rosary*, 'A. W.', did not fail to notice the repressive atmosphere that defined the Italian peninsula at the time of the Irish pilgrimage. Concurrent with the Holy Year celebrations, Mussolini had abandoned all recourse to constitutional pretence. From January 1925 the dictatorship was openly proclaimed, and in the weeks preceding the Irish National Pilgrimage the Squads had been given free rein (Rome excepted) to intimidate the remaining political opposition. 'A. W.' was therefore less inclined to bless Mussolini's political career than to explain his policies by reference to Machiavelli and 'the great Fascist of modern times', Oliver Cromwell.⁵² Furthermore, he cast doubt on the popular assumption that Mussolini enjoyed majority consent, and articulated the concerns of many Irish confessional observers by condemning the centralising ambitions of the Italian state and Fascist militarism. Nevertheless, the curtailment of political liberty had benefits that 'A. W.' was quite prepared to celebrate. Beyond the patronage extended to the Jubilee/Holy Year celebrations, he was pleased to

⁴⁸ Curtis, *The Splendid Cause*, pp 82–4.

⁴⁹ *Irish Catholic*, 6 Apr. 1929.

⁵⁰ Cleary, 'Rome Revisited', p. 163.

⁵¹ *Irish Catholic*, 26 Dec. 1925.

⁵² 'A. W.', 'Italian Politics', p. 919.

discover that Fascism really did make the trains run on time, and that discipline and endeavour had replaced the ‘mendicancy of the past’ by transforming ‘an inert and ineffectual people into the live organism that now palpitates with an energy such as one looks for in a people who are first come to a sense of their power and mission.’⁵³

This second *Risorgimento* called for a satisfactory apologia, and the one advanced by ‘A. W.’ complemented his own narrow view of the Italian national character. Apparently, the dictatorship was the logical expression of historic traditions and ethnic traits—as he described it, ‘a national bent and humour’—that rendered Italians temperamentally unsuited to government by parliamentary democracy.⁵⁴ In Ireland and elsewhere, such opinions were far from unique.⁵⁵ In fact, casting aspersions on the political maturity of the Latin mind was the common practice of critics and admirers of Mussolini alike. Writing in *Studies*, for example, the future Blueshirt and architect of Fine Gael corporatism, Prof. Michael Tierney of U.C.D., speculated ‘whether there is not something in the character of the ancient Mediterranean nations which prejudices them against Northern forms of democracy’.⁵⁶ He believed there was, and welcomed the possibility that the regional dictatorships (viz Italy, Spain and Greece) might precede the coming of ‘a new and willingly accepted Empire of Europe’, which, reversing the democratic libertarianism of recent times, would ‘bring order to the present chaos of opposing customs barriers and hostile States’.⁵⁷ In a similar (albeit less prophetic) vein, Patrick J. Fogarty of the *Irish Catholic* maintained that Mussolini’s Liberal predecessors had:

... made the mistake of overlooking the fact that the Latins, great though their gifts may be, seem to lack the practical sense of things, a sense which may be counted on by Northern theorists in the workings of their schemes, and there is, indeed, grounds for the opinion that Parliaments have never

⁵³ Ibid., pp 912–3.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 915; see also, idem, ‘The Law of Reaction’ in the *Irish Rosary*, xxxi, no. 5 (May 1927), pp 323–4.

⁵⁵ John P. Diggins, ‘American Catholics and Italian Fascism’ in the *Journal of Contemporary History*, ii, no. 4 (Oct. 1967), p. 64.

⁵⁶ Michael Tierney, ‘Ancient Tyranny and Modern Dictatorship’ in *Studies*, xv no. 58 (June 1926), p. 193.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 203.

made themselves a suitable mechanism for the work of ruling the Italian people.⁵⁸

Despite such reservations as expressed by ‘A. W.’, the Catholic pretensions of Mussolini’s regime continued to impress Irish visitors to Italy. In many ways extensions of the Great Irish National Pilgrimage of 1925, two further exoduses, preceded and complemented by numerous smaller pilgrimages that summer, departed for Italy in September 1926. Involving some 450 persons under the spiritual direction of the Order of Friars Minor (Merchant’s Quay) and the Capuchin Franciscan Friars (Church St.), these pilgrimages coincided with the vast celebrations that had been organised to commemorate the septcentenary of St Francis of Assisi.⁵⁹ If anything, the pious pretensions of the Fascist regime during the Franciscan Year surpassed those presented to the world in 1925. In the lead up to the festivities, the Government invited Italians to take great pride in *Il Poverello* as ‘the most saintly of the Saints of Christendom and humanity’.⁶⁰ Again, Mussolini granted large sums of money toward the restoration and decoration of the many shrines associated with the name of St Francis. In the hope that his gesture would encourage Pius XI to break the tradition of the “Prisoner in the Vatican” and attend the Assisi ceremonies in person, he also commanded the return of the famed monastery there to the Franciscan Order.⁶¹ In this endeavour, Mussolini was disappointed. Nevertheless, such sycophantic behaviour encouraged one member of the Roman Irish community to praise the Fascist administration ‘for showing a liberality that is astonishing when we think of the recent past’.⁶²

Led by the Friars Minor, the larger of the pilgrimages celebrated the feast day in Rome. After witnessing a sombre religious ceremony attended by the black-shirted municipal elite, the pilgrims, largely drawn from rural Ireland, partook

⁵⁸ *Irish Catholic*, 26 Dec. 1925.

⁵⁹ *Irish Independent*, 22 Sept. 1926.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 30 Nov. 1925.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1 Dec. 1925. Like all religious foundations in northern Italy, the Franciscan monastery in Assisi was laicised and given over to state control in the wake of the French Revolution.

⁶² Not Stannous (pseudo.), ‘Notes from Rome’ in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xvi, no. 9 (Sept. 1926), pp 947–8.

of an impressive fireworks display and street carnival, all of which Fascist largesse paid for.⁶³ Meanwhile, the contingent led by the Capuchin Fathers spent the feast day in Assisi itself. Here, the man on the spot for the *Irish Independent* was the pious, conservative and future long-standing editor of that paper, Frank J. Geary. Through Geary, confessional Ireland learned of all the military and civic honours lavished upon the Cardinal Legate and his Court. Following Solemn High Mass, the Irish party attended an impressive reception hosted by the Fascist Mayor of Assisi. At this event, the pilgrims applauded the ecclesiastical and secular authorities as they exchanged compliments seldom heard during the Liberal era. The Legate, Cardinal Merry Del Val, acknowledged Mussolini as a worthy leader who ‘has willed that religion be respected, honoured and practised; visibly protected by God, he has wisely raised up the destiny of the nation, increasing its prestige across the world’.⁶⁴ It is worth noting that part of the Cardinal’s statement related to the actions of an Irish citizen. Briefly, Mussolini was ‘visibly protected by God’ because he had recently survived two assassination attempts. In September, an anarchist youth hurled a bomb at the dictator’s car.⁶⁵ The previous April, Ms Violet Gibson, a fifty-year-old Dublin born daughter of the Anglo-Irish aristocrat and former Lord Chancellor of Ireland, Lord Ashbourne, fired three pistol shots at Mussolini as he emerged from a function in the heart of historic Rome. Grazing the bridge of Mussolini’s nose, one of Gibson’s efforts came very close to changing the course of history. An unperturbed Mussolini capitalised on the failed attack by donning a small plaster to indicate his narrow escape. He then delivered a speech in which he urged his followers to “live dangerously”, thus coining a key slogan of the regime.⁶⁶ Gibson, meanwhile, was lucky to escape the justice of the Roman mob. Arrested and imprisoned, her fate remained uncertain. Diagnosing a case of “religious mania”, the regime eventually had her deported to Britain, where she lived the

⁶³ *Irish Independent*, 11 Oct. 1926.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini* (London, 2002), p. 219.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

remainder of her life in a Northampton asylum.⁶⁷ Towards securing this outcome, the British Foreign Office and the Free State Department of External Affairs liaised closely, with Irish officials, to satisfy a request of Italian prosecutors, certifying that Gibson had ‘never been connected with Communist or revolutionary societies’.⁶⁸ For his part, an apologetic President Cosgrave despatched a telegram congratulating Mussolini—who pronounced himself ‘deeply touched’ by the gesture—on his good fortune.⁶⁹

The Assisi celebrations, meanwhile, provoked further eulogies from Irish clergymen. For example, thrilled by all he had witnessed, the chief organiser on behalf of the Friars Minor, Fr Fridolin Fehily, was more satisfied than ‘A. W.’ had been as to the consensual basis of the regime. Addressing the assembled media at Dún Laoghaire on 17 October 1926, Fr Fehily announced that ‘Mussolini must be ranked as one of the greatest leaders of men. Everywhere I found evidence of his triumph. Industries are flourishing, religion is advancing, and the people are most content to have the greatest love and veneration for their liberator’.⁷⁰ The Carmelite priest and President of Terenure College, the Revd Dr R. B. Taylor, went further. Addressing a gathering of the College Union shortly after the pilgrims’ celebrated return, Taylor found much to recommend in a regime which he felt had been ‘misrepresented’ by the Irish and international media. Not overly concerned as to the fundamental differences between Catholic and Fascist political theory, Taylor, a personal friend of President Cosgrave and future Assistant General Superior of the Carmelite Order, defined Fascism as simply a ‘theory of the State antithetical to Socialism’.⁷¹ Arguing that distinctions should be made between the ‘patriotic principles underlying Fascism and the abuses on the

⁶⁷ Annabel Venning, ‘The deb who shot Mussolini: how aristocrat’s daughter came close to killing Il Duce’, in the *Daily Mail* (online), 1 Apr. 2010, (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1262670/The-deb-shot-Mussolini-How-aristocrats-daughter-came-close-killing-Il-Duce.html>) [accessed 2 Aug. 2010].

⁶⁸ File, ‘Attempted Assassination of Mussolini, position of Violet Gibson’, Apr.–May 1926 (N.A.I., Department of the Taoiseach (DT), S4952).

⁶⁹ *Irish Independent*, 23 Apr. 1926.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 18 Oct. 1926.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 22 Oct. 1926.

part of individuals in the carrying out of these principles’, he went on to dispense another oft-repeated apology for the Italian regime. If ‘A. W.’ exemplified the hypothesis that Latins were somehow naturally inclined to dictatorship, Taylor stood out as a devotee to the ever-expanding cult of *Ducismo*. To this mindset, an omniscient and benevolent Mussolini not only shielded Catholic interests against the presumed designs of a returned liberal, or worse, communist regime, he also acted as ‘a restraining influence on his more ardent followers’.⁷² With this remark, Taylor exonerated the head of Fascism from controversial policies pursued by the regime in the Italian borderlands (see chapter 2), and articulated his disdain—commonly felt in Ireland—for likely successors to Mussolini such as the openly anti-clerical Roberto Farinacci. This task completed, Taylor, himself an avid fan of Italian opera, brought proceedings to a close by conducting (much to the annoyance of concerned Labour Party observers) the Past Pupil’s Union band through the nuances of what we are told was ‘typically Fascist music’.⁷³

1.4. Fascist Italy and moral values

If Fascist religious pageantry impressed Irish commentators, so too did the apparent moral probity of the regime. It is important to emphasise that Irish Catholic activism in the immediate post-independence era was considerably more preoccupied with questions of sexual immorality and other forms of licentiousness than with the questions of social, economic and political reform that would dominate (via the “vocationalist” movement) confessional politics throughout the 1930s and beyond.⁷⁴ Unlike their counterparts on the European mainland, in particular France and Italy, Irish clergy and lay activists did not feel alienated or overly threatened by the combined advance of nationalism, secularism and revolutionary socialism. As such, the Irish hierarchy and the new governing elite had little appetite for potentially disruptive theories devised to combat heresies elsewhere. Assured of their

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid; *Voice of Labour*, 20 Nov. 1926.

⁷⁴ See, Michael Finnane, ‘The Carrigan Committee of 1930–1 and the ‘moral condition of the

position, recognising that there was no threat to the prerogatives of religion, and having identified what they believed to be a lowering of moral standards owing to the social turmoil of the revolutionary era, the Irish bishops preferred to encourage the practice of pious works and religious propaganda.⁷⁵

Given the puritanical tenor of Irish Catholic activism in the 1920s, it was natural that Fascist laws and initiatives that appealed to the precepts of religion and public morality should receive clerical approval. Beyond such laws as prevented any interference with Catholic practices (a common occurrence during the Liberal era), Irish commentators enthused about novel penalties that were devised to tackle such vices as gambling, intemperance, obscenity, and sexual deviancy. Press campaigns against alcoholism, for example, preceded the closure of some 25,000 wine shops between 1923–6. In addition, swearing, blasphemy and pornography became “crimes against the state”.⁷⁶ Indeed, the Fascist regime was particularly alert when it came to matters of sexual impropriety. Under the provisions of the Fascist Penal Code of 1927, convicted adulterers, concubines, seducers, souteneurs and distributors of contraceptives were all liable to lengthy prison sentences.⁷⁷ As early as 1924, and a full eleven years before similar legislation was enacted in Ireland, Italian night-life was severely curtailed after Mussolini denounced modern and unsupervised dances as being ‘immoral and improper, evil germs that will breed immorality in the minds of the people’.⁷⁸

Notwithstanding the reservations expressed by the L&H Society of U.C.D., a large majority of whom condemned the latter measure,⁷⁹ moralists in Ireland perceived these initiatives as worthy attempts to govern in line with the principles of Christian asceticism. According to the ascetic code, personal freedom has little or nothing to do with access to the political franchise.

Saorstát” in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxxii, no. 128 (Nov. 2001), pp 519–36.

⁷⁵ Keogh and O’Driscoll, ‘Ireland’ p. 278.

⁷⁶ Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini* (4th ed., London, 1987), p. 185.

⁷⁷ *Irish Catholic*, 3 Sept. 1927.

⁷⁸ Mack Smith, *Mussolini*, p. 185.

Rather, it is the constant pursuit of virtue and a life lived in accordance with the fundamental laws of God that leads to the path of true liberty.⁸⁰ Because virtue entails the practice of restraint and the curtailment of licence, ascetics argue that the governing power in the state has responsibilities that go beyond the strict claims of commutative justice. Sanctioned by God and not by man, governments have both the authority and the duty to indirectly (because in this regard the state is subject to the guidance of the Church) help to protect and promote the moral and religious interests of the people. From a Catholic perspective, by thus aiding the Church in her spiritual mission the state fulfils one of its many anointed functions.⁸¹ Consequently, many Irish commentators interpreted the Fascist regime as a proactive conduit between the Italian citizen and his or her right to lead a free and wholesome Christian life.

One clerical figurehead thinking along these lines was the Bishop of Kilmore, Dr Patrick Finegan, who told the Cavan faithful that in terms of public morality, he had personally ‘observed a great change for the better in Rome’.⁸² According to Bishop Finegan, this was thanks to Mussolini, who had ‘prohibited the circulation of bad books and newspapers’—a point also celebrated by the *Irish Independent*⁸³—and ‘had objectionable publications burned publicly’, thereby making Italians ‘more religious and moral than ever before’.⁸⁴ The former Irish Parliamentary Party M.P., Thomas Patrick Gill, expressed similar views. By the mid-1920s, Gill was dividing his time between chairing the Free State Savings Committee and speaking on behalf of the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland (C.T.S.I.). Long-established and easily the most important of the Irish moral vigilance associations, the Society’s Annual Conferences, which took place each October at Dublin’s Mansion House, were also the most celebrated gatherings of Irish confessional opinion during the

⁷⁹ *Irish Independent*, 25 Jan. 1927.

⁸⁰ P. Ivers Rigney, ‘What is Liberty?’ in *The Cross*, xix, no. 8 (Dec. 1928), pp 400–03.

⁸¹ E. J. Cahill, ‘Notes on Christian Sociology’ in the *Irish Monthly*, lii, no. 602 (Mar. 1924), p. 163.

⁸² *Anglo-Celt*, 5 Nov. 1927.

⁸³ Ed., ‘For Better Reading’ in the *Irish Independent*, 13 Jan. 1923, p. 4.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Free State era. Addressing the assembled delegates in 1925, many of whom were set to depart for Rome with the ‘Great National Pilgrimage’ a few days later, Gill, as recorded by the *Irish Times*, remarked that

He had no love for dictatorships, and believed that democracy was only to be made safe in every country by constitutionalism, and that it could so be made safe. But desperate diseases sometimes required temporarily desperate remedies: and the point was that the Italian people, whose spirit of work and industry and order now impressed all beholders, were today ... working under the inspiration of a higher motive—the motives of patriotism and Christian morality.⁸⁵

As Gill and his audience were very well aware, one of the “desperate diseases” recently remedied in Italy was the prospective power of the state to facilitate divorce. For demographic rather than spiritual reasons, in his first speech as an elected deputy (June 1921) Mussolini had announced that he was ‘no divorcist.’ True to his word, once in power he dismissed out of hand a divorce initiative sponsored by a yet unbowed Socialist Party. Following the briefest of “debates”, during which the Fascist Minister for Justice, Aldo Oviglio, announced that the P.N.F. and the Italian people were united in their ‘profound and general repugnance to the institution of divorce’, measures were put in place which prevented any further attempts to raise the question in parliament.⁸⁶

Because a similar divorce “crisis” threatened to undermine the otherwise cosy relationship between the Catholic Church and the Cosgrave government, confessional lobbyists hoped that Irish legislators would show similar resolve. No divorce courts existed in Ireland, either before or after 1922, but citizens of the Free State inherited the right to obtain divorce through private parliamentary bills.⁸⁷ When three such bills appeared before the Oireachtas in short succession (remaining unaddressed, they were later withdrawn), the Cumann na nGaedheal administration was forced to choose between Catholic

⁸⁵ *Irish Times*, 8 Oct. 1925.

⁸⁶ Binchy, *Church and State*, pp 399–400.

⁸⁷ Lee, *Ireland*, p. 157.

teaching on the indissolubility of marriage or upholding the religious neutrality of the Free State Constitution. After a period of procrastination, the Government deferred to the Hierarchy. In a confidential resolution issued in October 1923, the bishops advised that it ‘would be altogether unworthy of an Irish legislative body to sanction the concession of divorce, no matter who the petitioners may be’.⁸⁸ President Cosgrave and his Minister for Justice, Kevin O’Higgins, accepted the Church’s position.⁸⁹ However, the Government would not act until it had taken further advice from a hastily convened Joint Committee on Standing Orders. As the Committee deliberated through the spring and summer of 1924, rumours of possible divorce legislation abounded, leading to fulminations from the pulpit and the Catholic press.

Inevitably, comparative studies between Fascist and Irish policymakers accompanied the escalating anti-divorce campaign. In a prominent letter to the *Irish Independent*, for example, the Secretary of the C.T.S.I., Frank O’Reilly, pointed out that the obligations of moral law forbade Catholic deputies from countenancing divorce legislation of any kind.⁹⁰ Lest religious dogma was lost on them, the Committee members were to seek inspiration from their Fascist contemporaries. Unlike the Oireachtas, explained O’Reilly, Italian deputies had immediately recognised that ‘the indissolubility of marriage was a sentiment so rooted, not only in the laws of the country, but also in the hearts of the people, as to permit of no effort, direct or indirect, to allow divorce to be introduced into legislation’.⁹¹ Furthermore, in Fascist Italy the family ‘was recognised as an institution surrounded by religious sanctions, its integrity protected and safeguarded with the same jealousy and care as the integrity of the nation itself’. Satisfied that spiritual convictions and a healthy

⁸⁸ Quoted in David Fitzpatrick, ‘Divorce and Separation in Modern Irish History’ in *Past and Present*, no. 114 (Feb. 1987), p. 188.

⁸⁹ Extracts from a pamphlet entitled *Catholic Outlook*, 26 Sept. 1925 (U.C.D.A., Mulcahy papers, P7/C/82).

⁹⁰ Appointed C.T.S.I. Secretary in 1918, O’Reilly was both a capable organiser and a gifted propagandist who oversaw the steady expansion of the Society during the 1920s; see, Bridget Hourican, ‘O’Reilly, Frank’ in James McGuire & James Quinn (eds) *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁹¹ *Irish Independent*, 21 Feb. 1924.

regard for public opinion motivated the Mussolini government, O'Reilly encouraged Irish deputies to prove that they were not lagging behind their Italian counterparts in either respect.⁹² Shortly thereafter, William Dawson, son of another Irish Parliamentary Party M.P. (the one-time Lord Mayor of Dublin, Charles Dawson) and likewise a well-known C.T.S.I. activist, elected to make his views known at a public lecture hosted by the Central Catholic Library, of which he was a founding member. In a paper entitled "Are the Irish Catholic"?, Dawson challenged the national self-perception that 'Ireland was a Catholic country, imbued with Catholic culture and Catholic tradition'.⁹³ Arguing that the overwhelming religious homogeneity of the Irish people was insufficient proof of 'the claim to Catholic culture in the Continental sense', Dawson maintained that so long as Irish divorce legislation failed to comply with the Canon Law, then Ireland had little right to consider herself amongst the 'first rank' Catholic nations, which he listed as Spain, Italy and Austria.⁹⁴

In a similar vein, the well-known Jesuit priest and future vocationalist, Joseph E. Canavan, believed that the Joint Committee would benefit from an appraisal of Italian developments. Resident in Italy at the time, Canavan was well versed in the Fascist attitude to divorce.⁹⁵ Writing in the *Irish Monthly*, he explained that all previous Italian divorce initiatives (there were ten attempts to legalise divorce in Italy between 1870 and 1920) had failed because even the anti-clerical governments of the day had not the courage to press the issue upon a staunchly Catholic people.⁹⁶ Hence, the salutary lesson that 'No government could pass a Divorce Law in Italy, and live' had not been lost on an otherwise fearless Mussolini.⁹⁷ As Canavan intended, the implications for the Oireachtas were all too obvious: if an authoritarian regime such as Fascist Italy balked at the wrath of its Catholic constituency, then those deputies who

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ William Dawson, 'Are the Irish Catholic?' in the *Irish Rosary*, xxviii, no. 7 (July 1924), p. 513; *Irish Independent*, 4 Apr. 1924; *Freeman's Journal*, 4 Apr. 1924.

⁹⁴ Dawson, 'Are the Irish Catholic?', p. 513.

⁹⁵ My thanks to Damien Burke, archivist at the Irish Jesuit Archives, for compiling a register of the Irish Jesuits who were resident in Rome during the Fascist era.

⁹⁶ J. E. Canavan, 'Divorce in Italy' in the *Irish Monthly*, lii, no. 611 (May 1924), p. 230.

entertained divorce in Ireland were guilty of presumption. With further implied advice for the religious minority of the Free State, Canavan somewhat arrogantly concluded by explaining Mussolini's attitude to Italian objectors. According to Canavan, the Italian 'minority who advocate it [divorce] must put up as best they may with the disability of living in a Catholic country, and console themselves with the thought of other more solid advantages that may accrue to them' in the future.⁹⁸

Seeking to influence developments in Leinster House, the combined efforts of O'Reilly, Dawson and Canavan helped to confirm the Catholic credentials of the Mussolini government. Yet these were only marginal contributions to a much wider anti-divorce campaign. As such, it would be hard to maintain that celebrating the imagined piety of Mussolini had a major impact on this issue. Even though the Joint Committee failed to make any recommendations in favour of divorce, the desultory findings of its report had less to do with the precedent established by Fascist Italy than with the obvious reluctance of the Dáil to entertain any positive recommendations.⁹⁹ The Committee's instincts were invariably correct. In February 1925, Cumann na nGaedheal pushed ahead and introduced an amendment to parliamentary standing orders that prevented the introduction of any further divorce bills. Yet when the proposed amendment reached the Seanad, Lord Glenavy controversially ruled it out of order.¹⁰⁰ The Dáil likewise rejected a Seanad counter-amendment that would have effectively prevented discussion of private divorce bills without prohibiting their introduction.¹⁰¹ Thereafter, and despite a disquietingly sectarian C.T.S.I. campaign against recalcitrant Senators, the matter rested until 1937. Much to the annoyance of the Hierarchy, until the advent of *Bunreacht na hÉireann* divorce by private bill, if never actually availed of,

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 234.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp 234–5.

⁹⁹ Peter Finlay, 'Divorce in the Irish Free State' in *Studies*, xiii, no. 51 (Sept. 1924), p. 353.

¹⁰⁰ *Irish Independent*, 28 Apr. 1925.

¹⁰¹ Fitzpatrick, 'Divorce and Separation', p. 174.

remained technically possible.¹⁰²

Another shared goal of the Irish moral apostolate and the Fascist state was a common desire to curb female “immodesty.” In neither instance was the reaction against the freer sexual and social customs of the post-war world spontaneous. The remarkably conservative gender ideology of Pope Pius XI helped to shape Irish attitudes. Through Apostolic communiqués, the international Catholic Action movement, an extensive Catholic press and the preaching opportunities provided by the Holy and Franciscan Years, Pius waged a relentless war upon the ‘tyranny of fashion’ which ‘served often to offend sacrilegiously the sense of shame, and offer to everybody, especially the young, occasion for stimulation of the senses’.¹⁰³ In Mussolini’s Italy, Catholic prudery complemented the ideological chauvinism of the regime. Like all non-Soviet authoritarian regimes of the inter-war era, when it came to matters of sexual politics Fascist Italy was fundamentally anti-feminist. This is not to suggest that the Irish democracy had no experience of state sanctioned misogyny. Reviewing the legislative record of Cumann na nGaedheal and Fianna Fáil in 1943, Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington alleged that the Irish Free State and the fascist dictatorships were alike in their attitude toward women.¹⁰⁴ Whatever about Nazi Germany, where crude eugenicist propaganda defined women as exclusively house-bound guardians of *Volk und Kultur*,¹⁰⁵ with regard to Italy she certainly had a valid point. Unlike Hitler, when it came to restricting the political, legal or economic status of women, the Cosgrave, de Valera and Mussolini governments all invoked the traditional authority of family and religion.¹⁰⁶ As regards gender ideology, therefore, the fundamentals

¹⁰² Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900–2000* (London, 2005), p. 339.

¹⁰³ Pope Pius XI, public letter to Archbishop Schulte of Cologne, reproduced in part by the *Irish Times*, 9 Feb. 1927.

¹⁰⁴ Caitriona Beaumont, ‘Women, Citizenship and Catholicism in the Irish Free State, 1922–1948’ in *Women’s History Review*, vi, no. 4 (1997), p. 563.

¹⁰⁵ Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922–1945* (London, 1993), p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ The sexual equality provisions of the 1922 Constitution were short-lived. Legislation affecting women’s rights during the Free State era began with the 1925 Civil Service Regulation (Amendment) Bill. This Bill attempted to restrict promotion prospects within the civil service. However, thanks to the combined efforts of Senators Eileen Costello, Jennie Wyse Power and the Irish Women’s Citizens Association, the Bill was defeated at the Seanad

of Italian Fascism and Catholicism were not dissimilar. Anticipating the notorious encyclical *Casti Connubii*,¹⁰⁷ both codes agreed that women occupied a subordinate role in terms of the political, social and family order, and both codes shared an intolerance of suggestive fashions and mannerisms that implied alternatives to a woman's "natural role" as wife and frequent mother.¹⁰⁸

Yet the primary motive behind the Fascist modesty crusade of the mid-to-late 1920s was, as with the other material concessions made to the Church, an exercise in point scoring. With the great prize of the Lateran Agreements in the offing, Mussolini was prepared to indulge the pope. Other factors affecting the Italian modesty campaign were jingoism and economic nationalism.¹⁰⁹ Throughout 1926, lectures, competitions and relentless propaganda all endeavoured to 'develop a taste for national material and national costumes' that would signify a 'new creation of the national revival of Italy'.¹¹⁰ From 1927, when the campaign began to coalesce with the famous "Battle for Births",¹¹¹ it had taken on a distinctly moralistic hue. As reported by the *Southern Star*, 'Mussolini's campaign for an increase in the Italian population, the thunderous decrees of the Fascist regime for public morality, and the campaign of Pope Pius XI for more modest fashions for women have brought

stage. More successful was the public service marriage bar. First introduced for teachers in 1932 and later extended to all female civil servants, once married, women were automatically retired. With the passage of the 1936 Conditions of Employment Act, the Minister for Industry and Commerce obtained powers to regulate the number of women working in a given industry. The 1924 Juries Act gave women the right to apply for exemption from Jury service, a right that implied they were less responsible citizens than men. The Juries Bill of 1927, which attempted to exclude all women from Jury service, confirmed the implication. Although passed, a series of amendments allowed individual women to apply to have their names kept on the jury rolls. The 1935 Criminal Law Amendment Act prohibited the sale or importation of contraceptive devices, whilst those Articles of the 1937 Constitution that define women's social status according to Catholic teaching are Articles 41, 41.2.1 and 41.2.2. See, Beaumont, 'Women, Citizenship and Catholicism in the Irish Free State', pp 563–85.

¹⁰⁷ Pope Pius XI, *Encyclical Letter, Casti Connubii: On Christian Marriage* (Rome, 31 Dec. 1930).

¹⁰⁸ Alexander de Grand, 'Women under Italian Fascism' in the *Historical Journal*, xix, no. 4 (Dec. 1976), p. 956.

¹⁰⁹ De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, pp 221–2.

¹¹⁰ *Irish Independent*, 18 Aug. 1926.

¹¹¹ See below, p. 212.

to Italy a sweeping wave of reform'.¹¹² Verona provided a striking example of the Fascist–clerical alliance. Here, churchmen, Fascists and employers united to prescribe restrictions that suggested, quoting the Shakespeare conscious correspondent of the *Irish Catholic*, 'like Samson in *Romeo and Juliet*, "they will be cruel with the maids". They will, that is, show no mercy for short skirts, sleeveless dresses and so on'.¹¹³ Pious congratulations on behalf of the monarchy, the central government, various public bodies and the pope quickly followed, with the pontiff wishing 'every success to the high enterprise'.¹¹⁴ By 1929, the crusade was at its peak. While the Italian Church denied physical and sacramental access to "improperly" dressed women, Mussolini banned beauty pageants on the basis that they encouraged 'empty ephemeral popularity' and 'feminine vanity' with 'often lamentable results'.¹¹⁵ In a move that appealed to clerical cranks in Waterford, the regime also prescribed new styles for female swimmers before banning 'the mixed bathing scandal' once and for all.¹¹⁶ Meanwhile, party secretary Filippo Turati, whose strictures were soon transferred to the workplace by fawning employers, announced that members of the Fascist female auxiliary corps could consider themselves out of uniform if skirts did not fall two inches below the knee.¹¹⁷

The modesty campaign in Ireland hinged upon the condemnations set forth in the *Decrees of the Maynooth Synod* of 1927.¹¹⁸ The most important hierarchical statement of the Free State era, the synod decrees denounced sexual and social emancipation. As far as the Irish bishops were concerned, a heady cocktail of immodest fashions, dances, alcohol, cinema-going and "evil literature" led invariably to promiscuous sex and the modern practice of contraception.¹¹⁹ Effectively a clarion call for the "Confessional State", most of

¹¹² *Southern Star*, 23 July 1927.

¹¹³ *Irish Catholic*, 21 May 1927.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Irish Times*, 24 May 1929.

¹¹⁶ *Munster Express*, 16 Aug. 1929.

¹¹⁷ *Irish Times*, 24 May 1929.

¹¹⁸ See, Michael Browne, *Decrees of the Maynooth Synod 1927: Decrees which effect the Catholic Laity* (Dublin, 1930).

¹¹⁹ Curtis, *The Splendid Cause*, p. 86.

the perils outlined in the Decrees had received or would receive some degree of legislative attention.¹²⁰ Immodesty was the exception. Not immersed in the Roman Question and not harbouring totalitarian ambitions of their own, Irish politicians had sense enough to leave female voters to their own devices when it came to matters of fashion and personal deportment. Consequently, even though the Irish bishops proved no less adept than Mussolini at playing the economic nationalism card—according to the Decrees, ‘exotic modes of dress are a crime against our country [that are] not only out of joint with traditional usage, but mean moreover, an injury to our native industries and a loss to our trade’¹²¹—the Irish modesty crusade never obtained anything like the level of state patronage enjoyed by its Italian counterpart.

Supported by the clergy, the Catholic press and the myriad of vigilance associations, the campaign pressed on regardless. In the person of Timothy Harrington, latest member of the Castletownbere journalistic dynasty and then editor of the *Irish Independent*, it had a powerful supporter.¹²² Intrigued by the Mussolini regime, Harrington paid close attention to events in Italy. Having previously noted that ‘The women of Rome have made an effort to create native fashions, which will betray none of the eccentricities of imported products’, in commenting upon the Synod Decrees he optimistically announced that, if Irish ladies would only look to their Fascist counterparts, all was not yet lost: ‘Irishwomen, like the women of modern Italy, can revive the traditions of a past which was rich in beauty of modest raiment and rich in the glory of modest womanhood’.¹²³ Two years later, optimism had turned to despair. In an editorial entitled “From Bad to Worse”, Harrington lamented

¹²⁰ Principally, the Censorship of Films Act (1923); Intoxicating Liquor Acts (1924 & 1927); Censorship of Publications Act (1929); Criminal Law Amendment Act (1935); Public Dance Halls Act (1935). See, J. H. Whyte, ‘The Catholic Moral Code Enshrined in the Law of the State’ in *idem, Church and State in Modern Ireland*, pp 24–61; cf. Michael Nolan, ‘The Influence of Catholic Nationalism on the Legislature of the Irish Free State’ in the *Irish Jurist*, x, (1975), pp 128–169.

¹²¹ *Irish Independent*, 23 Oct. 1927.

¹²² See, Felix M. Larkin, ‘Harrington, Timothy Richard’ in James McGuire & James Quinn (eds) *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 3, Oct. 1927; *ibid.*, 23, Oct. 1927.

that, despite the exhortations of hard-pressed husbands and a demoralised clergy, the Irish *fashionista* ‘almost naked and wholly unashamed, goes her way unheeding’.¹²⁴ Because women were ‘unable to see themselves as others see them’, drastic measures were required. The measure Harrington proposed was a state sponsored organisation similar to the ‘Fascist Committee for Propriety in Women’s Dress’, which had ‘issued regulations fixing the length of skirts, prohibiting tight-fitting or transparent dresses, and decreeing that short-sleeves and flesh-coloured stockings must be abolished’.¹²⁵

Yet the purveyors of naked necks, arms and legs did not just confound patriarchal wisdom. The most active opponents of immodesty were women themselves. The women of Ireland who responded to the shared concerns of Rome and Maynooth converged upon the wonderfully entitled ‘Moral Dress and Deportment Crusade’. Begun in the Mary Immaculate Teacher Training College Limerick and enthusiastically endorsed by both the Irish clergy and the Vatican, by late 1929 the M.D.D.C. had a national membership in excess of 12,000.¹²⁶ It must have been a cause of great satisfaction for participants that, give or take an inch or two, the guidelines laid down by the M.D.D.C.—skirts not to be “suggestive” in style and not to be cut less than four inches below the knee, transparent or shades of stockings suggesting ‘the nude’ never to be worn¹²⁷—were those encouraged by the Fascist state. The anonymous registrar of the M.D.D.C. was certainly prepared to give Mussolini his due when the opportunity arose. Her primary source of information on all things Italian was the weekly front page ‘Rome Letter’ of the *Irish Catholic*. In addition to the affairs of the papal court, this column strove to illustrate the assistance rendered to confessional interests by the Fascists. In September 1928, readers were informed that the Roman Commissioner of Police had closed one of the city’s theatres ‘for failing to respect a severe warning communicated to the management concerning the dress of some of the female artists’, and that the

¹²⁴ Ibid., 29 May 1929.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, p. 65.

semi-official organ of the Vatican, the *Osservatore Romano*, had offered its ‘warm congratulations to the Commissioner for his vigilance and energy in applying a truly Fascist Law’.¹²⁸ According to the registrar, who first congratulated the *Irish Catholic* for ‘so consistently with its name, and so fearlessly, throwing itself into the fight against immodesty’, this piece of information was an ‘important matter of interest to members of the Crusade’.¹²⁹ To her mind, the actions of the Roman police were quite in accordance with a state’s duty to the moral law. Moreover, they were also a useful missile to hurl at the most outspoken opponent of Catholic moral vigilantism, Senator William Butler Yeats. At the time, Yeats was leading the fight against the forthcoming Censorship of Publications Act (1929). We can only speculate as to whether or not the registrar of the M.D.D.C. was aware of Yeats’ admiration for Mussolini, but, if the poet cared to notice, then her barb must have cut all the deeper: ‘Yet Mr. Yeats fears that the Censorship Bill will make Ireland the laughing stock of the world. This is evidently a case where great minds do not think alike—Mussolini’s and Mr. Yeats!’¹³⁰

Spokespersons on behalf of a more elitist organisation than either the Catholic Truth Society or the Moral Dress and Deportment Crusade were no less critical of the Yeatsian mindset. Founded in 1926 by the Jesuit priest and Professor of Moral Theology at Maynooth, Edward J. Cahill, *An Ríoghacht* (‘The League of the Kingship of Christ’) was the first Irish Catholic Action organisation to move beyond the realm of pious works and religious

¹²⁷ Beaumont, ‘Women, Citizenship and Catholicism’, p. 567.

¹²⁸ *Irish Catholic*, 30 Sept. 1928.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 6 Oct. 1928.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* Disillusioned by the violence of 1919-23, Yeats, despite remaining a liberal in matters of culture and conscience, developed a fondness for authoritarian politics. As such, he admired the Italian dictatorship, which he had an opportunity to witness at first hand (from 1928-30 Yeats was a convalescent in Rapallo, home to his friend and fellow Mussoliniphile modernist, Ezra Pound). Later a prominent Blueshirt, Yeats revelled in the “symbolic trappings” that identified this movement with continental fascism. Moreover, in his final years Yeats discreetly supported Nazi anti-Semitism and eugenics. This infatuation with the European right has troubled Yeatsian scholars ever since. For conflicting views on same, see Conor Cruise O’Brien, ‘Passion and Cunning: An Essay on the Politics of W. B. Yeats’ in A. N. Jeffares & K. W. Cross (eds), *In Excited Reverie* (London, 1965); cf. Elizabeth Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism* (London, 1981); cf. R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life* (2 vols., Oxford,

propaganda. Attracting as it did many of the leading lights of Irish academic, professional and political life, it was a narrow-based but nonetheless influential organisation that sought to realise the central vision of Pius' pontificate—again, the restoration of Christian values as the basis of modern society—through the dogmatic study and dissemination of Catholic social principles.¹³¹ Accordingly, Fascist probity made a strong impression upon League activists. Indeed, Hilliard Stack, a barrister and League Ard Comhairle member who travelled to Italy on a “fact finding” mission in 1927, felt that Fascist austerity was in great measure a reflection of Catholic ethical teaching. Highly conscious of the Maynooth Synod, in an address to the League's Central Branch in January 1928 he explained that the Fascist state had tackled all of the issues so recently raised by the Irish bishops:

Italy has set her face firmly against divorce. She exercises a very rigorous control over the drink trade, and forbids Sunday trade in strong spirits. She carries on a campaign against immodest fashions in dress, and keeps a rigid censorship over plays and cinemas. Nightclubs are prohibited, and immoral newspapers and magazines are banned.¹³²

For Stack, this prudery produced remarkable results. Supposedly demoralised by the ravages of Liberalism, Italians had obtained a sense of self-respect and self-reliance; indeed, they were now ‘a healthier, more intelligent, happier, people’.¹³³

That “anti-Christian liberalism” stalked the evolving Irish Free State was the pre-eminent concern of Stack's mentor. A Catholic social doctrinaire *par excellence*, Edward J. Cahill displayed something of an ambiguous attitude toward the Italian dictatorship. Although forthright in condemning what he described as ‘the ultra-nationalistic and secularistic aspects of Fascism’,¹³⁴ he too was satisfied that the laws affecting public morality reflected the enduring

2005), ii: ‘The Arch Poet’, pp 471–7.

¹³¹ Keogh and O'Driscoll, ‘Ireland’, p. 281.

¹³² Hilliard Stack, ‘Some Aspects of Fascism (part II)’ in the *Irish Rosary*, xxxii, no. 3 (July 1928), p. 508.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 509.

¹³⁴ E. J. Cahill, ‘The Catholic Social Movement’ in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* (5th series), xxxvi (June–Dec. 1930), p. 576.

power of traditional Italian Catholic culture.¹³⁵ Conversely, Cahill claimed that centuries of English rule had denied Ireland the benefits of ‘a thoroughly Catholic social framework’ such as could be found in ‘Italy, Spain and the other more or less Catholic countries of the continent and Latin America’.¹³⁶ Accordingly, all the indicators of an “Irish moral crisis” simply reflected the cultural predominance of England, which Cahill derided as ‘the original nursing mother and home of liberalism and Freemasonry’.¹³⁷

Bound up in the well-documented Irish censorship campaign, Cahill also took a keen interest in Fascist laws that curtailed the freedom of the Italian press.¹³⁸ Cahill was content to endorse Fascist censorship because it nullified journalistic anti-clericalism and obscenity. Amongst confessional commentators, this attitude was far from unique. Indeed, it was common for Irish observers to suspect British, French and American journalists of vilifying Mussolini simply because he had the courage to exercise a tight rein over a hitherto irreligious and licentious domestic press.¹³⁹ What set Cahill apart from his contemporaries, however, was his anxiety to see the mechanics of Fascist censorship applied in Ireland. Although the Censorship of Publications Act was a significant victory for the moral vigilance lobby, Cahill was not convinced that the newly established Free State Censorship Board was competent to deal with the threat posed by ‘anti-national’ media interests. Like his close friend and fellow Jesuit, Richard E. Devane, who published an alarmist treatise on the subject, Cahill was particularly worried about the ever-expanding press empires of Lords Northcliffe and Beaverbrook.¹⁴⁰ Convinced that cultural isolationism was necessary to preserve Gaelic and Catholic moral

¹³⁵ Idem, ‘The Social Question in Ireland: a study in social science’, *ibid.*, xxxiv (June–Dec. 1929), p. 227.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*; cf. Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, p. 56.

¹³⁷ *Irish Times*, 23 June 1927.

¹³⁸ See, Peter Martin, *Censorship in the Two Irelands, 1922–1939* (Dublin, 2006).

¹³⁹ See, for example, *Irish Times*, 8 Oct. 1923; cf. O’Herlihy, ‘Italy’, pp 227, 230; ‘Editorial’ in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xv, no. 5 (May 1925), pp 401–2.

¹⁴⁰ R. S. Devane, ‘A Suggested Tariff on Imported Newspapers and Magazines’ in *Studies*, xvi, no. 64 (Dec. 1927), pp 545–63; cf. *idem.*, ‘The Menace of the British Press Combines’, *ibid.*, xix, no. 73 (Mar. 1930), pp 53–69.

values, Cahill was apprehensive that these and other British press combines were determined to saturate the Irish market. In his 1932 social treatise, *The Framework of a Christian State*, he therefore called for new measures ‘after the manner obtaining in Italy’.¹⁴¹

Developing ideas gleaned from a blatantly propagandist publication issued on behalf of the *Centre International d’Etudes sur la Fascisme* (C.I.N.E.F.),¹⁴² Cahill suggested two measures in particular. Firstly, “Responsible Managers” were to take charge of all periodical publications. With editors and correspondents alike, these managers then applied for enrolment in a juridically recognised “Register of Journalists”. However, only Irish citizens, and at that only those who furnished ‘proofs of sufficient education and moral probity’ could be inscribed on the Register. The second measure Cahill suggested complemented the first. As in Italy, Irish newspapers were to make a full declaration of the names of their financiers. Hence, both state and consumer would know with whom exactly they had to deal when it came to ‘false, mendacious or dangerous propaganda calculated to corrupt morals and to disseminate scandal’.¹⁴³ All told, when allied to appropriate tariffs and other restrictions on imported British journals, the ‘legitimate freedom of the people’s press’ would be protected against the ‘foreign controlled press’, which, ‘if allowed to operate freely within the organism of the body politic, [would] inevitably dominate the whole organism, or at least impede or destroy its healthy and vital action’.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ E. J. Cahill, *The Framework of a Christian State* (Dublin, 1932), p. 482.

¹⁴² Namely, Ermanno Amicucci, ‘The Liberty of the Press’ in H. De Vries De Heekelingen (ed.), *A Survey of Fascism: the Yearbook of the International Centre for Fascist Studies* (London, 1928), pp 170–90. Based in Lausanne, Switzerland, the C.I.N.E.F. was an international organisation devoted to the study and promotion of Italian Fascism. Intrigued by Fascist religious policy, Cahill entered into correspondence with the English spokesperson for the C.I.N.E.F., Major James Strachey Barnes. As an individual subscriber, Cahill thereafter received a number of C.I.N.E.F. publications. Nevertheless, and despite repeated entreaties from Major Barnes, he refused to allow *An Ríoghacht* to become a vehicle for the distribution of C.I.N.E.F. propaganda. See, Letters (four) from J. S. Barnes to Edward J. Cahill, c. late 1927 to Feb. 1930 (I.J.A., Cahill papers).

¹⁴³ Cahill, *The Framework of a Christian State*, p. 482.

Cahill was highly selective in his recommendations. He did not inform his readers that Italian journalists required a certificate of political probity in addition to the one outlining their educational achievements and moral standing.¹⁴⁵ In addition, no mention was made of the arbitrary powers of suppression enjoyed in Italy by local prefects, all of whom were Fascist appointees.¹⁴⁶ These were no accidental oversights. Cahill clearly understood that the Fascist Press Laws (the *Decreto Sul Stampa* of 1924), were primarily a means of political manipulation. Nevertheless, overcome as he was by paranoid fears about the subversive threat of Jewish–Freemason propaganda, he endorsed the Fascist model without reserve. Unfortunately for Cahill, his proposals suffered from poor timing. In the aftermath of the 1931 spat between the Vatican and Mussolini, which, as we shall see, provoked a remarkable Irish backlash against Fascism, there was little appetite for measures associated with an unpopular regime. Moreover, and notwithstanding the personal friendship that existed between them, the incumbent leader of the Free State, Éamon de Valera, shared few of the insecurities expressed by Cahill.¹⁴⁷ Privileged with a copy of *The Framework of a Christian State* upon his election, De Valera was certainly aware of Cahill's suggestion.¹⁴⁸ However, with substantial press interests of his own, and having suffered humiliation by comparing himself to Mussolini once before,¹⁴⁹ de Valera was not inclined to give serious thought to controversial measures explicitly derived from the Italian dictatorship.

1.5. Freemasonry

Ostensibly outlawing all secret societies in Italy but unmistakably directed at the Freemasons, the Fascist Bill of Associations was introduced to the Italian Parliament in January 1925. Accompanied by a press campaign and violent

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 483.

¹⁴⁵ Amicucci, 'The Liberty of the Press', pp 184–5.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Finin O'Driscoll, 'Social Catholicism and the Social Question in Independent Ireland: The Challenge to the Fiscal System' in Mike Cronin and John M. Regan (eds), *Ireland: The Politics of Independence, 1922–1949* (London, 2000), p. 129.

¹⁴⁸ Keogh and O'Driscoll, 'Ireland', p. 286.

attacks on Masonic persons and property in Rome, Bari, Modena, Forli and Genoa,¹⁵⁰ the legislation was intended to have a threefold effect. In the first instance, at a time when his political supremacy seemed anything but assured, the campaign against Freemasonry reflected Mussolini's need for new and more credible enemies than the defeated socialists, communists and anarchists.¹⁵¹ Secondly, the Bill was intended to exorcise any remaining independence then enjoyed by the Italian civil service. Recognising that Lodge membership had been a vital factor affecting employment and promotion prospects during the Liberal era, Mussolini sought to destroy, or to be more precise, to "Fascistise" the clientism and patronage system that had hitherto dominated the machinery of state.¹⁵² Finally, as Franco-Italian rivalry in the Mediterranean and the Balkans was the dominant feature of Fascist foreign policy during the inter-war period, the French origins and Francophile sentiment of Italian Freemasonry also affected the regime's attitude toward the Lodges.¹⁵³

Whether or not the motives behind Fascist anti-Masonry were abundantly clear is a moot point. Prior to 1922 Masonic agitation against the Church was a highly visible aspect of Italian social and political life. As an extension of the French Grand Orient, Italian Freemasonry differed from Irish Freemasonry in the sense that it was frankly political and atheistic (hence it was disowned by the English and Irish Lodges in 1877).¹⁵⁴ Italian Masons made no secret of their involvement in parliamentary attempts to subvert the Law of Guarantees and in the anti-clerical demonstrations of the day.¹⁵⁵ Because Rome was the focal point for these oft-violent rallies, a very real sense of vulnerability

¹⁴⁹ See below, pp 222–5.

¹⁵⁰ Adrian Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power: Fascism in Italy, 1919–1929* (London, 1973), p. 284.

¹⁵¹ The Bill of Associations, like the Fascist Press Laws, appeared in the aftermath of the Matteotti crisis (See below, pp 229–30)

¹⁵² Lyttelton, *Seizure of Power*, p. 156.

¹⁵³ Binchy, *Church and State*, p. 146. On the Franco-Italian diplomatic nexus, see Alan Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy* (Princeton, 1970), pp 353–76.

¹⁵⁴ Terence de Vere White, 'The History of Freemasonry in Ireland', Thomas Davis Lecture Series, R.T.E., 15 Nov. 1970 (Radio), pub. in the *Irish Times*, 16 Nov. 1970.

¹⁵⁵ Binchy, *Church and State*, p. 40.

affected Irish clergy prior to the Fascist seizure of power.¹⁵⁶ Convinced that the Italian Craft was behind the poisonous atmosphere in the capital city, Irish commentators did not trouble themselves as to the actual motives behind Fascist anti-Masonry. Rather, they were satisfied that the Law of Associations had paid, to quote Michael P. Cleary, ‘the *amende honorable*.’¹⁵⁷ Notwithstanding the fact that the official discourse of the regime made little or no reference to the historical conflict between Freemasonry and the Italian Church, Fascist propaganda encouraged this belief.¹⁵⁸ Banner headlines in the Roman edition of *Il Popolo d’Italia*, faithfully reported by the *Irish Catholic*, announced that the legislation was required to protect Fascism and the Church from their common enemies within the ‘Masonic, Hebraic, Protestant, Atheist, Bolshevist and Republican International’.¹⁵⁹ Cynically deployed for Catholic consumption, it was this kind of propaganda which enabled pro-Fascist Irish clerics to assert that the suppression of Italian Freemasonry provided the dictatorship with ‘its merit, its triumph, and its victory’.¹⁶⁰

Apart from services rendered to the Holy See and the Italian Church, Fascist anti-Masonry captured the imagination of commentators with a keen nose for conspiracy closer to home. Identified with defeated unionist and surviving imperialist sentiment, Irish Freemasonry quickly became a target of abuse. Indeed, the abundance of anti-Masonic polemics reflected the uncertainties that underlay confessional and secular politics in the Free State. Irish Freemasons were repeatedly denounced from the pulpit and the hustings because they were perceived to exercise a disproportionate influence upon

¹⁵⁶ See, file entitled ‘Attack on College Students in Tivoli’, containing correspondence between Mgr John Hagan, Mgr Michael O’Riordan, Secretary Eric Phipps and Ambassador Sir Edwin Egerton of the British Embassy, 2 Oct.–26 Nov. 1907 (P.I.C.R.A., Hagan papers, HAG 1/1907/31); cf. A. O’Loughlin, ‘Jubilee Year in Masonic Rome’ in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* (3rd series), xiv (Sept. 1893), pp 769–88; cf. Scottus (pseudo.), ‘Notes From Rome’ in the *Catholic Bulletin*, i, no. 11 (Oct. 1911), pp 479–82; *ibid.*, iii, nos. 3 & 11 (Mar. & Oct. 1913), pp 245–8, 701–12.

¹⁵⁷ Cleary, ‘Rome Revisited’, p. 162.

¹⁵⁸ Binchy, *Church and State*, p.143.

¹⁵⁹ *Irish Catholic*, 17 Jan. 1925.

¹⁶⁰ H. O’N. (pseudo.), ‘Notes from Rome’ in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xx, no. 12 (Dec. 1930), p. 1154. cf. Letter from “Civis Romanus” to the editor of the *Irish Independent*, 19 Oct. 1931.

Irish cultural, political and economic institutions. In addition to misgivings about Masonic nepotism or “graft”, commentators railed against the suspected anti-national and irreligious leanings of Lodge members. As such, Irish anti-Masonry was often couched in resentful, threatening and vitriolic language. For instance, the revered nationalist and Offaly-based priest, Fr Thomas H. Burbage, whose wartime polemics in the *Catholic Bulletin* thundered against Anglo–Saxon and Continental Masonry alike, maintained that ‘Unless anti-Christ be Satan incarnate, as some indeed have held, then Freemasonry is anti-Christ’.¹⁶¹ Combining nationalism with evangelism in a similar way, the editor of a short-lived pro-treaty organ, *The Nation*, welcomed the 1924 New Year by urging vigilance against a Masonic community which had

... always been hostile to Irish national ideals. At worst they are implacable opponents to the national movement, at best they are contemptible Little Englanders. We do not wish to give the religious aspect of Freemasonry extended notice and shall confine our remarks thereon to the statement of fact that Freemasonry involves the worship of the goddess, Heat. Hence to all God fearing men its activities ought to be an abomination ...What a humiliation for the plain Catholic people of the Free State! In the near future, when attempts will be made to tax Catholic charities and to drive our nuns and priests out of the country, our people will fully realise their responsibilities.¹⁶²

When allied to events in Italy, this type of abuse cast a long shadow over an important Masonic event which took place in June of 1925. As the Fascists set about implementing the Law of Associations, Irish Freemasons and representatives from the Grand Lodges of the English speaking world gathered in Dublin to commemorate the bicentenary of Freemasonry’s introduction to Ireland. Justifiably apprehensive lest Italian developments should inspire calls for similar measures in the Free State—celebrating Mussolini’s “courage”, one Government backbencher, Osmond Grattan Esmonde, had already called for their proscription under the terms of the Treasonable and Seditious Offences Act¹⁶³—leading Masons took the opportunity provided by the festival to distance the Irish Lodges from their European counterparts. Addressing a

¹⁶¹ T. H. Burbage, ‘Freemasonry’ in the *Catholic Bulletin*, vii, no. 4 (Apr. 1917), p. 244.

¹⁶² Ed., ‘A Prince Freemason the Real Minister for Finance’ in *The Nation*, 1 Jan. 1924, p. 6.

¹⁶³ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, x, 1,294–6 (19 Mar. 1925), cit. in McCarthy, *Kevin O’Higgins*, pp 179–

packed St Patrick's Cathedral on 4 June, the Anglican Primate of All Ireland and Grand Chaplain of the Irish Lodges, Dr Charles D'Arcy, protested that no common ties existed between the Irish Rites and the 'so-called Freemasonry' of France and Italy.¹⁶⁴ Emphasising the Christian ethos of the Irish fraternity, he pleaded for toleration and rejected the oft-repeated accusation that Masons resented the majority religion and the constitutional status of the Free State. Frustrated that 'Irish Freemasonry has suffered through the myth that it has some association with the Freemasons of Southern Europe', the preferred journal of D'Arcy's audience, the *Irish Times*, summarised his argument thus: 'The Masonry which is practiced throughout the English speaking world is not anti-Christian. On the contrary, its foundation is a deep faith in God. It is hostile to no church and exhorts its members to be loyal to their several creeds. It preaches obedience to the settled Constitutions of States'.¹⁶⁵ Accordingly, even though 'misapprehensions based on ignorance continued to survive in some minds', the *Irish Times* hoped that the bicentenary celebrations would 'do a good service to the cause of national peace and progress'.¹⁶⁶

Unfortunately for D'Arcy, the *Irish Times* and the cause of religious toleration, the 1925 celebrations had the opposite effect. Offended by this ostentatious display, a small but nonetheless vocal cadre of confessional journalists were determined to link Irish Masons with the Continental Rites. This campaign centred upon Edward J. Cahill and his Holy Ghost understudy, Fr Denis Fahey. Both priests were devoted to the disclosure of Jewish–Masonic–Communist conspiracies.¹⁶⁷ From 1927, a series of articles penned by Cahill entitled 'Freemasonry: A Study in Catholic Social Science' appeared in the

80.

¹⁶⁴ *Irish Times*, 5 June 1925.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Keogh & O'Driscoll, 'Ireland', p. 282 — A native of Kilmore, County Tipperary, Fahey was then Professor of Moral Theology at Blackrock College. He spent the formative years of his ecclesiastical career on the continent, where, as a novice in France at the time of the Dreyfus Affair and a doctoral student in Rome during the Nathaniel era, he was exposed to anti-Semitic and anti-Masonic currents that informed his radical outlook.

pages of the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*.¹⁶⁸ First delivered verbally as the *An Ríoghacht* lecture series for the spring of 1928, these articles also appeared in the Paris-based *Revue Internationale des Sociétés Secrètes*, and in book format as the bestselling *Freemasonry and the anti-Christian Movement* (1929).¹⁶⁹ Following suit, in 1928 Fahey published a twelve-part article for the *Catholic Bulletin*. Proofed and amended by the future archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid,¹⁷⁰ ‘Secret Societies and the Kingship of Christ’ was later incorporated into two of Fahey’s major works, *The Kingship of Christ according to the principles of St Thomas Aquinas* (1931) and the viciously anti-Semitic *Mystical Body of Christ in the Modern World* (1935).¹⁷¹

The thrust of both studies was identical. According to Cahill and Fahey, Freemasons simply adopted different forms and tactics according to the circumstances that prevailed in different lands. However, the overriding objective of the Masons never changed. As explained by Fr Cahill,

All sections of Freemasonry—Irish, English, American, French, Italian and Mexican—are ‘tarred with the same brush’. They have the same common purpose, sometimes concealed, sometimes openly avowed, but always steadily pursued; and this purpose is none other than the avowed object of the Continental Grand Orient, which is the destruction of the Catholic Church.¹⁷²

Agreed that there was no substantive difference between Continental and Irish Freemasonry, Cahill and Fahey dismissed as lies Masonic claims of fealty to the Free State. From their perspective, Irish Freemasons, appreciating that the inherited social framework was “non-Catholic”, merely followed a traditional

¹⁶⁸ Cahill, ‘Freemasonry: A Study in Catholic Social Science’ in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* (5th series), xxix (Jan.–June 1927), pp 349–66; *ibid.*, pp 481–99; *ibid.*, pp 616–26; *ibid.*, xxx (July–Dec. 1927), pp 15–29; *ibid.*, xxxii (July–Dec. 1928), pp 449–61.

¹⁶⁹ *Idem*, *Freemasonry and the anti-Christian Movement* (1st ed., Dublin, 1929).

¹⁷⁰ Enda Delaney, ‘Political Catholicism in Post-War Ireland: The Revd Denis Fahey and Maria Duce 1945–54’ in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, lii, no. 3 (July 2001), p. 492.

¹⁷¹ Denis Fahey, ‘Secret Societies and the Kingship of Christ’ (12 parts) in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xviii, nos. 1–12 (Jan.–Dec. 1928); *idem*, *The Kingship of Christ according to the principles of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Dublin, 1931); *idem*, *Mystical Body of Christ in the Modern World* (Dublin, 1935).

¹⁷² Cahill, ‘Freemasonry’ in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* (5th series), xxix (Jan.–June 1927), p. 625; cf. Fahey, ‘Secret Societies’ in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xviii, no. 6 (June 1928), pp 606–12.

ploy by affecting a pose of loyalty to the established government.¹⁷³ Moreover, whereas Freemasons in “truly” Catholic countries such as Italy, Spain and Austria had of necessity to be openly disruptive, Irish Masons could practice subterfuge behind structures that supposedly accorded well with their principles and aims.¹⁷⁴ Because Latin Freemasonry apparently depended upon the financial strength of the Anglo–Saxon Lodges, Irish Masons had yet more reasons to deny their links with the Grand Orient, for to do otherwise would be to admit liability for the damage done to Catholic interests elsewhere. Nevertheless, for all the grievous sins of Irish Freemasonry, neither Cahill nor Fahey directly attacked the Masonic rank-and-file. Distinguishing between inner (“esoteric”) and outer circles of Freemasonry, both priests accepted that the common Lodge member earnestly believed in the pro-Christian claims of his superiors. Alas, this only made them even more the dupes of “Jewish moneyed-interests” and dedicated conspirators supposedly ensconced within the upper Degrees.¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, beyond lamenting that expatriate Italians in Britain and the United States were not discouraged from interacting with Masons in their host countries, Cahill and Fahey made only fleeting references to Fascist anti-Masonry.¹⁷⁶ However, by denigrating the Christian claims of Irish Masonry, by emphasising the subversive potential of the Lodges, and by repeatedly asserting that nests of the Masonic elite were to be found in the upper echelons of the civil service, the trade union leadership and ‘the more important commercial, academic and educational institutions’,¹⁷⁷ they exploited already existing tensions and encouraged others to make the appropriate links.

One of the first to do so was the outspoken “Irish Irelander” and doyen of sectarian nationalism, David Patrick Moran.¹⁷⁸ In late 1929, Fr Cahill became embroiled in a very public war of words with the semi-official spokesperson of

¹⁷³ Cahill, *Freemasonry and the anti-Christian Movement* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1930), p. 41.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid; Fahey, ‘Secret Societies’ in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xviii, no. 9 (Sept. 1928), pp 928–9.

¹⁷⁵ James S. Barnes to Cahill, 8 Feb. 1930 (I.J.A., Cahill papers).

¹⁷⁶ Cahill, *Freemasonry and the anti-Christian Movement* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1930) p. 21.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

Irish Freemasonry, Col Claude Cane. Sparked by the remarkable success of *Freemasonry and the anti-Christian movement*, this dispute received widespread coverage in the Catholic periodical press.¹⁷⁹ Moran's paper, the *Leader*, was no exception. Moran and the *Leader* were unimpressed by Col Cane's description of Cahill's treatise as 'absurd', 'puerile', 'grotesque' and 'ludicrous'.¹⁸⁰ For Moran, who admitted that he had hitherto looked upon the Irish Craft as 'merely a sort of sectarian trade union', Cahill's book was 'a revelation' and 'a terrible indictment against Freemasonry'.¹⁸¹ Pointing out that 'Mussolini had put an end to it in Italy', he therefore begged the rhetorical question 'Should Freemasonry be suppressed?'¹⁸² Another of the *Leader's* journalists, "Onlooker", entertained the thought. For him, the similarities between Masonic policy in Ireland and Italy were proof that 'the professedly non-political and non-sectarian basis of Masonry has never been anything more than an elaborate sham'.¹⁸³ Apparently, just as anti-Catholicism had driven Italian Masons to reduce their homeland to the status of 'a first-class pauperised power', so too had Irish Masons always endeavoured to retard political and economic progress in Catholic Ireland.¹⁸⁴ "Onlooker" also agreed with the contention that Irish Masons were not far removed from the Church's troubles in Italy. As he saw it, the fact that 'No members of the Cult in the world rejoiced more heartily than those of the Irish Lodges [at the] continued attacks on the Papacy and all that the Papacy stood for until Mussolini put the tin hat on Masonic activities', was a sign of their implicit guilt.¹⁸⁵ Hence, he reminded the Masons and their apologists that:

Mussolini has recently suppressed what Colonel Cane calls the "soi-distant Grand Lodges" in Italy. If the Grand Lodges in this little State continue to veil their aims and proceedings in impenetrable secrecy and to buttress that secrecy with an extravagant oath, those who are invested with plenary

¹⁷⁸ On Moran and *The Leader*, see Patrick Maume, *D. P. Moran (Life & Times)* (Dublin, 1995).

¹⁷⁹ Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, p. 58. Originally conducted through the *Irish Independent*, the dispute reappeared in its entirety as an appendix to the second edition (1930) of *Freemasonry and the anti-Christian Movement*.

¹⁸⁰ *Irish Independent*, 8 Nov. 1929.

¹⁸¹ *The Leader*, 2 Nov. 1929.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, quoted in Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, p. 58.

¹⁸³ *The Leader*, 9 Nov. 1929.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

powers in those water-tight compartments of the Masonic Order ... must not be surprised if the mere man in the street begins to ask those in authority to look into the matter.¹⁸⁶

By this stage, the growing band of anti-Masons and ‘the mere man in the street’ had an apparent champion in the guise of de Valera and Fianna Fáil. For calculated reasons of their own, the ‘Soldiers of Destiny’ were now marching to the same non-ecumenical tune that had long-motivated Moran and the *Leader*. Determined to heal the rift between republicans and the Church wrought by the civil war, Fianna Fáil played the Catholic card at every opportunity.¹⁸⁷ Party strategists were not overly concerned that this policy smacked of sectarianism. Instead, the non-sectarian credentials of Fianna Fáil, as exemplified by de Valera’s Bodenstown Address of 1930, when he confidently projected his party as the legitimate heir to the Protestant patriotic tradition of Tone, Emmet, Davis, Casement, Childers *et al*, were frequently flaunted.¹⁸⁸ Moreover, Fianna Fáil propaganda expertly turned allegations of bigotry or excessive clericalism to the party’s advantage. If so accused by Cumann na nGaedheal or the parties of the left, de Valera’s followers simply inferred that ‘unionist’ or ‘communist’ sympathies affected their opponents.¹⁸⁹

Occasionally expressed in reckless terms, anti-Masonry thus became a staple part of Fianna Fáil electioneering. For example, at Loughrea in 1927, whilst speaking at one of the famed Fianna Fáil night-time election rallies, party candidate and medical practitioner Dr Bryan Cusack was somewhat overcome by the occasion. Sharing a platform with de Valera and a host of local clergymen, Dr Cusack remarked that Fianna Fáil ‘did not want Freemasons or those who owed allegiance to any foreign power ... Mussolini crushed out Freemasonry in Italy because it was anti-Italian, and they [republicans] must crush out everything in this country that was anti-Irish’.¹⁹⁰ Unsuccessful at the

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ See, Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland*, pp 41–6.

¹⁸⁸ See, *The Nation*, 9 Aug. 1930.

¹⁸⁹ Dunphy, *The Making of Fianna Fáil Power*, p. 130.

¹⁹⁰ *Connacht Tribune*, 28 May 1927.

polls, Cusack was less conspicuous than Fr Eugene Coyle. A one-time member of the I.R.B. and then parish priest of Garrison, County Fermanagh, Fr Coyle was attracted to Fianna Fáil because of the predicament he and his parishioners found themselves in after the Boundary Commission fiasco.¹⁹¹ Elected to the Fianna Fáil National Executive in 1927, he laboured to establish electoral pacts with the other southern anti-partition parties (the rump Sinn Féin and the miniscule Clann Éireann)¹⁹² and to forge cross border links with a movement he helped to found in 1928, the short-lived National League of the North.¹⁹³ Although disappointed in these pan-nationalist pursuits, Fr Coyle remained confident that de Valera and his movement were far above conventional politics. As such, he displayed a not untypical disdain for the sectional parties—viz, Labour, the Farmers Party, the National League and the myriad of independent candidates—then competing for a place in the Free State Parliament.¹⁹⁴ In addition to the standard Fianna Fáil mantra that sectionalism was an unnecessary obstacle in the path of national reunification, he believed that the dissipation of Irish political energies had allowed Freemasonry to flourish and establish itself as never before. Disturbed by the prospect of permanent partition, and convinced that unchecked Masonry would wreak havoc on both sides of the border, Fr Coyle saw his Chief as an Irish Mussolini who might replicate certain policies and practices of the Italian original.

In late 1928, Coyle unburdened himself to a Dublin periodical called *Honesty—A weekly Journal of Independent Criticism*. The *Honesty* articles, which quickly became available in book form, had their genesis in the C.T.S.I. Conference of that year.¹⁹⁵ Like many other northern priests in attendance, Fr Coyle was dismayed to find that the delegates were preoccupied with the

¹⁹¹ Mary Harris, *The Catholic Church and the Foundation of the Northern Irish State* (Cork, 1993), p. 13. As explained by Harris, in order to avoid difficulties with his ecclesiastical superiors, the I.R.B. accepted Coyle without insisting that he take the Oath of Allegiance to the Republic.

¹⁹² *Honesty*, 4 Aug. 1928.

¹⁹³ Harris, *The Catholic Church and the Foundation of the Northern Irish State*, pp 175–6.

¹⁹⁴ *Anglo-Celt*, 23 Apr. 1927.

forthcoming Catholic Emancipation Centenary celebrations.¹⁹⁶ Resenting that northern Catholics were ‘expected to make hypocrites of themselves’ by partaking in the celebrations, Coyle felt that the Conference would have been better employed as a forum to discuss the Masonic conspiracy described by Cahill and Fahey.¹⁹⁷ From his perspective, the self-satisfying Emancipation preparations, no less than the splintered politics of the Free State, revealed a ‘false sense of security’ that the forces of Freemasonry and Orangeism (which latter he regarded as simply a less wily offshoot of the former) intended to exploit. Confronted by what he described as a dangerously apathetic public opinion, he therefore developed an alarmist scenario that foresaw the potentially murderous persecution of those who ‘continued to live in a fool’s paradise as regards the spread of Masonry’.¹⁹⁸

Fr Coyle’s vision of doom and foreboding owed much to contemporary events in Mexico. At the time, the Cristero War was at its height.¹⁹⁹ Covered in lurid detail by the Catholic periodical press (most notably the *Catholic Pictorial* and the *Catholic Bulletin*), and a cause for concern for officials at the Department of External Affairs,²⁰⁰ Irish commentators had little doubt that the man they held responsible, President Plutarco Elías Calles, was the most infamous

¹⁹⁵ Eugene Coyle, *Freemasonry in Ireland* (Dublin, 1929), foreword.

¹⁹⁶ *Irish Independent*, 19 Oct. 1928.

¹⁹⁷ Coyle, *Freemasonry*, p. 70.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁹⁹ The Cristero War (1926–1929) began as a popular revolt by the Mexican peasantry in defence of a persecuted church. Involving brutality and terrorism on both sides, it claimed the lives of some 90,000 Mexicans, including 40 priests who were executed by the state for ministering to the rebels. The Catholic Church in Mexico was the great loser from the conflict. Suppression, expulsion, and assassination reduced a pre-war priesthood of 4,500 to a post-war “licensed” ministry of 334. Furthermore, after the war Catholic education was completely eliminated and compulsory “socialist education” introduced in its stead. Very few English language accounts of the war exist. At the time, however, the Jesuit journal, *Studies*, kept Irish readers well informed about events in Central America. See: Eber-Cole Byam, ‘Religious Conditions in Mexico’ in *Studies*, xii, no. 47 (Sept. 1923), pp 425–442; Michael Kenny, ‘The Mexican Crisis: Its Causes and Consequences’, *ibid.*, xvi, no. 61 (Mar. 1927), pp 23–42; *idem*, ‘The Religious Persecution in Mexico’, *ibid.*, xxiv, no. 94 (June 1935), pp 263–274; Francis McCullagh, ‘Who Is Calles?’, xvii, no. 65 (Mar. 1928), pp 1–17; *idem*, ‘Mexico and the Press’, *ibid.*, xviii, no. 70 (June 1929), pp 225–39.

²⁰⁰File entitled ‘Catholic persecution in Mexico, 1926–8’ (N.A.I., Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), ES GR 817).

statesman of his day.²⁰¹ As a Marxist, atheist, and Freemason, Calles offended Catholic sensibilities in every way.²⁰² Explicitly condemned by Pius XI, he was also the linchpin to the Cahill–Fahey thesis that Irish Freemasonry was allied to the anti-Christian conspiracy it sought to deny. As part of the English speaking Masonic fraternity, the United States branch of the Scottish Rite, which openly backed Calles and which would present him with a medal of merit for his anti-Catholic policies in 1926, had sent representatives to the 1925 bi-centenary celebrations.²⁰³ Moreover, in 1927 Irish Masons had apparently travelled to Mexico City to attend an International Masonic Convention.²⁰⁴ Consequently, whatever Archbishop D’Arcy, the *Irish Times* or Colonel Cane had to say about the Christian ethos of Irish Freemasonry, the followers of Cahill and Fahey simply countered that the apologists deserved to be judged according to the company they kept.

Obsessed with events in Mexico, Fr Coyle explained that indigenous Masons were preparing to wage an open war against the Irish Church. Coyle fretted that the Irish Masonic community was, relative to the wider population, the largest in the Catholic world. He also stressed that the British legacy had left ‘practically every Department of State ... permeated and honeycombed with the Craft.’²⁰⁵ Accordingly, the conspiracy supposedly hatching in the Irish Lodges must soon reach a point of maturity. As in Mexico, the success of the conspiracy would depend upon a nominally Catholic governing elite doing little to disturb the national narcosis. Coyle sensed that the conspirators had nothing to fear from Cumann na nGaedheal in this regard. Well versed in the methods of Fianna Fáil propaganda, he alleged that by promoting the ‘hypocrisy’ that Ireland was ‘independent, free and prosperous’, the Government had shown sure signs of Masonic cultivation. Hence the Cosgrave

²⁰¹ See, Mary Harris, ‘Irish Images of Religious Conflict in Mexico in the 1920s’ in Harris (ed.), *Sights and Insights: Interactive Images of Europe and the Wider World* (Pisa, 2007), pp 205–26.

²⁰² Enrique Krauze, *Mexico—Biography of Power: A History of Modern Mexico, 1810–1996* (New York, 1997), pp 417–19.

²⁰³ Kenny, ‘The Mexican Crisis’, p. 32; *New York Times*, 18 May 1926.

²⁰⁴ Fahey, ‘Secret Societies’ in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xviii, no. 10 (Oct. 1928), pp 1035–6.

administration was ‘the *best asset* that Freemasonry has’.²⁰⁶

Certain that the Masons camouflaged their intentions behind the practice of benevolent works, Coyle informed his audience that the unfortunate Catholics of Mexico had failed to recognise this standard ploy. Unwittingly granted the freedom to ‘take root, grow and prosper’, Mexican Freemasonry had been able to ‘gradually but surely place all its brethren in the key positions in every Department of State and finally capture the whole governmental authority in the country’.²⁰⁷ Once in power, the Masonic melange of ‘secret plotting, of assassination, irreligion, immorality and paganism’ then emerged as the official policy of the Mexican State. Most worryingly from Coyle’s perspective, the Irish conspirators, like their counterparts in Central America, would be able to draw upon all the diplomatic and military resources of a powerful Masonic neighbour. For just as the Mexican Masons ‘had the Masonic Government of the U.S.A. near at hand to help them by influence and arms’, so would the Masons of Ireland ‘have a government equally as Masonic as the U.S.A. across the channel to give them a helping hand in waging a war against the Church of St Patrick’.²⁰⁸

Having thus described the impending apocalypse, Fr Coyle looked to defensive stratagems. Turning his attention to the Mediterranean, he explained that Mussolini had provided a means by which the Irish might ‘not only check the further growth of Masonry, but so far as possible root it out of the nation’.²⁰⁹ Coyle rejoiced that the Church in Italy was ‘in a flourishing condition’ whilst the Italians were now ‘the most orderly and progressive people in the entire world.’ Central to this happy state of affairs was the Fascist Law of Associations. To Coyle’s mind the legislation had (the emphases are his own) ‘*saved the Italian nation*, and probably too, *saved the Church* from what has

²⁰⁵ Coyle, *Freemasonry*, p. 69.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 65, 70 (Coyle’s Italics).

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 71–2.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 71, cit. by de Vere White in ‘The History of Freemasonry in Ireland’.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

happened since in Mexico'.²¹⁰ By showing commendable foresight and resolve, Mussolini had not only forestalled a fearsome attack on the Italian Church, he had apparently rescued Italy from woes that Fianna Fáil propaganda consistently identified with the Free State. According to Coyle, the symptoms of Masonic ascendancy expunged by Fascism were crippling taxation; a corrupt, disloyal and overpaid civil service; an international reputation that was 'degraded'; and the unpredictability of a marginalised electorate that was 'seething with discontent'.²¹¹ Faced with the same problems, post-colonial Ireland would have to follow Italy's lead and suspend an otherwise noble preference for parliamentary democracy. No more convinced of the "absolute sovereignty of the people" than any other clerical commentator, Fr Coyle explained that democracy was all very well 'in a free country [where] any number of parties may be normal and do good'.²¹² However, in a country that was 'partitioned and in Imperial and Masonic chains, and kept so under the duress of "immediate and terrible war"', it was as yet a luxury the people could ill afford.²¹³ Consequently, 'if ever there was a time a Mussolini were necessary to save a nation or a people, that hour is upon us, is at hand'.²¹⁴ Ideally, the "Irish Mussolini"—de Valera—would receive his mandate via the ballot box; but Fr Coyle was not inflexible when it came to means and ends:

Unless this be done within a reasonable time—and it can be done constitutionally, if I may use the expression, and without firing a shot—I for one, and I say it with full deliberation, would welcome from my heart another Easter Week rather than see this dear old land of so many glorious memories made the spawning bed of a secret anti-Christian and anti-National organisation, and the worst type of Imperialism that ever cursed a country.²¹⁵

Rhetoric that appealed to the failed tactics of physical force was not unusual for party activists at the time. Because militant republicanism was a vital part of the Fianna Fáil electoral machine, de Valera had encouraged his

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid., p. 75.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 76.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

subordinates to indicate an “understanding” of I.R.A. anti-constitutionalism.²¹⁶ More capably handled by the likes of Seán Lemass, who famously referred to pre-empowered Fianna Fáil as ‘a slightly constitutional party’,²¹⁷ the subtleties of this Janus-faced policy were often lost on zealots like Fr Coyle. Moreover, Coyle’s open support for an Irish dictatorship undermined another highly successful Fianna Fáil debating tactic. Anxious to shake the legacy of their Civil War past, de Valera and his parliamentary colleagues took great pains to portray themselves as the true champions of democracy. Hence, whether debating local government reform, the Public Safety Acts, proposed alterations to the electoral system or muted restructurings of the Free State military, Fianna Fáil consistently applied Fascist analogies to Cumann na nGaedheal.²¹⁸ The extent to which these accusations had any basis in fact is better discussed elsewhere. For now, suffice it to say that, because Fr Coyle’s tome contradicted this strategy, de Valera and the party hierarchy studiously ignored it.

In fact, Fianna Fáil was never likely to prosecute the kind of anti-Masonic measures envisaged by Fr Coyle. As a self-styled “National Movement”, the majority of party members had no stomach for internal witch-hunts that would distract from the external enemy across the Irish Sea. Accordingly, Fianna Fáil activists rarely engaged with the wilder fancies of clerics like Cahill, Fahey, and Coyle. Indeed, reviewing Cahill’s book in 1930, *The Nation* newspaper (a weekly forerunner to the *Irish Press* not to be confused with the pro-treaty organ already quoted), rejected as spurious his claim that Freemasonry had orchestrated such recent events as the U.V.F. mobilisation, the Curragh Mutiny and the Belfast pogroms.²¹⁹ Instead, *The Nation* suggested

²¹⁶ Tim Pat Coogan, *De Valera: Long Fellow, Long Shadow* (London, 1995), p. 410. As explained by Coogan, the I.R.A. facilitated Fianna Fáil in three important ways. In the first instance, the I.R.A. provided a body of energetic and committed campaigners, who, in any other country, most likely would have been drawn to the politics of the left. Fianna Fáil also benefited from associating itself with an emotive I.R.A. led ‘release the prisoners’ campaign. Lastly, it was Peadar O’Donnell and the I.R.A. that furnished de Valera with his most invaluable election plank in the form of the Land Annuities issue.

²¹⁷ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xxii, 1615–16 (21 Mar. 1928).

²¹⁸ As examples, see, *ibid.*, xxi, 1219 (10 Nov. 1927); *ibid.*, xxiii, 446, 454 (19 Feb. 1930); *ibid.*, xxiii, 1035 (26 Feb. 1930).

²¹⁹ *The Nation*, 29 Mar. 1930.

that ‘Catholic controversialists’ had granted Freemasonry far ‘greater power and unity than it actually possesses’, whilst to imply that the Irish Lodges were party to ‘sinister diabolical and anti-Christian designs would be manifestly unjust’.²²⁰ Aspiring to represent the interests of an emerging national bourgeoisie, Fianna Fáil was simply content to attack Freemasonry because of its alleged unpatriotic practices: namely, ‘sectarian graft’ and a perceived imperialist antipathy to national self-sufficiency.²²¹ Furthermore, it is an often overlooked fact that within Fianna Fáil, Catholic secret societies were no less a source of irritation than the Freemasons. As republicans before all else, a considerable body of the party faithful were angered that some of their fellows (most notably Seán T. O’Kelly, Seán MacEntee and Gerry Boland) were members of a “Catholic Masonry” in the guise of the Knights of Columbanus.²²² Frowned upon by de Valera himself, and only officially sanctioned by the Irish bench of bishops in 1934, the Knights were committed to counteracting Masonic nepotism by promoting Catholic jobbery in its stead.²²³ Anxious to dispel a widespread suspicion that Fianna Fáil had fallen under the sway of the Knights, de Valera therefore discouraged his subordinates from over-stepping the mark when it came to the Masons.²²⁴

Moreover, even within the ranks of radical Catholicism there was little support for actual suppression. Of the three Catholic publications that largely survived on anti-Masonic propaganda—the *Catholic Bulletin*, the *Catholic Pictorial* (later the *Catholic Mind*) and the *Irish Rosary*—only the *Bulletin* celebrated

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Richard Dunphy, ‘The Enigma of Fianna Fáil: Party Strategy, Social Classes and the Politics of Hegemony’ in Cronin & Regan (eds), *Politics of Independence*, p. 69; *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xxv, 473–4 (12 July 1928); *Seanad Éireann deb.*, xiv, 2049 (17 Oct. 1931).

²²² Evelyn Bolster, *The Knights of Columbanus* (Dublin, 1979), pp 48, 71.

²²³ Ibid., pp 33, 67, 72; Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland*, pp 41–2.

²²⁴ The 1933 and 1934 Ard Fheiseanna exposed the anti-Knight tensions within Fianna Fáil. On both occasions delegates proposed motions which would have debarred the Knights from membership of the party. Delegates also alleged that the Knights had subverted the judiciary and dominated promotion prospects within the public sector. Although not carried, the motions received considerable support. The 1933 debates also provoked a declaration from de Valera to the effect that he considered the Knights and the Masons to be two sides of the same sectarian coin. See, *Irish Press*, 9 Nov. 1933 & 14 Nov. 1934.

Fascist anti-Masonry to the same extent as Fr Coyle.²²⁵ Most notable in this regard was a distinctly opprobrious correspondent who wrote under the penname of “Dublinensis”. Supportive of Fianna Fáil, “Dublinensis”, like Fr Coyle, imagined that de Valera would take a leaf from the Mussolini capitulatory. Hence, just prior to General Election of March 1932 he urged the government-in-waiting to criminalise the Masons:

PEOPLE! Italy has driven the Masonic *Fehmgerichte* from her shores, imprisoning its protagonists. Either this sovereign nation must close down by right of its authority every lodge in this country of these secret geometric enemies, or itself suffer extermination ... As in Italy, security demands the total suppression of this naked stripping gang of alien adventurers—yearly being augmented by Irish imports, the managers and what-not of exploitation industries from England—who have rolled like lava over this fair land.²²⁶

For their part, the *Catholic Pictorial* and the *Irish Rosary* preferred to pursue a policy of exposure and ostracisation. Attacking Colonel Cane and the *Irish Times* in early 1929, the *Pictorial* explained that it had no objection to suppression in principle. However, it feared ‘the consequences of logic, for though here in Ireland the Craft is contemptible, its alliance with Masonry in other countries is a factor, which in our opinion must be taken into consideration by anyone who seeks to deal with the evil in the manner of Mussolini’.²²⁷ In other words, more guileful than the likes of Fr Coyle, the *Pictorial* only opposed suppression by law on the grounds of economic and political expediency.²²⁸ Furthermore, the *Pictorial* condemned what it described as a “defeatist attitude” toward Freemasonry. Arguing that Catholics should be ‘imbued with contempt for the [Masonic] mummary’, it called upon the doomsday prophets to desist from ‘investing the popular mindset with unwholesome dread’.²²⁹ This remarkably militant journal was also surprisingly sensitive to the irony of attacking Protestant civil liberties during the Catholic

²²⁵ Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland*, p. 41.

²²⁶ Dublinensis (pseudo.), ‘Lo!—a reply to a speech by Mr. William T. Cosgrave re conditions in Ireland’ in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xxii, no. 2 (Feb. 1932), pp 101, 108.

²²⁷ Ed., ‘Our Reply to the Irish Times and the Deputy Grand Master of Freemasons’ in the *Catholic Pictorial*, x, no. 4 (Apr. 1929), p. 102.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Idem, ‘Editorial Comment’, *ibid.*, x, no. 2 (Feb. 1929), p. 30.

Emancipation celebrations.²³⁰ Certain that bigotry was the preserve of Protestants alone, the *Pictorial* proved itself a model of consistency by instead publishing monthly lists of Masons and encouraging its readers to boycott the businesses of those named therein.²³¹ Likewise, even though the *Irish Rosary* never doubted that Irish Masons were intimately involved with the atheistic Grand Orient—according to its pro-Mussolini editor, Fr Michael McInerney, ‘the much advertised severance with continental Masonry is like a much advertised brand of soap: it won’t wash clothes’—it too was reluctant to endorse suppression.²³² Reviewing Fr Coyle’s book in 1930, the Dominican chronicle chastised him for advocating measures that bade ‘goodbye to charity, truth and common sense’.²³³ Furthermore, his ‘extreme republican notions’ amounted to nothing ‘but a cruel diatribe, which merely repels the reader and mars the value of the book’.²³⁴ Instead of criminalisation, the *Rosary* recommended further “name and shame” campaigns and encouraged members of the C.Y.M.S. to adapt themselves to the role of boycott enforcers.²³⁵ Greatly impressed by the kind of Christian charity practised by the *Catholic Pictorial*, the *Rosary* explained that Freemasonry ‘richly deserves all the publicity that Catholic Irishmen can give it, and it deserves not a pennyworth of support from the Catholics of the country.’²³⁶

1.6. Chapter summary

Thus far, the project has discussed the aspects of Fascist governance that appealed to the Irish confessional mindset. In advance of these discussions, it was necessary to consider Catholic apprehensions about political violence and

²³⁰ Idem, ‘The Menace of Freemasonry’, *ibid.*, x, no. 11 (Nov. 1929), p. 296.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, x, nos. 2–10 (Feb.–Oct. 1929), pp 32–4, 63–6, 95–8, 123–5, 148–150, 181–2, 202–04, 241–3, 265.

²³² Delta (pseudo.), ‘Reasons Against Freemasonry’ in the *Irish Rosary*, xxxiv, no. 1 (Jan. 1930), p. 72. The identity of “Delta” was revealed by Peadar O’Donnell, see *An Phoblacht*, 27 Aug. 1927.

²³³ Ed., ‘Father Coyle on Freemasonry in Ireland’ in the *Irish Rosary*, xxxiii, no. 10 (Oct. 1929), p. 721.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ Delta (pseudo.), ‘Work for Anti-Imperialists’, *ibid.*, xxxiii, no. 2 (Feb. 1929), pp 148–9; idem, ‘The Catholic Young Men’s Society’, *ibid.*, xxxiii, no. 11 (Nov. 1929), pp 867–8.

²³⁶ Ed., ‘Father Coyle on Freemasonry in Ireland’, *ibid.*, xxxiii, no. 10 (Oct. 1929) p. 726.

dictatorship. With regard to violence, it was argued that a combination of bias, confusion and gratitude enabled most confessional commentators to overcome their reservations about the dark origins of Fascism. In addition to these factors, the chapter outlined how scholastic theory about the origins and purpose of political power helped to legitimise the new regime.

Turning to the issue of forms of political organisation, we have seen that Catholic theory expresses no particular preference for one form of government over another. Even so, the Church had serious reservations about the type of liberal-democratic state that followed from the French Revolution. Resentful of the secular ethos of Italian Liberalism in particular, she thus adopted a “wait and see” attitude to the incumbent Fascist regime. Espying an opportunity to solidify his power, Mussolini capitalised on these resentments by immediately introducing a series of pro-clerical reforms. Importantly, the vast body of Irish pilgrims that journeyed to and from Rome had many and varied opportunities to witness these reforms first hand. In consequence, positive accounts of the Columbanus, Holy Year and Franciscan celebrations had a major impact upon Irish public opinion.

This chapter has also outlined the positive example set by Fascist Italy in terms of public morality. For an Irish Church obsessed with matters of sexual impropriety rather than radical socio-political reform, Fascist endeavours with regard to alcohol abuse, gambling, dancing, divorce, “evil literature” and female fashions, were all a cause for celebration. Discussed by a wide variety of prudish Irish social action groups (viz, the Catholic Truth Society, the Moral Dress and Deportment Crusade and *An Ríoghacht*) these initiatives helped to solidify the Catholic pretensions of the regime. Accordingly, Irish clergymen approved of the draconian censorship introduced in Fascist Italy, with Fr Edward Cahill also campaigning to have Mussolini methods applied in Ireland.

Finally, we have seen that the well-publicised Fascist campaign against Italian

Freemasonry made amends for past insults to Irish clergymen and their Italian colleagues. In addition to exorcising the ghosts of the Liberal past, Fascist laws gave added impetus to critics of Irish Freemasonry. Unnerved by events in Mexico, some confessional activists endeavoured to portray Irish Freemasons, who fought hard to prove otherwise, as central actors in an international conspiracy to subvert religion. Epitomised by Fr Eugene Coyle, who, bizarrely, added murderous intent to the list of Masonic “crimes”, this constituency was wont to lionise Mussolini in its efforts to criminalise the Irish lodges. However, if Irish Freemasonry suffered sustained abuse in the 1920s, a majority of its critics did not preach proscription and suppression. Not regarding Freemasonry as a diabolical or subversive organisation, but as a sectarian bastion of unionism/imperialism to which no Catholic could belong, Fr Coyle’s colleagues in the Fianna Fáil leadership were not primed to turn the repressive powers of the state against the lodges. This might not have suited the dedicated practitioners of what Curtis has aptly described as a ‘vindictive, splenetic and fearful Catholicism’, but Fianna Fáil, like Cumann na nGaedheal beforehand, was never going to suppress a lawful society like Freemasonry simply because it harboured sentiments other than a profound respect for Irish Catholic nationalism.²³⁷

²³⁷ Curtis, *A Challenge to Democracy*, p. 57.

CHAPTER 2:

THE CATHOLIC INDICTMENT OF FASCIST ITALY

If the pro-clerical aspects of the Fascist state visibly impressed Catholic Ireland, this is not to suggest that the confessional response to Italian Fascism was entirely positive. Quite the contrary: over time, the ultra-nationalist and secular impulses of the regime repelled many Catholic intellectuals and journalists. Two key episodes—the Fascist persecution of ethnic minorities and the attempted suppression of Italian Catholic Action—gave rise to sustained criticism, thereby doing lasting damage to the Catholic credentials of Mussolini.

2.1. Ethnic and religious minorities under Fascism: background

Offsetting the sense of satisfaction surrounding Fascist anti-Masonry was a general unease about Mussolini's policy toward ethnic minorities. Following the First World War, Italy annexed the South Tyrol and large parts of the Istrian Peninsula. Otherwise known to Italian irredentists as the *Alto Adige* and *Venezia Giulia*, the newly won territories brought a combined population of approximately 750,000 ethnic Germans and Slavs (mostly Slovenes) under the Kingdom of Italy.¹ Although the Liberal regime had announced a conciliatory attitude toward its new subjects, with the advent of Fascism came belligerence and oppression. Mussolini had no interest in maintaining the rights of national, linguistic or religious minorities. According to the integralist logic of Fascism, there could be only Italians, and good Fascists at

¹ J. F. Pollard, *The Vatican and Italian Fascism, 1929–32: A Study in Conflict* (London, 1985), p. 92.

that, in Italy.² Intent upon eradicating ethnographical differences, the new regime thus embarked upon an intense political, cultural and economic persecution. From 1923 internal colonisation was encouraged to dilute the ethnic character of the border provinces; minority newspapers and social clubs were proscribed; political and cultural partisans suffered violence, confinement and expulsion; property rights were compromised by legal chicanery; the Germanic and Slavic languages disappeared from the schools and libraries, while geographical and even family names were forcibly Italianised.³

Religious homogeneity might have acted as a dissolvent against racial tensions. Overwhelmingly Catholic, community of religion was an obvious means of reconciling the minorities to the Italian state. Yet the policy of forced assimilation did not stop at the Church door. In fact, the impious treatment of Germanic and Slavic Catholicism best illustrated the Erastian logic behind Fascist religious policy.⁴ In Italy proper, Fascism protected and cultivated religion because it acted as an instrument of cultural uniformity, but in the “redeemed lands” Catholicism was persecuted because it helped to maintain cultural and linguistic differences.⁵ Hence, offering the excuse that religion had become a cloak for political activities, the regime increasingly interfered with Catholic practices. If only because the forced confinement or exile of lay politicians meant that priests, by force of circumstance, emerged as natural leaders, this allegation did have some basis in fact.⁶ Indeed, it is worth noting that observers of the day tended to view the Slavic clergy in particular as “politically affected”. Minority resistance in Dalmatia was more confrontational than that practiced by the Tyrolese, with Slovene nationalists,

² Binchy, *Church and State*, p. 539.

³ Joseph L. Kunz, ‘Italian Rule in the German South-Tyrol’ in *Foreign Affairs*, v, no. 3 (Apr. 1927) pp 500–505.

⁴ Binchy, *Church and State*, p. 538.

⁵ Pollard, *Vatican and Italian Fascism*, p. 93.

⁶ Binchy, *Church and State*, p. 548.

after Italian communists, being the single largest group of political prisoners incarcerated during the Mussolini era.⁷ For many outsiders, however, the tenacious and frequently violent methods of the Slovenes merely reflected the ethnic strife that had defined Balkan affairs from time immemorial. Consequently, as opposed to a widespread sympathy for the Germans of the South Tyrol, a general antipathy to the Balkan imbroglio, allied to effective Fascist propaganda which deliberately sought to invest Slavic resistance with an international political character, meant that Irish commentators were less certain, and hence less vocal, as to the rights or wrongs of Italian policy in Dalmatia.⁸

Nevertheless, the religious aspects of the persecutions were much the same in both constituencies. In contrast to the financial assistance rendered to the wider Italian Church, the Fascists withheld state stipends from Tyrolese and Dalmatian clergy, whilst church buildings in these lands suffered neglect and quickly fell into disrepair.⁹ The abundant missions and retreats of the border localities, previously manned by religious Orders based in the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, were suppressed, as were the sodalities and societies of the various Catholic youth movements.¹⁰ Unlike Rome and the Italian core, religious functions in these areas required official approval and were subject to petty interference. In a more sinister vein, Fascists subjected non-Italian priests to the notorious punishment of forced castor oil drinking or worse.¹¹ Beyond the likelihood of physical assault, it was common for ecclesiastics to suffer exile, whilst replacement clergy had to be ignorant of the local dialects.¹² The regime targeted multilingual clergy because Fascism sought to use the teaching of religion to children as a weapon in the war against the cultural traditions of their forebears. Ignoring an age-old Church dictum, i.e. that only a language understood by those under instruction be used for the teaching of

⁷ Pollard, *Vatican and Italian Fascism*, p. 92.

⁸ Lavo Čermejl, *Life-and-Death Struggle of a National Minority (The Jugoslavs in Italy)*, trans. by F. S. Copeland (2nd ed., Ljubljana, 1945), p. 192.

Catholic doctrine, the Fascist regime made it a crime for schools to conduct religious instruction in any language other than Italian.¹³

Left with no other choice, the minorities resisted by withdrawing their children from school-centred religious education. Thenceforth, the church, parsonage and private domicile became the preferred arenas for religious instruction. This was in fact a strictly legal boycott. The Gentile Laws of 1923, which reintroduced compulsory religious instruction in schools, had a built in “opt out” proviso for the benefit of atheists and members of the non-Catholic worship-groups. It was a supreme irony that perhaps the most devout Catholic populace in Europe were the first to exercise their rights in this regard.¹⁴ Nevertheless, this was hardly a suitable compromise, and the religious aspects of the ethnic persecutions placed the Holy See in an invidious situation. The Church had no authority to prevent a community from being “denationalised”, no matter how abhorrent Fascist policy. Furthermore, the higher Church authorities were reluctant to compromise the wider gains made under Fascism. As such, the Holy See confined itself to confidential protests.¹⁵ Pius XI did try to insert protective guarantees for the minorities into the Lateran Agreements, but in this endeavour, the papal negotiators were roundly defeated. Moreover, the assurances the Church did obtain regarding the religious rights of the minorities were more than offset by the deliberate ambiguity of the relevant clauses, and a state policy more rigorously pursued after 1929 than beforehand.¹⁶

⁹ A. Raybould, ‘Glimpses of the Religious Struggle in the Tyrol’ in the *Irish Monthly*, lvii, no. 677 (Nov. 1929), p. 582.

¹⁰ Idem, ‘Fascism in the Tyrol’, *ibid.*, liv, no. 638 (Aug. 1926) p. 410.

¹¹ Eduard Reut-Nicolussi, *Tyrol Under the Axe of Fascism*, trans. by K. L. Montgomery (London, 1930), p. 179.

¹² Raybould, ‘Fascism in the Tyrol’, p. 410.

¹³ Idem, ‘Religious Aspect of The Tyrolese Question’ in the *Irish Monthly*, lvi, no. 662 (Aug. 1928), p. 423.

¹⁴ Binchy, *Church and State*, pp 554–5.

¹⁵ Pollard, *Vatican and Italian Fascism*, p. 94.

The ethnic persecutions were also a cause of embarrassment to the League of Nations. As a Great Power and a member of the victorious *Entente*, Italy was not obliged to respect the post-war structures established for the protection of national minorities.¹⁷ The Fascist regime was exempt from censure by the League of Nations Council or investigations conducted by the Geneva based Minorities Commission. These bodies had responsibility for overseeing the series of bilateral agreements and unilateral declarations collectively known as the “Minorities Treaties”. Entered into after the Paris Peace Conference, the Treaties only affected the successor states, for, as self-proclaimed “civilised nations”, the Great Powers saw minority guarantees as unnecessary for themselves. German and Austrian political leaders sought to revise this arrangement. In February 1926, the German Chancellor, Gustav Stresemann, announced that once admitted, Germany intended to defend the Tyrolese through the aegis of the League Council.¹⁸ Realising that France and Great Britain had troublesome minorities of their own in Alsace-Lorraine and Ireland, Mussolini was not in the least bit perturbed by the prospect of outside interference. In a raucous address to the Italian Senate, which involved an infamous threat to ‘carry the Italian standard across the Brenner’, he reminded Stresemann that the ‘alien inhabitants of the Upper Adige are outside absolutely the number of those minorities which were the objects of special agreements in the treaties of peace.’¹⁹ Mussolini also dismissed Austrian appeals for clemency. The Fascist press was incensed when Dr Ignaz Seipel, the Austrian priest-Chancellor and a man much admired by Irish confessional commentators, saw fit to allow discussion of the persecutions in the Austrian National Assembly.²⁰ Seipel chose his remarks carefully.

¹⁶ Binchy, *Church and State*, p. 560.

¹⁷ Kunz, ‘Italian Rule in German South-Tyrol’, p. 500.

¹⁸ *Irish Independent*, 10 Feb. 1926.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11 Feb. 1926.

²⁰ Mgr Ignaz Seipel served as Austrian Chancellor on two occasions (1922–24 & 1926–29). Committed to combating socialism through the application of Catholic social theory, Seipel’s reign was viewed by Irish commentators as a brilliant success. See, for example, E. J. Coyne, ‘The Crisis in Austria and Mgr Seipel’ in *Studies*, xviii, no. 72 (Dec. 1929), pp 607–18; cf. Ed.,

Acknowledging that Austria and the League had no right to interfere in Italy's internal affairs, he merely appealed to an 'international sense of morality'.²¹ Nevertheless, Mussolini again went on the offensive, temporarily breaking off diplomatic relations with Vienna and delivering another warlike speech to the Italian Senate.²²

2.2. Irish criticism of Fascist actions in the South Tyrol

This high-handed approach to Italy's northern neighbours did not endear Mussolini to Irish opinion.²³ Interlinked groups in Switzerland, France, Austria and the United Kingdom all engaged in propaganda that sought to develop the internationalist themes outlined in *Ubi Arcano Dei Consilio*. Eventually united under the umbrella title *Confederatio Internationalis Catholica*, the activities of the Catholic peace movement involved a limited amount of Irish participation. Prior to the advent of the Irish *Catholic Association for International Relations* (1937–1949), the Swiss based *Catholic Union of International Studies* had, from the early 1920s, an active "Irish Section". The Jesuit priest, Fr Stephen J. Brown, dominated this particular area of Irish Catholic activism, with the Central Catholic Library, which he founded, and *Studies*, of which he was an important member of the editorial staff, acting as focal points for discussion and literary propaganda.²⁴

Another enthusiastic supporter of "Catholic Internationalism" was the academic, controversialist and future priest for the Archdiocese of Nairobi, Alfred O'Rahilly.²⁵ An authority on Catholic philosophy, O'Rahilly was a

'A Great Priest Statesman: Mgr Seipel's Work for Catholic Austria' in the *Irish Catholic*, 30 Oct. 1926, p. 5.

²¹ *Irish Catholic*, 10 Mar. 1928.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ See, for example, 'The Bully of Europe' in *The Irishman*, 10 March 1928, p. 1.

²⁴ For example, see, S. J. Brown, 'An International Enquiry Concerning Nationalism' in *Studies*, xii, no. 46 (June 1923), pp 306–13; *idem*, 'Catholic Internationalism', *ibid.*, xiv, 55 (Sept. 1925), pp 476–9.

²⁵ Anthony J. Gaughan, *Alfred O'Rahilly* (3 vols, Dublin, 1993), ii, p. 133; cf. John A. Murphy, 'O'Rahilly, Alfred' in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish*

committed democrat (in the scholastic rather than the Rousseauvian sense) who feared that the dictatorships would ultimately spell disaster for Catholic interests in Italy and Spain.²⁶ Anything but enamoured of Fascism, in his capacity as editor of the *Irish Tribune*, a weekly Cork newspaper that examined domestic and foreign affairs from a Catholic viewpoint, O’Rahilly repeatedly denounced the ethnic and foreign policies of the Mussolini government.²⁷ In spite of the pope’s inferred criticisms, O’Rahilly and the *Irish Tribune* were optimistic that the workings of the League of Nations would eventually match the spirit of its Covenant.²⁸ However, Mussolini’s obvious disdain for the League and his penchant for bilateral agreements convinced O’Rahilly that Fascist Italy was wedded to the discredited pre-war “Balance of Power” system.²⁹ An ardent anti-imperialist, O’Rahilly was also quick to recognise and condemn the expansionist programme of the Italian dictatorship. Convinced that the intricacies of Fascist diplomacy were calculated ‘to make smooth the path of Italy on a career of adventure which has in it much that is menacing for Europe’,³⁰ the *Irish Tribune* treated with disdain mooted Fascist designs upon Albania, Syria, Symrna, Tunis, French

Biography (Cambridge, 2009) (<http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a6973>). At the time, O’Rahilly was registrar and professor of mathematical physics at U.C.C. During the Anglo-Irish conflict, he was closely identified with Sinn Féin. Although a supporter of the treaty, O’Rahilly frequently disagreed with the Cosgrave government on constitutional and economic matters. As an advocate of Catholic corporatism, he also maintained strong links with the labour and trade union movement in Ireland. O’Rahilly went on to become president (1943-54) of U.C.C. Upon his retirement, he re-applied for the priesthood (as a young man, O’Rahilly spent more than a decade training to become a Jesuit priest, only to withdraw at the latter stages). None of the domestic bishops were willing to take the troublesome academic under their charge. However, when prevailed upon by Archbishop McQuaid, John J. McCarthy, the Irish prelate of Nairobi, agreed to accept O’Rahilly provided he ‘never sets foot in this [Nairobi] Archdiocese’. Ordained in December of 1955, O’Rahilly spent the remaining years of his life and ecclesiastical career at his *alma mater*, Blackrock College.

²⁶ *Irish Tribune*, 19 Mar. 1926.

²⁷ S. J. Brown, ‘The Press in Ireland. Part II: Some Catholic Periodicals’ in *Studies*, xxv, no. 99 (Sept. 1936), p. 442.

²⁸ O’Rahilly was heavily involved in League affairs, representing the Irish Free State at the International Labour Organisation annual conferences of 1924, 1925 and 1932. On O’Rahilly’s work at Geneva, see, Gaughan, *Alfred O’Rahilly*, i, 76–125.

²⁹ In the spring of 1926 Italy concluded bilateral pacts with Czechoslovakia and Greece. These pacts were designed to undermine the French sponsored “Little Entente” and Turkey, thereby opening a path to Italian expansion in the Balkans and the Aegean.

³⁰ *Irish Tribune*, 7 May 1926.

Savoy, Corsica and Nice.³¹ Attacking Mussolini's foreign policy as aggressive, hypocritical and potentially fatal to the League, O'Rahilly also railed against the Fascist practice of internal colonisation and forced ethnic assimilation. Identifying the sufferings of the Tyrolese with the Irish experience of the penal laws and "Anglicisation", he explained that:

... the cherished customs of the Tyrolese are outraged by methods which would have been called Hunnish ten years ago. The famous policy of "thorough" is operative to make Germans into happy Italian children. We have had too much of that policy here in Ireland to sympathise with it when practiced by Italians in the Tyrol, and we hope that it will be defeated there as it was here.³²

Apart from the *Irish Tribune*, the *Irish Monthly* was to the fore in condemning the ethnic persecutions. One of the oldest of the confessional journals then in circulation—it first appeared in 1873—the *Irish Monthly* was another Jesuit organ, but which had since been surpassed in sales and influence by its sister publication, *Studies*. For a journal otherwise committed to eschewing 'the political contentions of the hour',³³ it was somewhat ironic that one of the *Monthly's* more prolific correspondents, "A. Raybould", was the man most responsible for awakening Irish consciences to the plight of the German minority in Italy. Despite his frequent literary output, Raybould's biographical background remains elusive.³⁴ By his own account, he lived a large part of his adult life in the pre-war Tyrol, whilst his writings also suggest Swiss nationality and a professional attachment to the Catholic University of Fribourg.³⁵ In any event, amidst articles informing Irish readers of developments within the Austrian and Swiss Catholic Social Action movements, Raybould denounced Mussolini's campaign against the Germans of the South Tyrol. As early as February 1921, he foresaw the state-sponsored

³¹ *Ibid.*, 7 May & 10 Dec. 1926.

³² *Ibid.*, 12 Mar. 1926.

³³ S. J. Brown, 'The Press in Ireland. Part II: some Catholic periodicals', p. 433.

³⁴ In addition to the *Irish Monthly*, Raybould wrote on a variety of topics for *Studies*, the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* and the journal of the English Dominicans, *New Blackfriars*.

³⁵ Raybould, 'Religious Aspect of the Tyrolese Question', p. 424; cf. *idem*, 'The Catholic University of Fribourg: The Realisation of a Catholic Need' in the *Irish Monthly*, lx, no. 710

persecutions yet to come.³⁶ Irrespective of the Liberal regime's conciliatory pronouncements, Raybould sensed that the South Tyrol, which he described as a 'Catholic Utopia' and the 'last stronghold of mediaeval Catholicity', would be infinitely worse off under Rome than under the Habsburgs.³⁷ Alluding to the rising tide of ethno-political violence (at this time pre-empowered Fascism had already set about "Italianising" the borderlands through Squadrist brutality), he lamented that the national life of the Tyrolese had become 'inexpressibly sad ... they go their way sorrowfully, and for the moment they endure; in the meantime all sorts of influences are pouring in calculated to undermine the national or religious life of this once so happy land.'³⁸

His worst fears confirmed, in the wake of the Mussolini–Stresemann clash Raybould penned a savage indictment of the Mussolini regime. Published by the *Irish Monthly* in August 1926, 'Fascism in the Tyrol' was the most powerful description of the Tyrolese persecution to appear in the pages of the Irish confessional press. Once again emphasising the rich Catholic heritage of the Tyrolese, Raybould endeavoured to expose what he described as 'social and political conditions which are a disgrace to civilised Europe'.³⁹ Readers of the *Irish Monthly* clearly understood that the cornerstones of the Irish apologia for Mussolini's government—viz, Fascist piety, anti-masonry, anti-socialism and economic regeneration—did not apply in the South Tyrol. Rather, recognising that 'national life was so closely interwoven with religious life in the Tyrol that to destroy the one it will be necessary to destroy the other', Raybould argued that Fascism had deliberately fostered Tyrolese Freemasonry so as to alienate the populace from Rome, thereby driving them 'in desperation into the hands of the Socialists'.⁴⁰ Other noteworthy calumnies

(Aug. 1932), p. 492.

³⁶ Raybould, 'The Tyrol—Past and Present', *ibid.*, il, no. 572 (Feb. 1921), pp 57–63.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 58, 60.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

³⁹ Raybould, 'Fascism in the Tyrol', p. 409.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 410.

included the ‘public horsewhipping’ of priests; the disbarment of ethnic Germans from higher education, the staffing of kindergartens with unintelligible mistresses of questionable moral standing (‘usually a barmaid or waitress imported from the South of Italy’), and the deliberate laming of crucial Tyrolese industries like wine exporting and tourism.⁴¹ Above all else, Raybould was determined to disabuse apologists like the aforementioned R. B. Taylor of the excuse that the central government was somehow unaware of peripheral policy. According to Raybould, the *Duce* could not hide behind the façade of ignorance:

Mussolini is quite cognisant of the state of things in the Tyrol. Hundreds of appeals have been made to the Government, but in vain. The Tyrolese, in despair, are sending pamphlets all over the world imploring aid in the cause of justice. In the meanwhile we must look on and see this once so happy country condemned to every injustice and cruelty, whilst Fascist terrorism is robbing its people of their laws, their land, their language, their customs, their education, even their religion.⁴²

Commentators who endorsed ‘Fascism in the Tyrol’ included Hilliard Stack and Patrick J. Fogarty. Otherwise happy to applaud Fascist asceticism, the ethnic persecutions appalled Stack. Denouncing cultural intolerance as a vulgar symptom of ‘Statolatory’, he informed *An Ríoghacht* that ‘it is in the Tyrol that the worst form of this ultra-Italian attitude is seen. This is the greatest blot of the Fascist administration’.⁴³ Furthermore, restating the Cromwellian analogy first applied by the aforementioned ‘A. W.’, he explained that ‘if the Fasces is the emblem of unity and strength in Italy, it only stands for the rod of the Lictor in the Tyrol’.⁴⁴ This latter remark was indicative of the common belief that dictatorship was perhaps suited to the political and economic needs of an almost childlike Italian people. Stack’s racial preconception of the Tyrolese was somewhat different. Employing language explicitly taken from Raybould, he expressed disbelief at attempts to obliterate

⁴¹ Ibid., pp 411–13.

⁴² Ibid., p. 416.

⁴³ Hilliard Stack, ‘Some Aspects of Fascism (Part II)’ p. 512.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 511.

the cultural traditions of a people who were ‘thrifty, industrious, order-loving and essentially Catholic’.⁴⁵ The deeds outlined in ‘Fascism in the Tyrol’ likewise offended Fogarty. Hitherto largely neutral on the evolving Fascist state, he now editorialised in a tone that was increasingly hostile to the Italian dictatorship. According to the *Irish Catholic*, Mussolini was guilty of ‘an ill-conditioned, provocative and boastful handling’ of the minorities question. Indeed, the sabre-rattling tactics of Fascist diplomacy recalled ‘the outbursts of the German ex-Kaiser in his palmiest days’.⁴⁶ Fogarty was also alert to Raybould’s assertion that Fascist anti-Masonry was in fact bogus. Mindful of the positive impression made by Mussolini’s suppression of the Grand Orient in Italy, he remarked that it was ‘surely a singular thing’ that the dictatorship should be so inconsistent as to give ‘all power into the hands of the Freemasons of Trent’.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Fogarty took a diametrically opposite view to that of Fr Eugene Coyle, when, commenting upon anti-clerical violence in the Tyrol, he suggested that ‘this cannot fail to remind readers of what is happening at the moment in Mexico’.⁴⁸ Unambiguously identifying Fascism with tyranny, the *Irish Catholic* proclaimed that ‘Liberty lovers in every land, and all those who are jealous for the free and unhampered action of the Catholic Church’ must feel ‘righteously indignant at these disclosures of what the Mussolini touch—or should we not say the Machiavellian touch?—means for the gallant and unfortunate people of the Tyrol’.⁴⁹

Although Stack’s contribution was not insignificant (in addition to the *Irish Rosary*, the *Nenagh Guardian* also reproduced his address), in terms of highlighting the persecution of the Tyrolese, the stance of Fogarty and the *Irish Catholic* was crucial.⁵⁰ Whereas the *Irish Monthly* had only a limited

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 513.

⁴⁶ *Irish Catholic*, 10 Mar. 1928.

⁴⁷ *Irish Catholic*, 14 Aug. 1926.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Nenagh Guardian*, 17 Nov. 1928.

circulation, the *Irish Catholic* had a weekly readership, and one not just confined to Ireland, in the region of 60,000.⁵¹ Moreover, it is important to point out that competing journals did not replicate the indignation expressed by the *Irish Tribune*, *Irish Monthly* and *Irish Catholic*. Not appearing until late 1928, the other major Catholic weekly, the London-based *Standard*, confined itself to defending the pope against allegations that he took no interest in the fate of his Germanic flock.⁵² Likewise, the respective editors of *The Cross* (a publication of the Passionist Fathers), the *Catholic Pictorial* and the *Irish Rosary*, united when it came to reproaching Callist Mexico, had nothing to say about the persecution of Catholics in the Italian borderlands. The general reluctance to opine on the Dalmatian situation notwithstanding, these journals, whether owing to the silence of the Holy See, the well-known concessions to the Italian Church or the general enthrallment with Fascist anti-Masonry, were disinclined to accept the veracity of pro-Tyrolese propaganda. So too was the *Catholic Bulletin*. Despite the lack of an *imprimatur*, the *Bulletin* was an influential journal that could boast an impressive sales base (approx. 10–15,000) of its own.⁵³ From 1926, the *Bulletin's* Roman correspondent was an unidentified cleric who wrote under the pseudonym “H. O’N.”⁵⁴ Unabashedly pro-Mussolini in his commentaries, this author maintained that the ethnic strife had been blown out of all proportion, and that ‘fortunately, religion played no part in the present quarrel’.⁵⁵ Always ready to regurgitate Fascist propaganda, he explained that

⁵¹ ‘File on the threatened suppression of the *Irish Monthly*’, 1932 (I.J.A., Jesuit Provincials’ Correspondence); *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* (Washington, 1967), c.v. ‘Catholic World Press Survey: Ireland’. According to the former source, subscriptions to the *Irish Monthly* dropped from a high of 1,200 copies per month to a low of 400 by the end of the 1920s.

⁵² *The Standard*, 23 Feb. 1929.

⁵³ Brian P. Murphy, ‘J. J. O’Kelly, the *Catholic Bulletin* and Contemporary Irish Cultural Historians’ in *Archivium Hibernicum*, xlv (1989), p. 73.

⁵⁴ Most probably in honour of the exiled Earl, Hugh O’Neill, whose remains repose in the Roman Church of *San Pietro*. Unfortunately, the records of the Irish College Rome and the depositions of contemporary Irish clergy (Witness Statements, etc.) do not yield any clues as to who this author actually was. As the records of the *Catholic Bulletin* were destroyed by fire in the 1970s, the identity of ‘H. O’N.’ may remain lost to posterity.

⁵⁵ H. O’N. (pseudo.), ‘Notes from Rome’ in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xviii, no. 4 (Apr. 1928), p. 371.

Mussolini's contentious reply to Mgr Seipel was nothing other than 'an honest résumé of the history of the Italian occupation of the Alto Adige'.⁵⁶ Furthermore, disreputable officials and parochial Fascism may have committed 'misdemeanours', but not the central government, which could 'triumphantly show many acts of first-class statesmanship in its dealing with the annexed territory', and which had made 'an honest attempt to treat the inhabitants of the acquired regions as members of the great Italian family'.⁵⁷

2.3. Fascism and Protestantism

Rather than advertise the sufferings of German and Slav Catholics, the *Catholic Bulletin* preferred to applaud Fascist antipathy to proselytising sects. *Bulletin* readers were well primed to celebrate this aspect of Fascist religious policy. In 1920s Ireland, the medical centres, soup kitchens and, most notorious of all, the "Bird's Nests" of the Society for Irish Church Missions to Roman Catholics, an organisation established during the Great Famine and dedicated to 'saving souls from priest-craft and superstition', caused enormous controversy.⁵⁸ Indeed, the alarmist reports of a counter organisation, the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society (est. 1913) were a staple part of the annual C.T.S.I. conferences, whilst proselytism was also a major concern for Frank Duff and the Legion of Mary (est. 1921).⁵⁹ By 1926, clerical indignation had reached a crescendo. In that year, the Bishops of Ireland followed up on their statement of 1925, *The Evils of Proselytism*, by

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 372.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 371.

⁵⁸ Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland*, p. 191; *Irish Independent*, 17 Mar. 1926; cf. Miriam Moffitt, *The Society for Irish Church Missions to Roman Catholics, 1849-1950* (Manchester, 2010). "The Bird's Nest" was the name of the best-known of the Protestant children's homes. The title quickly became a generic term for all such institutions. Catering for the children of destitute parents (primarily single mothers), advocates of "The Bird's Nests" maintained that they performed charitable work that was not provided by the Catholic Church or the Irish Free State. Critics maintained that they exploited poverty in order to separate Catholic mother and child from their religion.

⁵⁹ On the anti-proselytism activities of the Legion of Mary, listen to John Bowman (producer), *Frank Duff* (RTÉ Radio, 26 June 2011), [<http://www.rte.ie/radio1/bowmansundaymorning/archive2011.html>].

denouncing Protestant evangelism in their traditional Lenten Pastorals.⁶⁰ In consequence, the Maynooth Union oversaw the establishment of an ‘Anti-Proselytising Priests Guild’, while the *Irish Independent*, striving as always to keep abreast of clerical opinion, mounted an extensive campaign against the evangelicals.⁶¹ All of this affected the militant Catholic Young Men’s Society. Members of this organisation physically opposed the proselytisers, leading to scenes that were tense and sometimes violent. For instance, when representatives of the ‘International Bible Student’s Association’ appeared in Kilkenny in June 1928, the local branch of the C.Y.M.S. accused them of defaming the Catholic clergy. The meeting was quickly broken up, with the would-be preachers forced to flee to the tune of “Faith of Our Fathers”. This victory won, the protestors embarked upon an impromptu book-burning session.⁶²

Similar tensions existed in Italy. Even before unification, Italy had a substantial and varied community of Protestant denominations. Typified by the Waldensian Calvinists of Piedmont, the majority of these were long-established and located in virtual uniform enclaves.⁶³ However, from the time of the *Risorgimento*, the Liberal regime had tolerated, indeed, if only for the nuisance value they posed to the Vatican and the foreign revenue that followed in their wake, actually encouraged, Anglo–Saxon proselytising groups.⁶⁴ Throughout the late nineteenth-century, therefore, sectarian preachers engaged in noisy propaganda that trumpeted the likely advance of their creed. Yet by the time of the Fascist era, and despite the expenditure of enormous sums of money, sixty years of unrestricted activities had yielded only 50,000 ‘native’ Italian Protestants from a population of some 42 million.⁶⁵ Despite this

⁶⁰ Curtis, *Splendid Cause*, p. 107.

⁶¹ *Irish Independent*, 19 Mar. 1926; *ibid.*, 24 June 1926.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 30 June 1925.

⁶³ Binchy, *Church and State*, p. 571.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 581.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 570.

unimpressive national return, the proselytisers did enjoy a certain amount of success in Rome itself. Indeed, it was concern at the growing appeal of Methodist schools for the Roman poor that brought the Irish Christian Brothers to the Italian capital. At the behest of Pius X, the Brothers established their *Marcantonio Colonna Institute*, which, by the time of the Lateran Agreements, was catering for about five hundred boys and proving itself a model school in the instruction of Christian ethics and Fascist civics.⁶⁶

Beyond establishing an educational ministry to the Roman poor, the Irish Christian Brothers were also involved in countering an attempt to establish a “Protestant City” on the highest hill in Rome, *Monte Mario*. Briefly, in 1914 the Italian Mission of the American Methodist Episcopal Church purchased land on *Monte Mario*.⁶⁷ Thereon the Mission built a large complex that opened to the public in 1921. Styled the ‘American War Relief Centre’, the new building incorporated impressive sports facilities, a library, reading and billiard rooms, etc., which wary Catholic clerics interpreted as proselytising aids.⁶⁸ The head of the Mission, one Revd Bertrand Tipple, had further plans to establish a cathedral, schools and a university; all of which would combine, as Tipple put it, ‘to stand aloft like a lighthouse’ over priestly enthralldom.⁶⁹ The Catholic reaction was furious. Responding to the appeals of Pope Benedict XV, the American Knights of Columbus, an organisation founded and dominated by men of the Irish Diaspora, threw themselves into a property and propaganda struggle subsequently known as “The Battle of *Monte Mario*”.⁷⁰ The Christian Brothers played a role in the conflict, with the procurator-

⁶⁶ *Irish Catholic* 7 Dec. 1929; *The Star*, 21 Dec. 1929.

⁶⁷ *New York Times*, 26 Jan. 1914.

⁶⁸ H. O’N. (pseudo.), ‘Notes from Rome’ in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xx, no. 8 (Aug. 1930), p. 847; Binchy, *Church and State*, p. 580.

⁶⁹ Binchy, *Church and State*, p. 580. Binchy misidentifies the Methodist preacher as William Tipple.

⁷⁰ Returning from their audience with Benedict XV, and wishing to witness conditions in revolutionary Ireland first-hand, forty of the Knights travelled to Dublin in September 1920. In anticipation of the visit, the *Irish Independent* (30 Aug. & 14 Sept.) gave notice of the Knights’ intended combat with the Methodist Italian Mission.

general of the Roman congregation, J. M. Costen, receiving sums of money from the Irish bishops to help stay the advance of the Methodist missionaries.⁷¹ In Italy itself, the clergy, the P.P.I. and the Nationalists, who denounced evangelical Protestantism as a cloak for Anglo–American colonisation, petitioned the Government to oppose the ‘New Jerusalem’.⁷² Mussolini was happy to oblige. In 1924, the regime, ostensibly on aesthetic grounds but in reality as an obvious sop to Catholic opinion, put a halt to the building programme. Furthermore, according at least to one returned preacher who addressed the St Stephen’s Green Methodist Church that same year, the regime adopted a benevolent attitude to increasingly violent Catholic anti-proselytisers.⁷³ Reported in glowing detail by “H. O’N.” and the *Catholic Bulletin*, the story of *Monte Mario*, accompanied by further accounts of Fascist vigilance against economic evangelism (medical missions, soup kitchens, *et al*) at the time of the great Messina earthquake of 1930, helped to deflect attention from Mussolini’s critics and reassure the confessional apologists.⁷⁴

2.4. Fascism V Catholic Action: background

No such ambiguity surrounded the 1931 conflict between Pius XI and Mussolini over the activities and status of Italian Catholic Action. We have already seen that the pope was intent upon a spiritual re-conquest of civil society, and Catholic Action, with its myriad of youth, professional and recreational organisations, was to be the means to this end.⁷⁵ According to Pius, who coined the classic definition of Catholic Action as ‘the participation

⁷¹ Donal A. Reidy to Mgr John Hagan, 30 June 1924 (P.I.C.R.A., Hagan papers, HAG1/1924/308); on the Roman career of Brother Costen, see *Irish Independent* (obituaries), 6 Feb. 1930.

⁷² Peter R. D’Agostino, *Rome in America: Transnational Catholic Ideology from the Risorgimento to Fascism* (Chapel Hill, 2004), p. 170.

⁷³ *Irish Independent*, 30 Sept. 1924.

⁷⁴ H. O’N. (pseudo.), ‘Notes from Rome’ in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xxi, no. 1 (Jan. 1931), pp 73–6.

⁷⁵ Alice A. Kelikian, ‘The Church and Catholicism’ in Adrian Lyttelton (ed.), *Liberal and Fascist Italy* (Oxford, 2002), p. 58.

of the laity in the apostolate of the Church', it was a corporate movement that remained 'above and beyond any political party'.⁷⁶ Thus, the Holy See, which was wholly indifferent to the destruction of Mgr Sturzo's P.P.I.,⁷⁷ was determined to protect Catholic Action from Fascist interference. In the so-called "Totalitarian State", however, where one party claimed a monopoly over every aspect of Italian life, *all* extra-Fascist campaigning, even that confined to religious and moral issues, was a cause for concern.⁷⁸ As such, and despite the official policy of material concessions to the Church itself, the Fascist press and youth movements were encouraged to agitate (often violently) against their Catholic counterparts. Fearing that these campaigns were a prelude to actual suppression, the pope insisted upon making the independent survival of Catholic Action a precondition of the 1929 Lateran Agreements.⁷⁹ Yet even though Article 43 of the Concordat recognised Catholic Action as the only remaining autonomous organisation in Italy, further disputes soon disturbed this guarantee and very publicly highlighted the irreconcilable differences between Fascist and Catholic social doctrine.

2.5. Irish response to the Lateran Agreements

Before examining the impact of this conflict on Irish opinion, it is worth making some general observations about the Irish response to the Lateran Agreements themselves. There can be little doubt that the resolution of the Roman Question enhanced Mussolini's reputation. Yet it is a mistake to overestimate the propaganda benefit conferred upon the dictatorship. Broadly, Irish polemicists simply acknowledged Mussolini as an "ultra-realist" who, unlike his Liberal predecessors, had the courage to recognise the justice

⁷⁶ Pope Pius XI, *Apostolic Letter, Quae Nobis: on the Fundamental Principles of Catholic Action* (Rome, 13 Nov. 1928); James J. Campbell, 'Catholic Action and Politics' in the *Irish Monthly*, lxiv, no. 751 (Jan. 1936), p. 10.

⁷⁷ See Below, p. 180.

⁷⁸ Binchy, *Church and State*, p. 497.

⁷⁹ Ibid; Albert C. O'Brien, 'Italian Youth in Conflict: Catholic Action and Fascist Italy, 1929–1931' in *Catholic Historical Review*, lxxviii, no. 4 (Oct. 1982), p. 627.

of the pope's temporal claims.⁸⁰ With the notable exception of the aforementioned "H. O'N.", rather than elevate Mussolini on a plinth, an air of Catholic triumphalism dominated Irish commentary.⁸¹ As one correspondent informed the rector of the Irish College Rome, Mgr John Hagan, the settlement was 'viewed by all as a complete surrender to the Holy Father'.⁸² Moreover, although entirely positive, the Irish response to the Lateran Agreements was not exactly effusive. Despite genuine and widespread joy at the Agreements, practical expression did not follow popular approval. As explained by *The Standard*, because the reconciliation was unknown at the time of their traditional Lenten Pastorals, the Irish bishops missed an opportunity to 'sound the note of jubilation which fills the hearts of their people'.⁸³ Without doubting the accuracy of this claim, it is worth noting that amongst the senior clergy, an element of caution also prevailed. The bishops realised that the formal establishment of a Vatican State would hasten the arrival of the first Papal Nuncio since the time of Rinuccini. Jealous of their privileged position *vis-à-vis* the Irish government, elements of the Irish hierarchy were apprehensive that the Holy See would take an increased interest in Irish ecclesiastical affairs.⁸⁴ At a lower level, remarkably few commemorative ceremonies occurred. Instead, public demonstrations corresponded with, and were ancillary to, the ongoing Catholic Emancipation celebrations.⁸⁵ This subordination of the pope's "liberation" to Catholic Emancipation confounded some observers. Comparing the muted celebrations

⁸⁰ See, for example, *The Standard* 16 Feb. 1929 (editorial); cf. P. Redmond Buckley, 'The Papal Sovereignty: The Roman Question and How it was Settled' in *The Cross*, xx, no. 3 (July 1929), pp 74-7.

⁸¹ In typical fashion, "H. O'N." proclaimed that with the Roman Question resolved, 'Mussolini now considered his work practically ended, and this coming year proposes to resign his dictatorship to a Constitutional Government'. Clearly overcome by the hyperbole generated by the Fascist press, he also inveigled upon the "incoming" Government to 'always follow the magnanimous principles laid down by the greatest statesman of modern times' and to 'gladly join in the universal cry: Eviva il Duce!'—'Notes from Rome' in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xix, no. 3 (Mar. 1929), p. 231.

⁸² G. V. Maloney to Mgr John Hagan, 2 Mar. 1929 (P.I.C.R.A., Hagan papers, HAG1/1929/96).

⁸³ *The Standard*, 16 Feb. 1929.

⁸⁴ See, Keogh, *Ireland and the Vatican*, pp 41-44.

⁸⁵ See, for example, *Munster Express*, 8 Mar. 1929.

of 1929 to the massive reaction against the partial invasion of the pope's temporal domain in 1860, a clearly annoyed *Catholic Bulletin* lamented what it described as a modern Irish apathy toward Rome.⁸⁶ This judgement was somewhat harsh, but events in Nenagh perhaps typified the Irish reaction to the Lateran Agreements. Here, although the townspeople paraded under the papal colours to the tune of "God Save the Pope", the festivities merely complemented the planned opening of a local park. Although the inauguration ceremony was pre-empted by a hasty (and thoroughly biased) appraisal of the Roman Question, it is worth noting that, as he followed the usual script of celebrating 'the Pope's Great Victory', the orator, one Fr O'Halloran, found no time to sentimentalise about Mussolini.⁸⁷

2.6. Rupture between Church and State in Italy

Irrespective of the limited response to the *Conciliazone*, Irish opinion fully expected that the Quirinal and the Holy See would remain on cordial terms. However, for two years following the Agreements, a period when the Italian lay apostolate dramatically increased its efforts on every front, the central dispute over Catholic social activity continued to fester. A particular cause of friction was the growing popularity of the Catholic Action youth organisations. As with the Nazi and Soviet dictatorships, the Fascist state staked a claim to be the sole moral guardian of the nation's youth. In each instance, this claim represented a bid for perpetuity and an attempt to deny the inevitable decline and collapse that had hitherto been the fate of all autocratic regimes. Yet Mussolini, unlike Stalin and Hitler, did not seek to banish Christianity from the minds of future generations.⁸⁸ On the contrary; according to the Fascist philosophy of "Actual Idealism", religious instruction, acting as a dissolvent of class antagonism and a cradle of the heroic virtues (the foremost of which was patriotism), was to play an important part in the mental formation of Italian

⁸⁶ Kevin (pseudo.), 'Far and Near' in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xx, no. 1 (Jan. 1930), p. 20.

⁸⁷ *Nenagh Guardian*, 2 Mar. 1929.

⁸⁸ Binchy, *Church and State*, pp 407-8.

children.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the role of the Church and her agents was to be a subordinate one, for, regardless of the Concordat, the regime had no intention of allowing Catholic Action to compromise the Fascist vision for Italian youth.

Pius XI, however, remained steadfast in defence of the Church's rights in the sphere of education. In a powerful encyclical that appeared shortly before the first anniversary of the Lateran Agreements, *Rappresentanti In Terra*, he posed a direct challenge to the Fascist creed of state supremacy.⁹⁰ Composed in Italian and addressed solely to the Italian bishops, the encyclical was, by proxy, clearly aimed at the Mussolini government.⁹¹ Therein Pius condemned the imparting of military training to children and the furtherance of a 'spirit of nationalism which is false and exaggerated, as well as dangerous to true peace and prosperity'.⁹² Having poured scorn on the training of Fascist youth, the pope went on to extol the Catholic principle that the primacy in education, as in the moral sphere, belongs to the family and the Church. Reiterating age-old Catholic dogma, he explained that as the family anticipates political authority, it has incontrovertible rights, including the right to have the child instructed according to Christian teaching, with which the state may not interfere. The pope also reminded Mussolini that the Church had a superior claim in the sphere of education, both by virtue of the divine commission received by her through Christ (Matt. 28:19), and the fact that, even though the state predated the Catholic Church, it was a latecomer when it came to providing teachers and the schools to house them in.⁹³

⁸⁹ On Actual Idealism as described by its chief architect, see, Giovanni Gentile, 'The Philosophic Basis of Fascism' in *Foreign Affairs*, vi, no. 2 (Jan. 1928), pp 290–304.

⁹⁰ Pope Pius XI, *Encyclical Letter, Rappresentanti In Terra: On the Christian Education of Youth* (Rome, 31 Dec. 1929).

⁹¹ Pollard, *Vatican and Italian Fascism*, p. 130. *Rappresentanti in Terra* was actually an Italian translation of an earlier encyclical, *Divini Illius Magistri* (1929), which Fascist propaganda had dismissed as not pertaining to Italy. To emphasise that it did, Pius XI took the unprecedented step of reissuing a translated text addressed to the Italian hierarchy.

⁹² *Rappresentanti in Terra*, par. 49.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pars. 25 & 77.

No match for the pope in controversy, and apprehensive at the international response to the encyclical, Mussolini chose not to press the omnipotent claims of Fascism. The pope's well-publicised Lenten Allocution of 1931 provided the catalyst for renewed conflict. Remaining true to a favourite theme, Pius XI railed against the evils of modern society. Despite Fascist endeavours in both regards, the pope condemned perceived lapses in public morality and the ongoing activities of Protestant propagandists. These complaints preceded a specific allegation that the regime had failed to live up to its concordatory obligation to preserve 'the sacred character of Rome'.⁹⁴ Allied to the Catholic social offensive of the preceding two years, the public ingratitude of the pope engendered a hard line from the Fascist regime. Only an important Catholic festival temporarily stayed the inevitable Fascist reaction. 15 May 1931 marked the fortieth anniversary of the pre-eminent social encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*.⁹⁵ The Church's answer to the problems of the industrial age, *Rerum Novarum*, as explained by Pius XI, was 'the great charter of Catholic social action'.⁹⁶ To commemorate the event, Pius issued a successor document, *Quadragesimo Anno*, and invited representatives of international Catholic Action to gather in Rome.⁹⁷ Highlighting the weakness of Catholic Action in the Free State at the time, the number of Irish pilgrims who heeded the pope's call was remarkably few.⁹⁸ Irish apathy again gave offence to the *Catholic Bulletin*. Indignant that the Free State was the only Catholic country not to send official representatives to the ceremonies, "H. O'N." complained that 'the few Irish who came seemingly on their own initiative ... found themselves utilising English, and [were gathered] under the shelter of the Union Jack, to

⁹⁴ Quoted in Pollard, *Vatican and Italian Fascism*, p. 114. For the full scope of the Allocution, see, *Irish Catholic*, 28 Feb. 1931.

⁹⁵ Pope Leo XIII, *Encyclical Letter, Rerum Novarum: On Capital and Labour* (Rome, 15 May 1891).

⁹⁶ *The Standard*, 23 May 1931.

⁹⁷ Pope Pius XI, *Encyclical Letter, Quadragesimo Anno: On the Reconstruction of the Social Order* (Rome, 15 May 1931). Both *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* are examined in greater detail elsewhere (see pp 237–9).

⁹⁸ *Irish Catholic*, 23 May 1931.

the great hurt of the feelings of the Irish colony in Rome.’⁹⁹ Whatever about the nationalistic sensibilities of the Roman–Irish, between 14 and 17 May some 10,000 foreign activists attended the ceremonies (which incidentally coincided with the pope’s birthday), and, until their departure, Mussolini again judged caution to be the better part of valour.¹⁰⁰

Acting on the pretext that they were a front for political intrigue, the regime proscribed the Catholic youth organisations on 31 May. Violence accompanied the suppression, with the Fascists employing press campaigns and choreographed rioting to reduce the Catholic organisations to a state of fearful inaction.¹⁰¹ The Holy See, however, was not so supple. Intent upon fighting the cause of Catholic Action to the end, Pius XI had some highly effective weapons at his disposal. Firstly, the *Osservatore Romano* chronicled the violence on a daily basis. Printed as it was in the Vatican State, it escaped the Fascist censor. In addition to the *Osservatore Romano*, the pope made full use of the Vatican audiences. Throughout the summer of 1931, Pius advised pilgrimage after pilgrimage about the fundamental issues involved in the dispute.¹⁰² Finally, the Holy See once again issued a condemnatory encyclical letter to maximum effect. Appearing on 29 June, *Non Abbiamo Bisogno* (‘On Catholic Action in Italy’) was a far more explicit attack on Fascism than *Rappresentanti In Terra*. Published in haste and clandestinely distributed, it remains one of the most remarkable statements ever issued by the Vatican.¹⁰³ Employing language

⁹⁹ H. O’N. (pseudo.), ‘Notes from Rome’ in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xxi, nos. 6 & 7 (June & July 1931), pp 598, 708.

¹⁰⁰ O’Brien, ‘Italian Youth in Conflict’, p. 630.

¹⁰¹ Binchy, *Church and State*, p. 517.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Mgr Francis Joseph Spellman, who was then assistant to the Vatican Secretary of State (Cardinal Pacelli), flew with several hundred copies of the encyclical direct from Rome to Paris, from whence it was released to the world. An amateur pilot in his own right, Spellman, like his close friend Cardinal O’Connell of Boston, was of immediate Irish descent. Both men would play prominent roles when Dublin hosted the International Eucharistic Congress of 1932, with Spellman translating the pope’s radio broadcast to the million strong audience in the Phoenix Park. See, *Time Magazine*, 13 July 1931; *ibid.*, 15 Aug. 1932; cf. Rory O’Dwyer, ‘On Show to the World: The Eucharistic Congress of 1932’ in *History Ireland*, xv, no. 6 (Winter, 2007), p. 43.

that was in many ways less diplomatic than that used in his more notorious polemic against Nazi Germany, *Mit Brennender Sorge* (1937), Pius condemned the attack on Catholic Action as a ‘usurpation intended to snatch the young from Christ and his Church, even with violence’.¹⁰⁴ Publicly doubting whether earlier gestures of goodwill ‘were actuated by sincere love and zeal for religion, or whether they were not rather due to pure calculation and to an ulterior purpose of domination’, the pope completed his broadside by announcing that Fascism, by its complete devotion to the ‘neo-pagan’ philosophy of ‘Statolatry’, had surpassed even the worst excesses of Jacobin liberalism.¹⁰⁵

2.7. Irish response to papal appeals

This uncompromising appeal to the universal Church thus transported the dispute far beyond the confines of Rome and Italy. To the cost of Mussolini’s international reputation, messages of sympathy poured into the Vatican.¹⁰⁶ In this regard, the Irish mobilisation was immense. Confessional organisations vied with one another to express their filial devotion to the embattled pope. Overcoming their sensibilities about Vatican interference, the Irish bench of bishops were amongst the first to offer their support. Even before the advent of *Non Abbiamo Bisogno*, the bishops had joined the Maynooth Union and the Oliver Plunkett Union (representing the past students of the Irish College Rome) in expressing their sorrow at the attacks upon Catholic Action.¹⁰⁷ Telegrams on behalf of individual dioceses, confraternities and the various Irish social action organisations (C.Y.M.S., C.T.S.I., *An Ríoghacht*, Legion of Mary, St Vincent de Paul Society, etc.) followed suit. Many of these messages, as with that sent by the bishops themselves, diplomatically refrained from

¹⁰⁴ F. J. Coppa, ‘Mussolini and the Concordat of 1929’ in Coppa (ed.), *Controversial Concordats* (Washington, 1999), p. 511; Pope Pius XI, *Encyclical Letter, Non Abbiamo Bisogno: On Catholic Action in Italy* (Rome, 29 June 1931) par. 44.

¹⁰⁵ *Non Abbiamo Bisogno*, par. 44.

¹⁰⁶ Coppa, ‘Mussolini and the Concordat of 1929’, p. 511.

¹⁰⁷ *Irish Catholic*, 27 June 1931.

condemning Fascism outright. Nevertheless, some communicants expressed their obvious disappointment at a regime hitherto held in high regard. The clergy of Achonry, for example, lamented ‘the manner in which principles that lie at the core of Catholicity have been recently assailed in quarters where there seemed to be so many symptoms of good will’.¹⁰⁸ Likewise, bishop Cohalan and the priests of Cork, whose communiqué reflected Irish apprehension at the recent fall of the Spanish monarchy, made it known that they cherished ‘no unfriendly feeling towards the Italian State. We rejoice in its growing strength, but we cannot bear silently and without protest the present interference of the Government in the affairs of the Church.’¹⁰⁹

Homilies, lectures and journalistic comment accompanied the cabled messages of support. North of the border, where Catholic organisations felt less secure in themselves than their southern counterparts, a plethora of spokespersons came forward to condemn Mussolini. For instance, on the Feast of the Assumption (15 August), events in Italy loomed large at a massive rally staged by the Ancient Order of Hibernians. As described by the north Leinster/Ulster journal, the *Anglo-Celt*, upwards of 25,000 Catholics assembled in Armagh to take part ‘in a demonstration which, for its dimensions and enthusiasm, has never been exceeded in the Primatial City or the County’.¹¹⁰ Having alleged that events similar to the recent attacks upon Catholic organisations in Italy were daily fare for Catholics in Northern Ireland, John D. Nugent, national secretary of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, founder of the Irish Life Insurance Company, a former parliamentarian at Westminster and previously a noted supporter of Fascist anti-Masonry,¹¹¹ provoked an enthusiastic response when he proposed:

¹⁰⁸ *Irish Catholic*, 18 July 1931.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* Followed by a period of intense anti-clerical rioting, the Spanish Monarchy fell in mid-April 1931. The Spanish dictator, Primo de Rivera, had left the political stage some twelve months previously.

¹¹⁰ *Anglo-Celt*, 22 Aug. 1931.

¹¹¹ Convinced of the alleged intimacy between the Irish and Mexican Lodges, in the summer of

That we avail of this gathering of many thousands of Ulstermen to proclaim our deep sympathy with His Holiness the Pope in the grief and humiliation inflicted upon him by recent events in Italy; that we regard with abhorrence the outrages and oppressions to which the Church has been subjected at the hands of the Fascist government and the Fascist Organisation; that we pledge our loyalty to the Pope in his efforts to defend the Church, protect the young, and vindicate the rights of parents ... In resisting the attempts to bend the Church in subjection to the ideal of a pagan State, His Holiness is the champion of civil liberty and individual rights, as well as the guardian of the supreme interests of religion and morality.¹¹²

Elsewhere in the north, the Parish Priest of Dungannon, Mgr Dean Quinn, identified similarities between the Fascist mobs and the Black-and-Tans. Mocking the supposed political activities of Catholic Action as a ‘Mussolini invention’, he completed his analogous account by informing his parishioners that the Italian organisations were ‘no different from the St Vincent de Paul Society, the Catholic Truth Society, or the Total Abstinence Society here in Dungannon.’¹¹³ This and similar sermons were repeated by the mainstays of the Irish confessional press, the *Irish Catholic* and *The Standard*. Thanks to their respective Vatican correspondents, these papers also provided detailed front-page accounts of the Italian fallout. The violence described by the *Osservatore Romano* featured prominently, as did the reciprocal telegrams on behalf of the pope to his many Irish supplicants. In the smaller and less frequent journals, former Mussolini partisans scrambled to explain earlier

1928 Nugent penned and circulated a series of anti-Masonic pamphlets of his own. Nugent informed Archbishop Edward Byrne that the purpose of these pamphlets was to cause as much embarrassment as possible to the Irish Lodges (J. D. Nugent to Archbishop Edward Byrne, 21 May 1928 (D.D.A., Byrne papers)). To this end, the pamphlets pre-empted menacing themes—principally, that a disproportionately large and evidently expanding Irish Masonic community intended to replicate the Mexican persecutions—more fully developed by Fr Coyle. Undersigned ‘K. O. R.’ and cited in Curtis, *Challenge to Democracy*, p. 58, three of Nugent’s anti-Masonic pamphlets—*Have You Ever Given This a Thought?; Freemasonry’s “Duplicate Personality”*; *The “Hidden Hand” in the Mexican Atrocities*—survive in the Archbishop Edward Byrne papers. The latter suggested that Irish Freemasonry had increased from c. 20,000 in 1920 to 43,000 members by 1925. Consequently, there were ‘as many Freemasons in Ireland as in Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Norway—all combined’. Furthermore, Irish Freemasonry was proportionately fifteen times stronger than its Italian counterpart, ‘before Mussolini wiped it out of existence’.

¹¹² *Anglo-Celt*, 22 Aug. 1931.

¹¹³ *Irish Catholic*, 25 July, 1931.

comments in favour of the regime. Writing from Paris for the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, the aforementioned Timothy O’Herlihy, who, it will be recalled, favourably contrasted the revolutionary Squads against the anti-clerical Roman Republic of 1848, now penned a crushing case against Fascism.¹¹⁴ So too the mysterious “H. O’N.” performed an abrupt volte-face. Acknowledging that, ‘From the beginning, in all our articles, we have spoken favourably of the present movement in Italy’, he explained that this support was always qualified by a conviction that ‘under the *Duce*’s careful tuition, some regular and constitutional form of government would be established’.¹¹⁵ In effect, O’Herlihy had summed up the hopes of Mussolini’s confessional apologists the world over. Blinded by the pro-Catholic posturing of the dictatorship, O’Herlihy and his fellow travellers imagined that Mussolini would outlast the transient phenomenon of Fascism, and, guided by the Church, establish a lasting political legacy wherein Catholic values might thrive. Compelled by recent events to reengage with reality, a frustrated “H. O’N.” now found it therapeutic to pillory Mussolini as an insecure ‘humpty-dumpty’ whose ‘dependence on the mob element’ illustrated the hollowness of Fascism and presaged further attacks on the Church.¹¹⁶

Secular bodies supported the confessional campaign. The constituent colleges of the National University of Ireland (U.C.D., U.C.C. and U.C.G.), all sent messages of support to the Vatican, as did many professional organisations and municipal authorities.¹¹⁷ Amongst these latter was the Killarney Urban Council. Less concerned about Fascist sensibilities than bishop Cohalan and the clergy of Cork, the Councillors unanimously passed a resolution ‘conveying to his Holiness the Pope an expression of their sincere sympathy with him as head of the Church, in the humiliation and persecution to which he is being

¹¹⁴ Timothy O’Herlihy, ‘Fascism and Azione Cattolica’ in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* (5th series), xxxviii (July–Dec. 1931), pp 449–57.

¹¹⁵ H. O’N. (pseudo.), ‘Notes from Rome’ in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xxi, no. 7 (July 1931), p. 704.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 705.

¹¹⁷ *The Standard*, 4 July 1931.

exposed owing to the intolerable attitude adopted towards him by Signor Mussolini and the other heads of his party.’¹¹⁸ Elsewhere in Munster, the deliberations of the Waterford Corporation shed light upon the sectarian tensions then affecting local politics in Ireland. Without attempting to abjure from expressing their sympathy toward Pius XI, five Protestant deputies objected to a communication implying that they and the one thousand or so non-Catholic electors of Waterford wished to ‘tender to His Holiness our most respectful fealty and homage’. Accusing the dissentients of religious intolerance, the most truculent Catholic deputies only grudgingly accepted an amendment that placed the words ‘On behalf of the Catholic citizens of Waterford’ before the offending clause.¹¹⁹

Of the main political parties, Fianna Fáil was the most vocal in condemning Mussolini and the Fascist regime. Concurrent to the ongoing ‘Red Scare’, the pope’s troubles were a timely opportunity to once again play the Catholic card. Throughout the summer of 1931, the Government exaggerated the threat posed by a supposedly communist-leaning I.R.A. With a view to the forthcoming General Election, Cumann na nGaedheal derided de Valera as an “Irish Kerensky” who, unwittingly or otherwise, would inevitably surrender Ireland to the militants.¹²⁰ As part of this campaign, the Government persisted in identifying Fianna Fáil with the anti-clerical violence that accompanied the birth of the Spanish Republic.¹²¹ However, whereas Spain was central to Cumann na nGaedheal propaganda, the recognised organ of the Government, *The Star*, considered it bad form to comment on a dispute between powers with which Ireland enjoyed excellent relations. Consequently, this journal ignored the ongoing fracas in Italy. Taking full advantage of the Government’s

¹¹⁸ *Irish Independent*, 31 July 1931.

¹¹⁹ *Irish Times*, 8 Aug. 1931.

¹²⁰ See, Dermot Keogh, ‘De Valera, the bishops and the Red Scare’ in J. P. O’Carroll and John A. Murphy (eds), *De Valera and his times* (Cork, 1983), pp 134–59.

¹²¹ ‘Spain and Ireland’ in *The Star* (June 1931), p. 226; cf. “Poisoning the Well”—Spain and Ireland Once More’ in *The Star* (July 1931), p. 246 (note on citation: in its final format, *The*

silence, the Fianna Fáil weekly, *The Nation*, made sure to proclaim the orthodox Catholic line on the battle between pope and *Duce*. Indeed, the editorial commentaries of Frank Gallagher effectively blended Catholic fundamentalism with political opportunism. Condemning Fascism as ‘the Italian answer to Jacquerie in Spain’, Gallagher, accurately identified with the ultra-pious element within Fianna Fáil,¹²² prophesied that ‘Fascist state-absolutism’ would flounder on the rock of Pope Pius XI, ‘the defender of democracy, the champion of the common people against tyranny’.¹²³

Such pronouncements did not go unnoticed in Italy. Angered by the protests emanating from Ireland, some Italian journals set about demonstrating how recent developments in the Free State pointed toward the existence of a “White International”. For instance, the important Roman daily, *Il Giornale d’Italia*, suggested that a conspiracy operating under the cloak of Catholic Action had been steadily sapping at the roots of the fledgling Irish democracy. In a lengthy article headed ‘Alarming inquietude in Ireland through the political intrigue of Catholic Action’, the *Giornale* implied that the recent establishment of a chair of Catholic Action at Maynooth, the Letitia Dunbar-Harrison controversy,¹²⁴ and the ongoing anti-divorce propaganda of the C.T.S.I., had caused ‘grave apprehension to the law-abiding Irish public’.¹²⁵ In a similar vein, the mouthpiece of the Fascist Labour Confederation, *Il Lavoro*

Star newspaper was printed on a monthly basis).

¹²² Diarmaid Ferriter, ‘Gallagher, Frank’, in James McGuire & James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

¹²³ Ed., *The Nation*, 5 Sept. 1931; cf. *ibid.*, 6 June, 27 June, 11 July 1931.

¹²⁴ Briefly, in May 1930 Ms Dunbar-Harrison, a Protestant graduate of Trinity College Dublin, had been recommended for the post of Mayo County Librarian by the Local Appointments Commission. Reacting to opposition from the local Catholic clergy, and on the grounds that she had an inadequate grasp of the Irish language—somewhat dubious grounds given that the clergy’s preferred candidate, one Ellen Burke, also failed to pass an Irish language competency test—Mayo County Council refused to endorse the appointment. Consequently, the Minister for Local Government, Richard Mulcahy, dissolved the Council. A standoff ensued, with the Government only yielding in late 1931, when Dunbar-Harrison was “promoted” to the Military Library in Dublin. See, Lee, *Ireland*, pp 161–7; cf. Kevin Cummins (dir.), *Scannal—The Curious Case of the Mayo Librarian* (RTÉ Television, 2010).

¹²⁵ Quoted in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xxi, no. 8 (Aug. 1931), p. 793.

Fascista, sought to exploit the annual commemorations to mark the Battle of the Boyne. Completely ignoring the nuances of Irish history, *Il Lavoro Fascista* cynically announced that thousands of ‘Organisti’ had descended upon Belfast to protest against the ‘insidious works of the Vatican in their midst ... [and] ... the intolerable practices of the *Azione Cattolica Irlandese*’.¹²⁶ Distinctly unimpressed by this kind of selective reporting, it was left to the *Catholic Bulletin* to remind the *Lavoro* that: ‘the *Organisti* have been doing this as a matter of form for the past two hundred and forty-one years—it was not prepared specially this year to support the Fascist government in its unjust action towards the Italian Catholic Association.’¹²⁷

2.8. Resolution

Yet the jibes aimed at Irish Catholic Action were short-lived, for the weight of the international response to *Non Abbiamo Bisogno* soon forced Mussolini to revise his strategy. Not alone did the encyclical successfully rally Catholic opinion, it also drew messages of support from unlikely quarters in France, Germany, Great Britain and America. In these lands, democrats, socialists and leading Protestant pastors applauded the pope for opposing Mussolini and defending the principle of religious liberty.¹²⁸ As with the messages of sympathy from across the Catholic world, the *Osservatore Romano* reproduced these plaudits on a daily basis. Alarmed at the damage done to his international reputation (particularly in the United States), and realising that a continuation of the present policy must eventually lead to a rupture with the Church itself, Mussolini abandoned the campaign against Catholic Action. Having made his intended point, and likewise fearful that a prolonged dispute would endanger the Concordat, Pius XI seized upon the proffered olive branch. With the polemics, street violence and police invasions of Catholic Action premises no longer an issue, shuttle diplomacy between the Vatican

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 794.

¹²⁸ J. P. Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism; the view from America* (Princeton, 1972), p. 199.

and the Quirinal continued throughout August, before a brief communiqué outlining what subsequently became known as the ‘September Accords’ announced the end of the dispute.¹²⁹

Leaving aside the long-term implications of the settlement it is important to note that Irish commentators, imitating the behaviour of their counterparts in Italy, devoted little time to ascribing victory to one side or the other. Acting under instruction, rather than subject the settlement to intelligent criticism, the Catholic and Fascist press expressed nothing other than approval and relief.¹³⁰ As such, few Irish commentators saw fit to question the rapprochement. Moreover, the short duration of the dispute, allied to the increasingly violent anti-Catholic demonstrations in Spain and the rise of blatantly anti-Christian Nazism in Germany, aided the healing process in Ireland. Indeed, when, to mark the third anniversary of the Lateran Agreements, an apparently humbled Mussolini subsequently paid his first (and only) official visit to the Vatican, elements within the Irish confessional press displayed a remarkable anxiety to rehabilitate the enigmatic *Duce*.¹³¹

Even so, it would be wrong to conclude that the dispute over Italian Catholic Action had not made a lasting impression. Thenceforth, none of the theologians who subsequently steered the Irish vocational movement failed to recognise that the fundamentals of Fascism were incompatible with the

¹²⁹ Binchy, *Church and State*, p. 528. As explained by Binchy, the September Accords involved concessions from both sides. In the first instance, the pope placed Catholic Action under the direct control of the Italian bishops (who assured the government that none of its officers would be drawn from ‘parties averse to the regime’) and re-emphasised that Catholic Action had none other than spiritual aims (thus ending any Catholic ambitions in the field of labour organisation). Accordingly, on the proviso that they refrained from competing with Fascist organisations in terms of physical and sporting activities, Mussolini restored the proscribed Catholic youth organisations.

¹³⁰ Pollard, *Vatican and Italian Fascism*, p. 165.

¹³¹ ‘Notes from Rome’ in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xxii, no. 3 (Mar. 1932), p. 208. On this occasion, the indefatigable “H. O’N.” invited his readers to observe and ‘kneel with the Duce, and pray that here there may be no formal ceremonial or diplomatic custom, but that under the Duce’s direction Catholic Italy may prove a bulwark against the maelstrom of un-belief and anti-Christian life surrounding her.’

teachings of the Catholic Church. Indeed, to all but the most committed apologists, it was now evident that the cordial relationship between Mussolini and Pius XI was merely a marriage of convenience. Nor was this lesson known only to the confessional organisations that had rallied around the pope. As explained by a contemporary Irishman, Daniel A. Binchy, whose major work on the Lateran Agreements, *Church and State in Fascist Italy*—which, it should be cautioned, tends to eulogise Pius XI at the expense of Mussolini—has informed much of the narrative to this section, the Catholic mobilisation of 1931 remained embedded in the popular psyche. Examining Irish attitudes to the subsequent Italian invasion of Abyssinia, Binchy described as hypocritical an *Irish Independent* campaign that raised the cry of ‘No Sanctions against a Catholic Power’.¹³² For him, the campaign was simply an ill-considered attempt to undermine de Valera’s government, and he was impressed to discover that ‘a peasant in West Kerry’ had drawn the same conclusions. When asked whether he agreed with the *Independent*’s pro-Mussolini commentary, the “peasant”, referring back to 1931, glibly replied, ‘How can Mussolini be such a great Catholic, and they telling us a couple of years ago that he was the devil himself?’¹³³

2.9. Chapter summary

Briefly, this chapter has illustrated the contradictions that underlay the regime’s attitude to religion. Intent upon eradicating ethnic differences, the Fascists undertook an intense political, cultural and economic persecution of the minorities transferred to Italy by the Treaty of St-Germain-en-Laye. Central to the dragooning of the borderlands was an attack upon the Catholic traditions of the minorities. Whilst this campaign drew no more than a confidential protest from a hamstrung Holy See, it was nonetheless visible to outside observers. Moreover, Mussolini’s contemptuous response to external protests provoked an angry response from influential Irish journals (i.e. the

¹³² Binchy, *Church and State*, p. 723.

Irish Tribune, *Irish Monthly* and *Irish Catholic*). Taking an active interest in the application of Christian principles to international affairs, these organs confronted hitherto accepted notions about the Catholic pretensions of Fascist Italy. Contextualising the regime's actions with the "Anglicisation" of Ireland, hostile journalists now depicted Mussolini as a deceptive bully who considered Catholicism only another means to the end of complete political hegemony. Even so, reflecting the powerful impact of the religious pageantry outlined in chapter one, rival publications either studiously ignored events in the South Tyrol or downplayed their significance. Moreover, for the sectarian *Catholic Bulletin*, the most significant persecution undertaken by Fascism was that directed at the evangelical Protestants. Focusing upon a campaign that resonated in an Ireland obsessed with proselytising sects, this journal documented Mussolini's decisive contribution to a conflict that had long exercised the minds of the Irish community in Rome.

Yet if the Alpine persecutions made little impact upon committed apologists, Irish indignation at the attack upon Catholic Action was unparalleled. This clash revealed that any admiration felt for Italian Fascism was clearly subordinate to the dictates of ultramontanism. Hitherto, the keystone of the Irish apologia for Fascism rested upon the cordial relationship between the Quirinal and the Holy See; standing in sharp relief to the travails of the Church during the Liberal era, this approach enabled Mussolini to pose as a first rank Catholic statesman. In very graphic fashion, however, the 1931 dispute for the first time placed the dictator at public loggerheads with Pius XI. By trying to suppress Catholic Action, the last remaining autonomous lay organisation in Italy, Mussolini reneged upon the Lateran Agreements and exposed his regime to charges of "pagan Statolatory". Provoking intense protests across the Catholic world, this affray embarrassed the Irish supporters of Fascism, gave greater credence to its detractors, and introduced new critics ranging across a

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 724.

broad range of confessional and secular institutions. In short, and notwithstanding Mussolini's coy handling of a reconciliation that a pragmatic papacy regarded as the last word in the matter, immense damage was done to the reputation of a regime that could no longer be safely acknowledged as fundamentally Catholic.

CHAPTER 3:

FASCISM AND IRISH FOREIGN POLICY— TWO STUDIES

Moving away from religious issues, this chapter explores diplomatic interaction between Ireland and Italy during the early Fascist era. It is important to note, however, that the still-outstanding Roman Question and the primacy of Anglo–Irish relations hampered bilateral communications at this time. Moreover, the Saorstát never exchanged Legations with Fascist Italy (that task fell to de Valera’s Éire in 1937).¹ Consequently, Italo-Irish communications remained, for the most part, sparse and historically insignificant. Nevertheless, two exceptions to this general rule are worth recounting. Firstly, during the crisis years of the Anglo-Irish conflict republican envoys struck up a curious rapport with Mussolini and the “elder statesman” of fascism, Gabriele D’Annunzio. Secondly, the Corfu Crisis of 1923 overshadowed Ireland’s accession to the League of Nations, and provoked conflicting responses from an Irish public as yet unsure about the merits of the Geneva institution.

3.1. Gabriele D’Annunzio & Fiume: background

During the Anglo-Irish War, Sinn Féin propagandists in Italy successfully exploited the particular circumstances affecting Italian national politics. Resentment against Italian intervention in 1915, allied to the perceived mistreatment of Italy at Versailles, created a groundswell of anti-British sentiment that enabled Sinn Féin to draw support from all parts of the Italian political divide.² The leader of the nascent Fascist movement, Benito

¹ Files entitled ‘Exchange of Legations with Italy’, Dec. 1936.–Dec. 1937 (N.A.I., DT, S9449B & S9735A).

² Recognising that the combination of shared religion, resentment at the “mutilated peace”

Mussolini, albeit for the opportunistic reasons outlined below, was an outspoken supporter of Irish independence. So too was his chief rival in the sphere of Italian hypernationalism, Gabriele D'Annunzio. Already an acclaimed poet, playwright and politician, D'Annunzio emerged from the First World War as Italy's most decorated hero.³ Coining the phrase "Mutilated Victory", he also epitomised post-war Italian Anglophobia.⁴ Moreover, D'Annunzio was determined to act on his resentments, and when the opportunity presented itself, he instigated a long-running military enterprise that almost bore spectacular results for the Irish Republican Army in the spring of 1921.

At the Paris Peace Conference, Italy and the newly created Kingdom of Yugoslavia fought for control of the port of Fiume (known today as the Croatian city of Rijeka) in southern Dalmatia. Pre-empting an international resolution to the dispute, D'Annunzio and a band of military renegades annexed the city on behalf of Italy. However, in deference to their wartime allies, the Italian government denounced this action. Undeterred, D'Annunzio now declared himself *Commandante* of a politically diverse city-state that for some fifteen months defied the authorities in Rome, Belgrade and Geneva. Indeed, his Fiuman adventure subsequently earned D'Annunzio a dubious reputation as the "John the Baptist of Fascism".⁵ Beyond demonstrating the inherent weakness of Liberal Italy, D'Annunzio earned this title for a number of reasons. In the first instance, Mussolini's movement only began to grow apace on the strength of Fascist support for the annexation of Fiume. Secondly, D'Annunzio and his followers were amongst the first to practice and

announced by Versailles and socialist anti-imperialism meant widespread support for Ireland in Italy (see, for example, *Irish Independent*, 7 Dec. 1920), Sinn Féin strategists believed that Rome could be convinced to recognise the Irish Republic. To this end, an extensive appeal was drafted (but never circulated because of the July truce) for the consideration of each member of the Italian parliament. See, *Indirizzo ai Deputati della Nazione Italiana da parte della 'Dáil Éireann'* (N.L.I., O'Kelly Papers, Ms. 27,676(1)).

³ Tommaso Antongini, *Life of Gabriele D'Annunzio* (London, 1971), pp 29–30.

⁴ Peter Neville, *Mussolini* (London & New York, 2004), p. 39; Clark, *Modern Italy*, p. 204.

⁵ Preface to Michael Ledeen, *The First Duce: D'Annunzio at Fiume* (Baltimore & London, 1977).

perfect the liturgy of Fascism (i.e. the black shirt, Roman salute, administering castor oil to political enemies, demagogic speechifying and choreographed street demonstrations, etc). Lastly, Fascist corporatism would borrow heavily, albeit in a perverse way, from the syndicalist constitution of Fiume, the remarkable *Carta del Carnaro*.⁶

Regardless of the origins of his sobriquet, D'Annunzio hoped that the *fait accompli* would inspire a general purification of Italian politics and society.⁷ A sworn enemy of the government in Rome, he looked upon the leaders of Liberal Italy as decadent and treacherous. However, when the fire ignited at Fiume failed to spread to Italy proper, D'Annunzio and his followers (variously self-styled 'myrmidons' and 'legionnaires') quickly found themselves in an isolated and somewhat precarious position. Nor did they enjoy the unqualified support of the Italians in Fiume itself. The latter may have invited the annexation, but very few shared D'Annunzio's hostility toward the Liberal state. Frustrated that his coup had not led to the collapse of the government in Rome, and likewise disillusioned with the limited ambitions of the Fiumans themselves, D'Annunzio, without abandoning his designs for political change in Italy proper, thus began to transform Fiume into a centre for international revolution.⁸

By late 1919, D'Annunzio was publicly portraying his Fiuman adventure as part of a larger contest between the major powers of the west and the exploited peoples of the world. Expanding upon ideas first developed by the ultra-nationalist writers, Giovanni Pascoli and Enrico Corradini, D'Annunzio

⁶ Ibid.; cf. Count Carlo Sforza, 'D'Annunzio, Inventor of Fascism' in *Books Abroad*, xii, no. 3 (Summer, 1938), pp 269–71. Primarily authored by the syndicalist Alceste de Ambris (later a virulent opponent of Mussolini), the Charter of Carnaro established a Corporatist State in Fiume. In addition to nine corporations, each representing the different economic interests in Fiume, a tenth one, devised by D'Annunzio, was to represent 'superior individuals' who distinguished themselves by their artistic or military prowess. Famously, D'Annunzio also inserted a clause in the Constitution that made 'music' the fundamental principle of the Fiuman city-state. A complete English translation of the Carta is found in Noel O'Sullivan, *Fascism* (London, 1983), pp 193–206.

⁷ Sforza, 'D'Annunzio, Inventor of Fascism', p. 270.

⁸ Ledeen, *The First Duce*, pp 140–1.

imagined Italy as something of a “proletarian power”, the destiny of which was to represent the interests of the young, emerging nations of the post-war world.⁹ In a major address to the people of Fiume entitled ‘Italy and Life’, D’Annunzio outlined his vision in the following terms:

Fiumans, Italians ... when you proclaimed in the face of the Supreme Council that history written with the most generous Italian blood could not be stopped at Paris ... you announced the fall of the old order. Therefore, our cause is the most beautiful which today has been directed against the evil of the world. It extends from Ireland to Egypt, from Russia to the United States, from Rumania to India. It gathers the white races with the coloured peoples, reconciles the gospel with the Koran ...¹⁰

In line with this new departure, Fiume became an increasingly attractive destination for an international coterie of socialists, anarcho-syndicalists and romantics. Of this influx, two men in particular, the leader of the Italian Maritime Workers Union, Giuseppe Giulietti, and the Belgian Poet, Leon Kochnitzky, helped to shape subsequent “Fiuman Foreign Policy”. In October 1919, Giulietti commandeered an Italian cargo ship called the *Persia*. Laden with military equipment, the *Persia* was en-route to Vladivostok in Russia, where she was to resupply the White Armies then fighting Lenin and the Bolsheviks. However, as a means of demonstrating their opposition to the war in Russia, Giulietti and a volunteer crew boarded the *Persia* at the Straits of Messina and instead diverted the ship north to Fiume.¹¹ Armed with the weapons intended for Russia, D’Annunzio now imagined he could enlist support for a fantastical Fiuman based parody of the League of Nations. Portentously called the ‘League of Fiume’, and the brainchild of Kochnitzky, this anti-League of Nations was to provide a rallying point for the so-called oppressed nations. Inviting a conference at Fiume on 15 May 1920 (never convened), the aim of the League, according to Kochnitzky, was to unite ‘all peoples which the Peace Conference has put under the heel of peoples of other races.’¹²

⁹ Ibid., p. 10; Lyttelton, *Seizure of Power*, p. 16.

¹⁰ Gabriele D’Annunzio, ‘Italy and Life’ (speech), Fiume, 24 Oct. 1919, quoted in Ledeen, *The First Duce*, p. 120.

¹¹ Ledeen, *The First Duce*, p. 116.

¹² *New York Times*, 20 Apr. 1920.

3.2. D'Annunzio & the Irish Republic

To further these ambitious plans, the Fiume Command sanctioned a number of diplomatic missions. Seeking out representatives of the nations marginalised by Versailles, D'Annunzio's heralds travelled throughout Italy and beyond. On 15 April 1920, one such diplomatic mission arrived at the Pontifical Irish College in Rome.¹³ This institution would play a crucial role in the coming months, for, repeating the role that it played during the World War, when it effectively acted as an interface between Irish nationalism and the Curia, the College authorities would prove to be the mainstays of a very successful Sinn Féin Vatican strategy.¹⁴ The emissaries from Fiume, however, were not interested in this aspect of the Irish diplomatic mission. Instead, they intended to interview the future President of Ireland, Seán T. O'Kelly, who was resident in the College at the time. The Fiumans already knew O'Kelly because of his work at the Peace Conference. Throughout 1919, the Sinn Féin rooms at the Grand Hotel Paris had hosted frequent *soirées* for the representatives of the other disaffected nationalities who had gathered in the French capital.¹⁵ Included amongst the regular guests was one Tommaso Antongini, an intimate friend (and later biographer) of D'Annunzio, who had been despatched to Paris in the immediate aftermath of the annexation.¹⁶ On this occasion, however, O'Kelly was unable to meet the Fiumans in person. Only recently arrived from a hectic and unsuccessful spell of lobbying at Versailles, he had fallen gravely ill. The task of interviewing the Fiumans thus fell to the vice-rector of the College, Mgr Michael J. Curran.¹⁷ The messengers came armed with a grandiose proclamation. Joining 'in the analogous declaration of

¹³ 'Interviews with Mgr Michael J. Curran' (U.C.D.A., Military Notebooks of Ernie O'Malley, P17b/117).

¹⁴ For detailed accounts of the role played by the Irish College from 1914–1922, see, Jerome ann de Wiel, 'Monsignor O'Riordan, Bishop O'Dwyer and the Shaping of New Relations between Nationalist Ireland and the Vatican During World War One' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, liii (1999), pp 95–106. See also, Dermot Keogh, 'The Papacy, the Bishops and the Anglo–Irish War, 1919–1921' in idem, *The Vatican, the bishops and Irish Politics 1919–1939* (Cambridge, 1986), pp 29–76.

¹⁵ Various papers relating to the Paris Peace Conference (N.L.I., O'Kelly papers, Ms. 27,690).

¹⁶ Antongini, *Life of Gabriele D'Annunzio*, p. 156.

¹⁷ Mgr M. J. Curran, 'Witness Statement' (B.M.H., WS 687).

the Irish Republic’ and denouncing the League of Nations as a tool of the British Empire, the proclamation, which was actually penned by the American communist-playwright, Henry Furst, railed against London for ‘inflicting upon Ireland, upon Egypt and upon India the most cruel and wicked yoke’.¹⁸ Having divested themselves of this document, the Fiumans—in a manner that Curran described as being ‘so enthusiastic as to be unreasonable’—held forth on the revolutionary plans then hatching in Dalmatia.¹⁹ Somewhat farcically, these designs included a plan to despatch ‘a Battalion of Volunteers ... [who] ... were anxious to go and fight in guerrilla warfare against England’.²⁰ Imagining that the Fiumans intended to travel to Ireland dressed in the same apparel as the emissaries that sat before him—the visitors to the Irish College wore extravagant military uniforms replete with flowing capes and sheathed daggers—it took Curran more than an hour to dissuade his guests from this latter venture. In so doing, the diminutive clergyman revealed the keen mind of an armchair strategist:

I could not confess to them that, as ecclesiastics, the Irish College could not organise a revolutionary invasion, even to help the duly elected government of Ireland; but I pointed out to them the obstacles which made their proposition impractical, dwelling on the impossibility of their carrying on effective warfare in present circumstances owing to the difficulties of language and the impossibility of foreigners like them passing undetected from place to place in Ireland, as would be essential.²¹

The limited military value of Fiuman irregulars notwithstanding, Curran urged his guests to pursue their plans with Seán T. O’Kelly. Consequently, some weeks later the convalescing diplomat received a personal letter from D’Annunzio. Although the letter in question has not survived, it is apparent that, on the proviso that the Irish signed up to the League of Fiume,

¹⁸ The Bureau of Military History holds the original proclamation; see, ‘Irish National Activities in Rome, 1918–1921’ (ibid., M. J. Curran documents, C.D. 131). Furst’s authorship was acknowledged by Seán T. O’Kelly in his biographical account of the troubles, see, Seán T. O’Kelly, *Scéal a Bheatha ó 1916–1923 / Á insint ag Seán T. Ó Kelly; in eagar ag Pádraig Ó Fiannachta* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1972), p. 136.

¹⁹ Curran, ‘Witness Statement’ (B.M.H., WS 687); cf. Ó Kelly, *Scéal a Bheatha Ó 1916–1923*, p. 136.

²⁰ ‘Interviews with Mgr Michael J. Curran’ (U.C.D.A., Military Notebooks of Ernie O’Malley, P17b/117).

²¹ Curran, ‘Witness Statement’ (B.M.H., WS 687).

D'Annunzio offered to provide the I.R.A. with a portion of the weapons previously bound for Russia.²² This offer presented the Dáil government with something of a dilemma. O'Kelly, his clerical collaborators in Rome and their political superiors in Dublin immediately recognised that public association with D'Annunzio and the League of Fiume would be highly damaging to Irish interests. There were several objections to the proposed alliance. In the first instance, the cornerstone of Fiuman foreign policy was opposition to the expansion of Anglo–American influence.²³ The Irish obviously voiced no objection to any organisation opposed to Great Britain. However, even though President Woodrow Wilson's negative attitude to Irish national aspirations had caused enormous resentment at the time, the Dáil government was not prepared to place itself in open opposition to the United States.²⁴ Moreover, the rector of the Irish College, Mgr John Hagan, was not unique in identifying similarities between D'Annunzio's actions in Dalmatia and events in pre-war Ulster. Writing for the *Catholic Bulletin* in January 1920, Hagan, by tersely advising that 'D'Annunzio in his Fiume adventure obviously followed Carsonite models', made it quite clear that he saw no difference between Ulster's illegal resistance to the onset of Home Rule and the forcible seizure of Fiume.²⁵ Finally, and perhaps most importantly, D'Annunzio was a notorious anti-clerical whose reputation for profanity, the parodying of religious symbolism (Gabriele D'Annunzio meaning Gabriel of the Annunciation, his real name was Gaetano Rapagnetta) and violent attacks upon the Catholic Church itself, had spread far beyond the shores of Italy. For example, the influential journal of the Irish province of Jesuits, *Studies*, which produced a biographical survey of D'Annunzio just weeks prior to the visitation to the Irish College, described the poet-orator in Dalmatia as a disreputable blasphemer, pornographer and megalomaniac.²⁶ Because the Roman Curia

²² Seán T. O'Kelly to Arthur Griffith, 18 June 1920 (N.A.I., DFA, ES, Paris 1920).

²³ Ledeen, *The First Duce*, p.180.

²⁴ On Irish antipathy toward President Wilson, see, T. H. Burbage, 'President Wilson and His Friends' in the *Catholic Bulletin*, viii, no. 1 (Jan. 1918), pp 25–31; cf. P. S. O'Hegarty, 'The Significance of Woodrow Wilson' in *Studies*, xiii, no. 49 (Mar. 1924), pp 129–30.

²⁵ Stannous (pseudo.), 'Notes From Rome' in the *Catholic Bulletin*, x, no. 1 (Jan. 1920), p.14.

²⁶ A. I. (pseudo.), 'Gabriele D'Annunzio' in *Studies*, ix, no. 33 (Mar. 1920), pp 134–6.

shared a similar low opinion of D'Annunzio, Sinn Féin was never going to compromise its efforts to keep Pope Benedict XV onside by openly associating the Republic with such a well-known and inveterate enemy of the Vatican.

The hard-pressed I.R.A., on the other hand, desperately wanted to access the Fiuman arsenal.²⁷ The Irish therefore decided upon a policy of prevarication. Advising Arthur Griffith that he intended to give D'Annunzio 'a non-committal answer' about the League of Fiume, O'Kelly revealed that he was nevertheless pursuing the prospect of obtaining Fiuman arms.²⁸ The man chosen for this sensitive task was the Genoese based Dáil Éireann consular and commercial agent for Italy, Dónal Hales. A native of Bandon, Co. Cork, and thus well known to Michael Collins, Hales' siblings, Tom, Seán and William, were all leading I.R.A. men.²⁹ Fully informed as to the ferocity of the fighting in Munster, he therefore pursued his task with an intensity born of concern for his family and friends at home. Hales was bitterly disappointed, however, to learn that the Fiumans had quickly lost interest in the Irish cause. For several reasons, the prospective League of Fiume had failed to become a reality. In the first instance, the project was fatally undermined by D'Annunzio's inability to convince the international left of his *bona fide* commitment to the cause of anti-imperialism (indeed, attempts to achieve Soviet recognition ended in abject failure).³⁰ Secondly, by appealing to Islamic separatists, D'Annunzio had caused considerable distress amongst his original band of nationalistic followers.³¹ Nor did the nefarious behaviour of the Egyptians encourage D'Annunzio to oppose anti-Islamic prejudice with any great conviction. On the strength of commitments that they likewise never intended to honour, emissaries from Cairo had recently made off with a large portion of the

²⁷ Tom Hales to Florence O'Donoghue, 15 June 1953 (N.L.I., O'Donoghue papers, Ms. 31,421)

²⁸ Seán T. O'Kelly to Arthur Griffith, 18 June 1920 (N.A.I., DFA, ES, Paris 1920).

²⁹ See, Maurice Cronin, 'Hales, Seán' in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009); idem, 'Hales, Thomas', *ibid.*; Dónal Hales 'Witness Statement' (B.M.H., WS 292).

³⁰ Ledeen, *The First Duce*, p. 179.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Persia's rifles.³² Therefore, when confronted with the emissary of an Irish Republic that refused to afford him public recognition, D'Annunzio was less inclined to be philanthropic with the remainder of the weapons at his disposal. Aggrieved at the two-faced posturing of his prospective allies, he instead abandoned his plans for the League of Fiume. Hoarding the remainder of his stockpile, from late May 1920, D'Annunzio concentrated on fomenting revolt in the neighbouring Kingdom of Yugoslavia, while at the same time earnestly plotting for a future March on Rome.³³

3.3. The role played by Mussolini

Despite this setback, the plot to acquire Italian arms now took a spectacular new twist. In July 1920, Dónal Hales made contact with a group of regular Italian Army Officers, who, identifying themselves as sympathetic to the Irish Republic, offered to satisfy the military requirements of the I.R.A.³⁴ According to Liam Ó Briain, whose position as Professor of Romance Languages at U.C.G. enabled him to travel to Italy and thus act as a liaison between Michael Collins and Dónal Hales, the officers revealed that captured Austrian equipment abounded in Italian military depots. As these weapons were then being decommissioned, it was suggested to Hales that, if the Irish were willing to pay a fair price, and themselves find a means of removing the arms from Italy, the Italian War Ministry should have no objection to providing the I.R.A. with a shipment of weapons disguised as 'scrap metal for some Jew in Amsterdam or Oslo.'³⁵

Unsure what to make of this offer, and anxious to obtain D'Annunzio's opinion on the merits of the officers concerned, Collins and O'Kelly enlisted the help of Annie Vivanti. Of German–Italian parentage, Vivanti was married to another Collins confidante and Sinn Féin activist, John Chartres, who would go on to

³² Ibid., p. 178; O'Kelly to Arthur Griffith, 18 June 1920 (N.A.I., DFA, ES, Paris 1920).

³³ Ledeen, *The First Duce*, pp 180–6. Over the summer of 1920, the Fiumans provided Albanian, Croatian and Montenegrin separatists with a combined sum of 27,000 guns, 20 million rounds of ammunition, and 11,000,000 Lire.

³⁴ Dónal Hales, 'Witness Statement' (B.M.H., WS 292).

enter Republican lore as the hated “Mystery Man of the Anglo–Irish Treaty”.³⁶ Alongside Seán T. O’Kelly and George Gavan Duffy, Vivanti had been the mainstay of the Sinn Féin office in Paris.³⁷ Arriving in Italy in late 1919, she continued to demonstrate her propaganda value by disseminating pro-Irish articles in the German, Swiss and Italian press.³⁸ Most importantly, as a renowned author in her own right and a well-respected member of the Italian literati, Vivanti had moved in the same pre-war social circles as Gabriele D’Annunzio. Indeed, Vivanti and D’Annunzio had forged a strong personal relationship, and when she wrote to the *Commandante* in early August, he quickly abandoned the reluctance that had marked his previous dealings with Dónal Hales. Once again waxing lyrical on the nobleness of Irish independence, D’Annunzio was optimistic that the proposed enterprise with the Italian military would be successful. Moreover, to speed the project along, he suggested that Vivanti and her Sinn Féin colleagues should approach a Milanese based radical whose own political star was then in the ascendancy. According to D’Annunzio, the man best placed to broker a deal with the military authorities was Benito Mussolini, whose Black Shirts were at that time collaborating with the forces of the state in violent clashes against the orthodox Italian left.³⁹

On 20 August 1920, Vivanti and O’Kelly travelled to meet Mussolini at the Fascist headquarters in Milan.⁴⁰ As later revealed by O’Kelly, accessing the future dictator was no easy task, for the duo first had to negotiate a *cordon sanitaire* of barbed wire and armed guards.⁴¹ Yet Mussolini was by now familiar with the Irish in Italy. In his capacity as editor of the Fascist daily newspaper *Il Popolo d’Italia*, he had invested a considerable amount of political capital in the Irish question. Courtesy of Dónal Hales and Michael

³⁵ Liam Ó Briain, ‘Witness Statement’ (ibid., WS 7).

³⁶ See, Brian P. Murphy, *John Chartres: Mystery Man of the Treaty* (Dublin, 1995).

³⁷ Seán T. O’Kelly to Éamon de Valera, 24 May 1919 (N.A.I., Gavan Duffy papers, 1125/13).

³⁸ Dáil Éireann Report on Foreign Affairs, 19 Aug. 1919 (ibid., Dáil Éireann (DE), 2/269).

³⁹ O’Kelly, *Scéal a Bheatha ó 1916–1923*, p. 134.

⁴⁰ O’Kelly to Diarmuid O’Hegarty, 16 Sept. 1920 (N.A.I., DFA, ES, Paris 1920).

⁴¹ O’Kelly, *Scéal a Bheatha ó 1916–1923*, p. 134.

Collins, the Fascist leader had ready access to the Sinn Féin wartime newssheet, the *Irish Bulletin*.⁴² Moreover, Annie Vivanti, and indeed, the rector of the Irish College, Mgr John Hagan, provided extra articles that pilloried British policy in Ireland.⁴³ Editorial commentary eulogising Sinn Féin at the expense of the British complemented this propaganda.⁴⁴ Yet Mussolini's pronouncements were rhetorical and tactical rather than genuine. His journalistic approach to the Irish Question reflected the catch-all intent of early Fascism. Embracing the Irish Republic simultaneously appealed to Italian left-wing sentiment whilst exploiting conservative and nationalist frustration at the perceived "treachery" of Great Britain at Versailles. Grandiose statements on international affairs—for Mussolini's personal contributions repeatedly treated with the various social upheavals and international conflicts then affecting post-war Europe—also sought to create the impression of a "statesman in waiting".⁴⁵ His insincere motives notwithstanding, Mussolini expressed unbounded enthusiasm for the proposed gunrunning venture. Always eager to impress, for the benefit of his guests he dictated a letter to D'Annunzio, wherein he promised to not only facilitate Irish interaction with the Italian military, but also to cover the financial costs associated with the enterprise.⁴⁶

Following Mussolini's assurances, the plot to obtain Italian arms now moved forward in earnest. At some point in the autumn of 1920, an unidentified General, acting on behalf of the Italian War Ministry, invited Dónal Hales to travel to Rome in order to meet with senior government officials.⁴⁷ Informed of this development, the Dublin authorities decided to send an emissary to Italy.

⁴² Hales, 'Witness Statement' (B.M.H., WS 292).

⁴³ When still a seminarian, the future Rector of the College during the Second World War, Mgr Denis McDaid, used to act as courier for Hagan, delivering articles to a Pisan clergyman who then relayed them to the offices of *Il Popolo d'Italia*. See, Keogh, *The Vatican, the bishops and Irish Politics, 1919–1939*, pp 34, 247.

⁴⁴ For a striking example of same, see Mussolini's front-page commentary on the Terence MacSwiney hunger strike, *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 27 Aug. 1920.

⁴⁵ Mack Smith, *Mussolini*, p. 46; Bosworth, *Mussolini*, p. 132.

⁴⁶ O'Kelly, *Scéal a Bheatha Ó 1916–1923*, p. 135.

⁴⁷ Hales, 'Witness Statement' (B.M.H., WS 292).

In mid-November 1920, Seán O'Shea, a well-travelled arms sourcing agent who passed himself off as the President of a registered company calling itself the Dublin Industrial Development Association (D.I.D.A.), arrived in Genoa.⁴⁸ After a prolonged train journey, which involved an amusing encounter with the future Pope Pius XI, Hales and O'Shea arrived in the Italian capital on Saturday 20 November 1920.⁴⁹ That evening they explained the purpose of their mission to the Irish College authorities, who, without revealing the military nature of the enterprise, immediately attempted to enlist the help of a senior Vatican banker in establishing 'direct trading' between the D.I.D.A. and Genoese shipping magnates.⁵⁰ Early the next morning—a fateful date in the calendar of the Anglo–Irish War, more commonly known as Bloody Sunday—Hales and O'Shea presented themselves at the War Ministry buildings, where a 'senior civil servant', who was quite possibly the then Minister for War and future Prime Minister of Italy, Ivanoe Bonomi, interviewed them.⁵¹ The meeting was highly successful from an Irish point of view. Asking that for obvious reasons the Irish maintain complete discretion, and that they find their own means of removing the weapons from Italy, for a 'nominal' fee the Italians promised to provide the I.R.A. with some 20,000 rifles, 500 machine guns and 5,000,000 rounds of accompanying ammunition.⁵² Extremely satisfied with the outcome of this meeting, O'Shea returned to Dublin, where the I.R.A. GHQ initiated complex plans with a view to landing these weapons near Cork harbour in the late spring of 1921.

⁴⁸ Seán O'Shea, 'Witness Statement' (ibid., WS 760).

⁴⁹ Ibid.; Curran, 'Witness Statement' (ibid., WS 687). According to O'Shea, Hales and Bishop Achille Ratti discussed the complexities of the Irish language. Acknowledging that Gaelic was not one of the 'seventeen or eighteen languages under his command', the soon-to-be elected pope was pleased to repeat a few endearing phrases provided by the Sinn Féin Consul.

⁵⁰ Mgr Curran to Florence O'Donoghue, 9 June 1953 (N.L.I., O'Donoghue papers, Ms. 31,421).

⁵¹ Ibid. Bonomi was the penultimate Prime Minister ousted by Mussolini in 1922, and the first elected Prime Minister of the post-Fascist era.

⁵² Neither Hales nor O'Shea have left an informative account of the meeting itself. The figures given are derived from the plans made by the Munster I.R.A. to land the weapons in the spring of 1921. See, 'Statement by Patrick O'Driscoll, O.C., Myross Company and Vice O.C. Skibbereen Battalion, re projected landing of arms from Italy, 1920–1921' (N.L.I., O'Donoghue papers, Ms. 31,421); cf. Ernie O'Malley, *On Another Man's Wound* (Dublin, 2002), p. 344; cf. Meda Ryan, *Tom Barry: I.R.A. Freedom Fighter* (Cork, 2003), p. 113.

3.4. D'Annunzio for Ireland?

As these events unfolded, the Irish in Italy thought nothing other than that they were collaborating with a cadre of corrupt officers and officials, who, smarting over British duplicity at Versailles, had espied an opportunity to line their pockets by selling untraceable Austrian weapons. However, given what we now know of the intrigues between Rome and Milan over the future of D'Annunzian Fiume, it is more likely that the intricacies of high politics, rather than corruption, best explain the extraordinary involvement of the Italian War Ministry. When placed in the context of international developments that presaged an imminent change in the status of the Fiuman city-state, it is apparent that the Irish military enterprise complemented a grand design to sideline an increasingly menacing and erratic Gabriele D'Annunzio.

By the late autumn of 1920, clandestine negotiations between Rome and Belgrade toward the First Treaty of Rapallo, a bilateral accord designed to end Italian–Yugoslav rivalry in the Adriatic, had reached an advanced stage. Under the secret provisions of Rapallo, Fiume was to become a demilitarised Free City along the lines of Danzig in Poland.⁵³ As such, should D'Annunzio reject the proposed agreement it would become a question of when, not if, the Italian military would be deployed against the Fiume Command. To forestall any violent opposition to the diplomatic checkmate, the chief architect of the Rapallo agreement, who happened to be none other than the Minister for War, Ivanoe Bonomi, had kept a close counsel with D'Annunzio's superficial ally in Milan, Benito Mussolini. It was only natural that the ambitious Mussolini should support the Italian government in its manoeuvrings against D'Annunzio. Journalistically he may have pledged his full moral support for 'the Hero' in Fiume, but Mussolini dreaded the prospect of a D'Annunzian led *coup d'état*.⁵⁴ With Fascist violence proceeding unopposed, and with D'Annunzio ensconced in Fiume for well nigh a year, by the autumn of 1920

⁵³ H. S. Hughes, 'The Early Diplomacy of Italian Fascism, 1922–1932' in G. Graig & F. Gilbert (eds), *The Diplomats, 1919–1939* (2 vols, Princeton, 1953), ii, 213.

⁵⁴ Christopher Duggan, *The Force of Destiny: A History of Italy Since 1796* (2nd ed., London,

Mussolini had begun to emerge as a political demagogue in his own right. Calculating that his time had not yet come, and sensing an opportunity to undermine the credibility of his rival, he thus privately agreed not to dispute the rapprochement with Belgrade, and connived with the Italian government as it made determined attempts to bribe D'Annunzio into leaving Fiume voluntarily.⁵⁵ Considered from this angle, then, the intrigues on behalf of the I.R.A. appear calculated to pander to D'Annunzio's wider interests in advance of Rapallo. If so, it is also probable that Bonomi and Mussolini anticipated that, post-Rapallo, the Irish might provide them with lasting relief from their mutual problem. Given that the *Commandante* was a self-proclaimed man of action with an insatiable thirst for adventure and publicity, there was every possibility that a deflated D'Annunzio might join the gunrunning expedition to Ireland, thereby removing himself from Italy altogether.

This hypothesis would seem to have been borne out by subsequent events. Unmoved by bribes, convinced that the Italian troops would never take up arms against him and completely ignoring the sensibilities of Fiume's inhabitants, in early December a desperate D'Annunzio declared war upon the Kingdom of Italy. The hostilities were short-lived. A naval bombardment on Christmas Eve 1920, in which D'Annunzio himself suffered an injury, finally brought the Fiuman experiment to something of an ignominious end.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, having obtained a quick and largely bloodless victory, and anxious not to appear overly vindictive towards Italy's greatest war hero, the authorities in Rome granted a general amnesty to the defeated garrison. D'Annunzio himself remained in Fiume for some weeks to recuperate, from whence, amidst widespread rumours that he was destined for Ireland or some other troubled part of the British Empire, he retreated to his villa on the shores of Lake Garda.⁵⁷

2008), p. 420.

⁵⁵ Ledeen, *The First Duce*, p. 194; Bosworth, *Mussolini*, p. 148; Morgan, *Italian Fascism*, p. 30.

⁵⁶ *Irish Times*, 28 Dec. 1920.

⁵⁷ *New York Times*, 31 Dec. 1920

Plans for the Irish military enterprise, meanwhile, had reached an advanced stage. In December of 1920, the republican leadership selected a Cork officer with sea-faring experience, Cmdt Michael Leahy, to travel to Italy.⁵⁸ Travelling incognito as a clerical student bound for Rome, Leahy arrived in Genoa on 28 March 1921, where he was pleased to discover that Dónal Hales, operating in tandem with a group of former Fiuman Legionnaires, had all but finalised arrangements for removing the arms from Italy.⁵⁹ That resourceful revolutionary mariner, Giuseppe Giulietti, had resolved the challenging task of transporting the weapons to Ireland. The Maritime Workers Union owned a fleet of five vessels, and it provided one of these ships, an aged sailing collier by the name of the *Stella Maris*, for the enterprise. Normally travelling outbound to Newcastle in ballast, on her next voyage Leahy and his Italian crew planned to sail the ship south to Rome and the mouth of the Tiber where she was to take aboard her military cargo. At this point, it appears that the only issue preventing the scheme from reaching a successful conclusion was a question of finance. Although the official at the War Ministry had indicated that the Irish would only have to pay a nominal sum for the captured Austrian weapons, it appears that by the spring of 1921, the Italians were demanding approximately £10,000.⁶⁰ Mussolini had evidently reneged on his previous assurances, and the cost involved gave Dublin serious pause for thought. Nevertheless, indicating that funds would be forthcoming, Michael Collins instructed Dónal Hales to bide his time until the Irish found a suitable means of transferring the money to Genoa.⁶¹

With the initiative stalled, Hales and Leahy embarked upon an impromptu tour of northern Italy. Travelling in the company of a trio of former Fiuman

⁵⁸ Coogan, *Michael Collins*, p. 170.

⁵⁹ Statement by Michael Leahy to Florrie O'Donoghue, c. 1951 (N.L.I., O'Donoghue papers, Ms. 31,421); Captain G. Frungoni to Dónal Hales (statement of expenses for procuring arms), 26 Mar. 1921 (C.C.C.A., Hales papers, U53).

⁶⁰ Hales, 'Witness Statement' (B.M.H., WS 292).

Legionnaires, including a certain Captain Frungoni, a confidante of D’Annunzio’s and a veteran of the Boer War who was imbued with a fanatical hatred of all things English, the Sinn Féin duo first travelled to Milan where they met with Annie Vivanti and associates of an apologetic Benito Mussolini, who was electioneering elsewhere. From there the party travelled to Brescia and onwards to the shores of Lake Garda, where the recently vanquished D’Annunzio entertained them. Although no exact record of what transpired at this meeting has survived, it is likely that discussions revolved around the prospective Fiuman Expeditionary Force that had astonished Mgr Curran a year previously. Interviewed by Ernie O’Malley and Florence O’Donoghue many years after the events in question, Leahy revealed that Frungoni and his companions pleaded with the Irish to facilitate Fiuman volunteers aboard the *Stella Maris*.⁶² Moreover, the records of the Dáil Éireann Department of External Affairs offer conclusive proof that D’Annunzio himself was toying with the idea of reappearing in Ireland as the feted benefactor of the I.R.A. In a letter dated 11 March 1921, the Sinn Féin “Roving Envoy” in Europe and future signatory to the Anglo–Irish Treaty, George Gavan Duffy, informed his superiors in Dublin that Hales was:

... in touch with some of D’Annunzio’s people, who tell me the poet wants a new field and thinks of Ireland, India and Egypt. On the whole, his help in Italy would be good, though it would offend some elements, is he to be seen hereon and encouraged? ... He is by a long way the biggest figure in Italy, and he is popular for what he did at Fiume, in spite of having outstayed his welcome there ... He is now bitterly against the King for firing him out of Fiume and signing the Treaty of Rapallo ... If there is anything doing in this direction, I think I should go to him with a written invitation from the DÁIL.⁶³

Unfortunately for D’Annunzio—and one must suspect for Mussolini and the Italian government also—this suggestion was not taken up by the then Minister for External Affairs, President Éamon de Valera. No more prepared to countenance a public alliance with D’Annunzio than he had been some

⁶¹ Michael Collins to Dónal Hales, 7 Mar. 1921, (C.C.C.A., Hales papers, U53).

⁶² Statement by Michael Leahy (N.L.I., O’Donoghue papers, Ms. 31,421); ‘Interviews with Michael Leahy’ (U.C.D.A., Military Notebooks of Ernie O’Malley, P17/B/117).

⁶³ George Gavan Duffy to Robert Brennan, 11 Mar. 1921 (N.A.I., DFA, ES, box 33, file 232).

twelve months previously, de Valera, through the discreet channel provided by Gavan Duffy, instead tried to persuade D'Annunzio to try his luck in Moscow, and from there to emulate Alexander the Great by marching on India.⁶⁴ Highly inventive in terms of how best to subvert the British Empire, the President's plans for D'Annunzio nevertheless required the important caveat, deftly applied by his secretary, Robert Brennan, that De Valera 'means this more seriously than may appear on the surface'.⁶⁵

Whether de Valera's fantastic suggestion restored, or indeed further humbled, D'Annunzio's pride must remain a matter for speculation. The prospective gunrunning operation collapsed within a few short weeks of Leahy's arrival in Italy. Upon learning (via the Irish wife of the British Consul and her priest friends at the miniscule, but staunchly nationalist, Irish College Genoa) that the Royal Navy was keeping a watchful eye out for the *Stella Maris*, Michael Collins aborted the mission.⁶⁶ Collins was quick to point the finger of blame at Michael Leahy for failing to exercise proper discretion, but exactly how the British intelligence services uncovered the plot remains something of a mystery.⁶⁷ In the interests of protecting his own intelligence gathering operations, Collins also instructed Hales to remain tight-lipped about why the Irish had abandoned the enterprise. Hales rigidly observed this instruction until his deposition to the Bureau of Military History in 1953. Thus, rumours and innuendo, including tales of Cabinet level treachery about the failure to procure Italian weapons, abounded within the Munster I.R.A. for months and years to come.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Robert Brennan to George Gavan Duffy, 1 Apr. 1921 (ibid., Gavan Duffy papers, 1125/19).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Hales, 'Witness Statement', (B.M.H., WS 292).

⁶⁷ Coogan, *Michael Collins*, p. 171.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

3.5. The Corfu Crisis of 1923: background

Notwithstanding Mussolini's lacklustre performance in support of D'Annunzian Fiume, foreign policy and military expansion would become key activities of the Fascist state.⁶⁹ Personally assuming the foreign portfolio in late 1922, Mussolini proved himself vain, erratic, and incapable of distinguishing between his own prestige and Italian national interest. In short, he amounted to something of a diplomatic gambler. Enthralled by the exhilarating game of Great Power diplomacy, from the second decade of the Fascist era he steered his regime on a ruinous course of international misadventure.⁷⁰ This outcome was perhaps inevitable, for, contrary to the effusions of the early Fascist press, Mussolini came to power with little real knowledge of foreign affairs. In fact, until his domestic position was secure, the Roman Question resolved, and the foreign policy successes of Nazi Germany emerged to deflate Italian national pride, Mussolini generally left the career diplomats to their own devices. Throughout the 1920s, therefore, caution, subtlety and respectability largely defined the various Fascist foreign policy initiatives.⁷¹ Intended to revise the Peace Treaties and undermine the ascendancy of Italy's wartime allies, Italian diplomacy at this time seldom affected Irish commentators (the aforementioned Alfred O'Rahilly being an obvious exception) or the small cadre of officials tasked with conducting Irish foreign policy. Understaffed, underfunded and even under threat of extinction for much of the 1920s,⁷² the Free State Department of External Affairs, broadly speaking, concentrated instead on constitutional developments within a rapidly changing British Empire.⁷³

As such, the Corfu Crisis of 1923 was somewhat atypical of early Fascist diplomacy. In August of that year, near the Greek town of Janina, a group of unknown assailants murdered an Italian General and several of his assistant

⁶⁹ Clark, *Modern Italy*, p. 280.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ H. S. Hughes, 'The Early Diplomacy of Italian Fascism', pp 219–27.

⁷² 'Introduction' to Ronan Fanning, Michael Kennedy, Dermot Keogh, & Eunan O'Halpin (eds.), *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy, Vol. III, 1926–1932* (Dublin, 2002), p. xiii.

compatriots, all of whom were part of an Allied commission attempting to define the post-war frontier between Albania and Greece.⁷⁴ Because the murders occurred on Greek territory, Mussolini immediately despatched an ultimatum to the Athens government.⁷⁵ Widely condemned as no less harsh than the infamous Austro-Hungarian note to Serbia of 1914, Italian demands ranged from a series of ceremonies and investigations intended to humiliate the Greek authorities, to the immediate payment of a fifty million Lire indemnity.⁷⁶ When the Greeks disclaimed responsibility for the murders, and thus rejected the most humiliating aspects of the ultimatum, Mussolini had a convenient pretext to implement contingency plans laid some months beforehand. With his navy already at a state of war readiness because of strained relations with Athens over the disputed sovereignty of the Dodecanese Islands, he promptly ordered the occupation of Corfu.⁷⁷ The operation itself was inefficiently conducted and excessively violent. Involving a naval bombardment that resulted in the deaths of sixteen Greek child-refugees from Turkish Armenia, the attack on Corfu pushed the Janina murders firmly into the background and led to an international outcry against the Fascist regime.⁷⁸

Significantly, from an Irish perspective, as both Greece and Italy were member states, the Corfu Crisis provided the inaugural test case of the League of Nations.⁷⁹ Yet Mussolini's response to possible League intervention was swift and negative. Believing that the honour and vital interests of his country could not suffer the indignity of judgement by ill-informed, distant statelets, he denied that the League held any jurisdiction in the affair.⁸⁰ The analogous

⁷³ For relevant texts, see above, p. 9, n. 22.

⁷⁴ Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, p. 670.

⁷⁵ Mack Smith, *Modern Italy*, p. 383.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁷⁷ C. J. Lowe & F. Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy 1870–1940* (Boston & London, 1973), pp 194–5. Ethnically Greek, the Dodecanese had been occupied by the Italians during the Turco–Italian War of 1912.

⁷⁸ Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Foreign Policy*, p. 105.

⁷⁹ Lowe & Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy*, p. 196.

⁸⁰ Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, p. 671.

Franco–Belgian invasion of the Ruhr facilitated this strategy. Whereas Great Britain was initially prepared to act as the League’s champion, France was loath to allow any interference lest it should undermine her position in relation to Germany.⁸¹ Supported by the French, Mussolini soon convinced the British that asserting League jurisdiction was too high a price to pay for continued good relations with Fascist Italy.⁸² A compromise agreement thus emerged. Simultaneous to their appeal to the League of Nations, the Greeks had formally protested to the Conference of Ambassadors. Established in 1920, the Conference of Ambassadors was essentially the old Allied Supreme War Council continued under another name. The Greeks protested to this body because it had appointed the Albanian frontier commission in the first place. Reacting to the Greek protest, Britain and France ensured that the Conference claimed refereeing rights over the Graeco–Italian dispute. This development entailed certain advantages for Mussolini. Unlike the League Council, the Conference of Ambassadors was not obliged to conduct its affairs in public, nor did it incorporate smaller nations likely to sympathise with the Greeks. Consequently, Mussolini (albeit reluctantly) agreed to accept arbitration from this quarter. Largely impotent, the League could do little but camouflage obvious failings by incorporating the Great Power investigation into its own deliberations.⁸³

3.6. Mixed Irish attitudes toward the League of Nations

Irish commentators, meanwhile, troubled themselves over the severity of the Italian action at Corfu. The most forthright in this regard was the editor of the *Irish Independent*, Timothy Harrington. One aspect of the Fascist case that particularly upset Harrington was Mussolini’s contention that because the Greek government of the day was itself founded upon an act of revolution, Athens had not the right of appeal to the League of Nations.⁸⁴ For Harrington,

⁸¹ Cassels, *Mussolini’s Early Diplomacy*, p. 110.

⁸² John Spencer-Bassett, *The League of Nations: a chapter in world politics* (New York, 1928), p. 220.

⁸³ Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, p. 672.

⁸⁴ In November 1922 the Greek army staged a *coup d’état*. This revolution involved the

the Italian Premier's posturing on these grounds was intolerable hypocrisy. Still sensitive to the possible alternative outcome of the recent Irish Civil War, he denounced as vulgar the insurrectionary origins of both governments. Acknowledging that 'people concerned for stable government and the reign of order' could 'hold no brief for the title of the present Greek government', he reserved his harshest words for the Fascist leader:

Signor Mussolini declines to accept the authority of the League of Nations ... on the grounds that the Greek government is founded on revolution ... But why should Signor Mussolini tell us these things? On what does the Italian government rest except on revolution? And how does the fact that Greece had a revolution put her outside the pale of the League any more than Mussolini's Fascist revolution absolves Italy from her obligation to the League Covenant?⁸⁵

Indeed, the anti-Mussolini position then adopted by Harrington was so severe that it drew a concerned response from some of his regular readers. For example, J. M. Hogg, 2nd Baron of Magheramorne and member of the House of Commons in London, complained about Harrington's tendency to equate Fascism with *Italianità*. Hogg, demonstrating a certain naivety (or perhaps mischievousness) about the Catholic sensibilities of the southern Irish, argued that 'What Signor Mussolini does and says ... is not necessarily what all Italy thinks. Let us not, then, deal out Jedburgh justice to the land of Garibaldi, to a land where reverence is still done to the name of Gladstone'.⁸⁶ Whatever respect Gladstone enjoyed in Ireland, the introduction of the notoriously anti-clerical Garibaldi, a reviled figure owing to his role in the *Risorgimento*, was a poor choice of tonic for Harrington and his target audience. Yet Fascist Italy was not the sole object of Harrington's ire. Appalled by the affront done to the League of Nations, the tardy response of the international community also gave rise to much foreboding. From the very onset of the crisis, the *Irish Independent* refused to compromise on the necessity of League intervention.

summary trial and execution of several members of the former cabinet. Shocked by these events, Britain and France withdrew their ambassadors. Mussolini followed the Anglo-French lead, meaning that, at the onset of the Corfu crisis, none of the Allied Powers formally recognised the Athens government.

⁸⁵ *Irish Independent*, 3 Sept. 1923.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 12 Sept. 1923.

Explaining that ‘Mussolini must be held to his bond if Europe is not again to be thrown into the welter of war’,⁸⁷ Harrington repeatedly invoked Article XVI of the League Covenant, which bound member states to regard any state declaring war on another signatory state as having declared war on them all.⁸⁸ Demanding a ‘reign of European law rather than of Fascist sword play’, he warned that if the League allowed ‘its authority openly to be flouted, then it should close its costly offices at Geneva and give up the pretence of being an international tribunal with covenants, sanctions and the rest’.⁸⁹

The *Irish Independent* reflected a latent Irish scepticism with regard to international affairs. In particular, Irish opinion regarded the League of Nations with a great deal of uncertainty. Mirroring the concerns of Catholic lobbyists across Europe, Irish commentators lamented the League’s refusal to involve the Holy See in its deliberations. Indeed, as testified by influential political commentators such as Mgr Michael Cronin and Prof. Michael Tierney (both of U.C.D.), from an Irish perspective, the pope’s exclusion somewhat invalidated the League.⁹⁰ A longing to incorporate the Catholic Church into the machinery of Geneva aside, nationalist Ireland had not forgotten that the architects of the League had snubbed the representatives of the Republic in 1919. Obtaining recognition and succour from the League had been perhaps the key strategy of the Sinn Féin party.⁹¹ A massive contributing factor to the subsequent ascendancy of the physical force tradition, this failure left a lasting sense of rancour and popularised the belief that the League itself was simply a front for British imperialism.

Yet there was not a complete absence of goodwill towards the League. Far from it: at the time that the Corfu crisis broke upon the world, Irish

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 3, 4, 6 Sept. 1923.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 3, 5 Sept. 1923.

⁹⁰ Michael Cronin, ‘The League of Nations Covenant’ in *Studies*, viii, no. 29 (Mar. 1919), pp 19–34; cf. Michael Tierney, ‘Some thoughts on the League of Nations’, *ibid.*, xxv, no. 98 (June 1936), pp 226–38. See also, file entitled ‘The Holy See and membership of the League of Nations’ (N.A.I., DFA, LN/81).

representatives were en-route to Geneva to rubber-stamp the Free State's accession to the organisation. However, the debates surrounding the prospective membership of the Free State indicate that the language of idealism that accompanied the League's advent elsewhere, rarely overcame even its most committed Irish supporters.⁹² Rather, as opposed to critics who believed that the League was primarily a talking shop with little real prospect of overturning Great Power hegemony, pragmatic supporters emphasised that membership promised much in terms of future Anglo-Irish developments. This faction looked to the League as a means of consolidating Ireland's international status separate from Great Britain. Supporters also expected the League to serve as a deterrent against possible future British aggression (hence, perhaps, the severity of Harrington's censures in favour of collective security), and as a medium through which to influence international opinion in the event of any dispute with London over the findings of the forthcoming Boundary Commission.⁹³ Nor were League advocates blind to the unfair division of power at Geneva: they simply viewed this setback as temporary, and therefore academic. As explained by one commentator in the Department of External Affairs, with the Ruhr controversy signalling the 'inevitable' breakdown of the *Entente*, the league 'was almost certain to gather strength as the one real international organisation still existing'.⁹⁴ To this mindset, 'the League stood to be altered radically and changed into some better association'; consequently, refusal to join did 'not mean a position of influence, but a position of isolation in which she [the Free State] can be completely ignored'.⁹⁵

3.7. Irish republicans support Mussolini

Republicans remained unconvinced. In fact, as the crisis unfolded, the anti-treaty press delighted in the actions of Mussolini and the apparent

⁹¹ Kennedy, *Ireland and the League of Nations*, p. 19.

⁹² See, for example, *Seanad Éireann deb.*, i, 957–63 (19 Apr. 1923).

⁹³ Memorandum marked 'Secret' from Kevin O'Shiel to each member of the Executive Council, Dublin, 14 Mar. 1923 (N.A.I., DT, S3332).

⁹⁴ Memorandum by Bolton Waller on admission to the League of Nations, Dublin, 24 Mar. 1923 (ibid., DT, S3332).

⁹⁵ Ibid.

filibustering of the diplomats in Geneva. Not only did the anti-treatyites evince a bitter memory with regard to the failure of Irish lobbying at Versailles, they also laboured under the belief that Mussolini still harboured the same sympathy for the republican cause that he had demonstrated in previous times. In this regard, Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington well reflected the attitude of dominant republican opinion. An outspoken opponent of the League, she led a small group of Irish women, including Mary MacSwiney, to Geneva to preempt President Cosgrave's arrival. There the women circularised the six hundred League delegates to protest against the acceptance into their ranks of the representatives of an "illegally" constituted 'puppet State'.⁹⁶ Unsurprisingly, only republican journals supported a mission that was otherwise the subject of mirth or invective to Government delegates and the pro-treaty press.⁹⁷ Sheehy-Skeffington herself sent a series of despatches to *Sinn Féin* and *Éire* (lesser-known forerunners to *An Phoblacht*) in which she outlined her scathing disregard for the League and her apparent approval of Mussolini's mischief making.⁹⁸ Acerbically describing the goings on at Geneva, her reports were seldom concerned with the justice of the claims made by Mussolini upon Greece and Corfu:

They were getting on nicely—reforming the calendar, dealing with malaria in (I think) Albania, and the white slave traffic, making war upon obscene postcards, and regulating the hygiene of ships—when the Mussolini bomb was thrown into their midst, dear souls. And now it is not Corfu that is bombarded, it is Geneva and its ewe lamb, the League of Nations, the "one child," as a powerful American she-millionaire wailed, "that the war gave birth to." And so the poor child is sick and like to die.⁹⁹

Contempt for international politics would continue to be a staple theme in the republican press, as would a remarkable reluctance to condemn Mussolini. The aforementioned Dónal Hales was highly influential in this regard. Hales remained devoted to Mussolini, even after a brief arrest and incarceration he

⁹⁶ Michael Tierney, *Eoin MacNeill: scholar and man of action, 1867–1945* (Oxford, 1980), p. 335; *Éire*, 15 Sept. 1923.

⁹⁷ Eoin MacNeill to Agnes MacNeill, 17 Sept. 1923 (U.C.D.A., MacNeill papers, LAI/G219); *Irish Independent*, 10 Sept. 1923; *Freeman's Journal*, 19 Sept. 1923.

⁹⁸ *Sinn Féin*, 29 Sept. 1923.

⁹⁹ *Éire*, 22 Sept. 1923.

endured some months prior to the Corfu Crisis. When King George V paid a state visit to Italy in May 1923, Hales, as a likely protesting voice, suffered imprisonment for the duration. Upon his release, he wrote to Mussolini to protest against the police action. Blissfully unaware that his arrest was ordered at the highest level, Hales for many years treasured a contrite response from Mussolini (recent recipient of a K.G.C.B.) which offered the false assurance that the Genoese Chief of Police had been ‘dismissed for life’ for exceeding the bounds of his responsibilities.¹⁰⁰ As a disciple of *Ducismo*, Hales maintained an association of sorts with the Italian leader through the latter’s beloved younger brother, Arnaldo.¹⁰¹ Unofficial editor of *Il Popolo d’Italia* after the seizure of power, Arnaldo Mussolini was aware that Hales and other Irish republicans harboured fantasies of a Mussolini-led Latin alliance emerging to challenge the commercial and military might of Great Britain.¹⁰² In order to promote the belief that an essential plank of Fascism was anti-imperialism, he, like his brother before him, reproduced articles submitted by Hales, who continued to style himself the ‘Rappresentante della Repubblica d’Irlanda in Italia’.¹⁰³ Throughout the era under review (inclusive of the Saor Éire interlude),¹⁰⁴ the republican press thus paid scant regard to the darker aspects of Mussolini’s Italy. The editor of *Sinn Féin* and future President of Ireland, Erskine Hamilton Childers, was quite blunt about why this was so. Celebrating Mussolini’s open contempt for the Italian parliament in the summer of 1924,¹⁰⁵ he gleefully anticipated

... a more determined attitude on the part of the Italian government against British power in the Mediterranean, as a result of stemming the tide of opposition that threatens Fascism and all that it stands for. ... While

¹⁰⁰ File labelled ‘Arrest of Dónal Hales in Italy, May/June 1923’ (N.A.I., DT, S3114); Hales, ‘Witness Statement’ (B.M.H., WS 292); Geoffrey O’Connell to Mgr John Hagan, 11 May 1923, (P.I.C.R.A., Hagan papers, HAG 1/1923/253).

¹⁰¹ Dónal Hales to the editor of *Sinn Féin*, 1 May 1924 (B.M.H., Childers papers, C.D. 6/40/7 (e)); cf. *Sinn Féin*, 28 June 1924.

¹⁰² See, *Sinn Féin*, 28 June 1924; *ibid.*, 23 Aug. 1924.

¹⁰³ Correspondence between Dónal Hales and Frank Aiken, Aug.—Oct. 1925, (U.C.D.A., Aiken papers, P104/2568, 2569, 2570).

¹⁰⁴ That criticism of continental fascism did not accompany the advent of Saor Éire is not surprising. Faced with rival “Revolutionary Workers’ Groups” from 1930, the I.R.A. leadership only approved of Saor Éire as a matter of expediency. See, Jonathon Hammill, ‘Saor Éire and the IRA: An Exercise in Deception?’ in *Saothar*, xx (1995), pp 56–67.

¹⁰⁵ See below, pp 229–30.

we have no concern with the internal policies of a friendly state, it is in the international role which Italy, thanks to the genius of Mussolini, is now fitted to play that we take a deep interest. ... [Without Mussolini] she will be reduced to the secondary and servile international role she played as a pawn of Great Britain's before his advent to power in 1919.¹⁰⁶

3.8. The Free State delegation at Geneva

The mores of diplomacy, meanwhile, bound the Free State delegation en-route to Switzerland. As this was the first official visit abroad of members of the Irish government, the President of the Executive Council, William T. Cosgrave, led the delegation. Other members included Desmond Fitzgerald (External Affairs), Eoin MacNeill (Education), and a host of legal advisors.¹⁰⁷ Initially, there was little to suggest that the Irish diplomats shared the sense of foreboding aired by Timothy Harrington and the *Irish Independent*. Indeed, as participants in the religious celebrations at Bobbio, they tactfully refrained from referring to events in the Ionian Sea. Rather, in separate interviews granted to Reuters and the leading Italian daily, *Corriere de la Sera*, Cosgrave and Fitzgerald restricted themselves to appraising the Italian people of the necessity of keeping a recently arrested Éamon de Valera behind bars, and celebrating Ireland's first opportunity to display 'her profound duty to her national glory'.¹⁰⁸

In this context, a public thanks was relayed to Mussolini for the help and courtesy extended to the Irish party.¹⁰⁹ This gesture infuriated the Irish left, a constituency of opinion naturally hostile to Fascism (see Chapter 6). According to the organ of the Irish Transport and General Worker's Union, the *Voice of Labour*, 'Mr Cosgrave's references to M. Mussolini, while in Bobbio, might well have been more cautious and less laudatory. A man who deliberately strikes matches in such a powder magazine as the Balkans ... is

¹⁰⁶ Ed., 'Mussolini's New Policy' in *Sinn Féin*, 23 Aug. 1924, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ Report of the Irish delegation to the Fourth Assembly of the League of Nations, c. Sept. 1923 (N.A.I., DFA, 26/102).

¹⁰⁸ *Irish Independent*, 5 Sept. 1923. On 15 Aug., De Valera was arrested during a political rally in Ennis, Co. Clare.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

not exactly a fit person for adulation'.¹¹⁰ To emphasise the point, this advice appeared under a front-page cartoon of Cosgrave, dressed in the attire of a female ballerina and dancing to a tune provided by Mussolini, who appeared as a malevolent organ grinder.¹¹¹ This treatment was perhaps unfair. The President's remarks at Bobbio obviously occurred in the context of long-established ambassadorial etiquette. Had Cosgrave met Mussolini in person, as an invitation from Rome specified, the diplomatic minefield thrown up by such an encounter might have provided a more testing scenario for the President. Cosgrave, however, adroitly sidestepped any prospective meeting by paying lip service to 'the pressure of circumstances'.¹¹² Perhaps, then, the misconstruction applied by the *Voice* reflected the bitterness surrounding a fierce agrarian dispute then consuming the midlands and southeast of Ireland (see below, pp 242-5). Replete with armed bands of farmers who styled themselves after the Fascist squads that had terrorised post-war Italy, from a labour perspective this dispute brought the possibility of Irish fascism into sharp focus. Accordingly, the *Voice of Labour* was not inclined to take a relaxed approach to dalliances between Irish ministers and the Italian originals, no matter how innocuous the circumstances. The attack on Cosgrave may also have been motivated by the recent return of James Larkin and the inroads he was then making upon the membership of the I.T.&G.W.U.¹¹³ It is most likely that the editorial team at the *Voice* felt obliged to keep pace with Larkin's attacks on Mussolini. Pieces like 'Mussolini the Brutalitarian', which appeared in Larkin's own newspaper, the *Irish Worker*, demonstrated that the Liverpudlian retained his polemical ability of old:

"His feet are on the downward slope where all like he must thread." Oh!
Warrior bold. Oh! Superman—your bag for one day's murderous
shooting, sixteen orphan children. Italy will pay for the brutal

¹¹⁰ *Voice of Labour*, 22 Sept. 1923; cf. *Workers' Republic*, 8 Sept. 1923.

¹¹¹ *Voice of Labour*, 22 Sept. 1923.

¹¹² *Freeman's Journal*, 4 Sept. 1923.

¹¹³ Larkin founded the I.T.&G.W.U. in 1911, but relinquished control of the union when he left Ireland for America in 1914. Upon his return in April 1923, Larkin tried to reassert his authority. This led to bitter clashes with the Union Executive. In June 1923, Larkin reissued the *Irish Worker*, which became the mouthpiece of a political movement he founded the following September, the Irish Worker League (I.W.L.), and a breakaway union he founded in June 1924, the Workers Union of Ireland (W.U.I.).

domineering oligarchy that curses that country by their presence. The pity of it! That the innocent working class, who are the dupes, sometimes the willing dupes we admit, of these abnormal abysmal brutalitarians must suffer.¹¹⁴

Not enjoying the same freedom of expression as the squabbling Irish left, the Cosgrave party hurried north to the Fourth Assembly of the League of Nations. Following a week of hectic socialising, the Irish delegates officially assumed their seats in the Assembly on 10 September 1923. To mark the occasion, President Cosgrave delivered a celebrated speech. Mixing Gaelic with English, Cosgrave emphasised the ancient Christian links between Ireland and the continent, whilst stressing a new era of friendship between the Free State and Great Britain.¹¹⁵ In addition to these innocuous themes, however, the address also alluded to the crisis then consuming the League. According to the author of the speech, Eoin MacNeill, the President's words 'were not spoken without advertence to the particular state of things which existed at the time and which pre-occupied the minds of the entire Assembly'.¹¹⁶ From MacNeill's remarks, it is apparent that passages of the speech more obviously related to the recent Anglo-Irish conflict—Cosgrave, for example, spoke of Ireland's determination to protect fellow small states from 'the shadow of external violence, vicious penetration, or injurious pressure of any kind'—were also applicable to the ongoing dispute between Italy and Greece.¹¹⁷ Similarly, passages that placed the rights of individual nations firmly within the confines of an ordered supranational framework, implicitly condemned the type of exaggerated nationalism so recently displayed at Corfu.¹¹⁸ Meanwhile, the Irish President had some words of advice for Italy's peers. Minimising the damage done by Mussolini's precipitate action, Cosgrave suggested that the Corfu crisis should clarify the authority of the League and thus strengthen the machinery of international co-operation:

¹¹⁴ *Irish Worker*, 8 Sept. 1923.

¹¹⁵ Text of a speech by William T. Cosgrave on the occasion of Ireland's admission to the League of Nations, Geneva, 10 Sept. 1923 (N.A.I., DT, S3332).

¹¹⁶ *Irish Independent*, 29 Sept. 1929.

¹¹⁷ Cosgrave, admission speech (N.A.I., DT, S3332).

¹¹⁸ Tierney, *Eoin MacNeill*, p. 336.

... we cannot say that we are satisfied with all its transactions. By some of its actions we have been profoundly impressed but, whether it was due to a too sanguine confidence in the beginning or a lack of knowledge of the entire facts, we have on occasion been profoundly disappointed ... if as yet the means provided have not always proved full effective to secure their worthy ends, we are mindful of our national proverb 'Bíonn gach tosnú lag' ('every beginning is weak'), and we trust that in time to come, adequate means and faithful use of them will justify our current hopes. Our history and the instinct of our hearts forbid us to think that temporary or even recurrent failures can deprive a just and steadfast purpose of the assurance of success.¹¹⁹

The admission speech announced what Michael Kennedy has aptly described as a policy of 'Critical Support' for the League of Nations.¹²⁰ Essentially, the Irish position would always be one of support for the League and its principles, but if there were shortcomings in terms of the League's performance—viz, an obvious inability to bind Fascist Italy to the League Covenant—then the representatives of the Free State would not recoil from saying so.¹²¹ Importantly, Cosgrave's speech helped to reassure the sceptics at home. Clearly impressed by the import of the address, other delegates engaged in speechifying that pandered to Irish national vanity. According to one of the Irish legal advisors, Kevin O'Sheil, the reaction of the smaller powers was 'spontaneous and sincere ... and it displayed, on the parts of the assembled peoples a far more intimate, acute and sympathetic knowledge of our history than any of us had given them credit for'.¹²² Now basking in the plaudits extended to Ireland by the other nations gathered at Geneva, less alarmist journalistic commentary attended the League and its timid response to the Italian occupation of Corfu.¹²³ Instead, Irish attitudes now mimicked the "wait and see" position adopted by the Assembly itself, which, at the behest of the League Council, agreed not to debate the issue prior to the report of the

¹¹⁹ Cosgrave, admission speech, partly quoted in Kennedy, *Ireland at the League of Nations*, p. 41.

¹²⁰ Kennedy, *Ireland at the League of Nations*, p. 41.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Memorandum by Kevin O'Sheil on the boundary issue and League of Nations policy, n.d. (N.A.I., DT, S3332).

¹²³ *Irish Independent*, 11 Sept. 1923.

Conference of Ambassadors.¹²⁴

3.9. *Italians in Ireland make an appeal to public opinion*

As the international community awaited this report, Irish opinion, as elsewhere, began to feel the effects of Fascist propaganda. Coinciding with the feted return of President Cosgrave from Geneva, the pro-cathedral on Marlborough Street hosted an impressive commemorative ceremony for the Janina victims. The Dublin-based organisers of the nascent *Fasci Italiani all'Estero* (Italian Fascists Abroad Organisation; see below, pp 233–5) controlled the event. Normally, these resident Fascists kept a low profile. The Janina commemoration, therefore, must rank as something of an anomaly. The appointed organiser of the Italian community in Ireland in 1923, one Captain D. A. Radoani, was the chief architect of the event.¹²⁵ A war-decorated journalist and “Fascist of the first hour”, Captain Radoani was also heavily involved in the preparations for the Irish gathering at Bobbio.¹²⁶ Acknowledged by the *Freeman's Journal* as ‘well known in Dublin’ and one who occupied ‘an important position in the affairs of his country’,¹²⁷ he exploited the Irish–Italian community of religion to stage a well-choreographed and overtly political event.

As described by the *Freeman's Journal*, Fascist paraphernalia adorned proceedings within the pro-cathedral:

A great number of Italian residents present wore the Fascisti badge, while others wore ribbons of the national colours with the addition of a mourning ribbon. ... A group of little girls of the Italian community, attired in white and wearing sashes of the national colours, laid bunches of flowers on the catafalque in the Church. The catafalque was draped with the Italian flag and was provided with a guard of honour of five Fascisti wearing war decorations. Nineteen other members of the Fascisti, also wearing war decorations, were among the congregation.¹²⁸

¹²⁴Spencer-Bassett, *The League of Nations*, p. 216.

¹²⁵*Irish Times*, 14 Sept. 1923.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 21 Apr. 1923; Memorandum on protocol for the Free State Delegation to the League of Nations (U.C.D.A., MacNeill papers, LA1/G/206).

¹²⁷ *Freeman's Journal*, 4 Sept. 1923.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 14 Sept. 1923.

Chopin's March added to the solemnity of the occasion, as did Fascist antics during the Elevation. At this juncture, the guard of honour 'saluted in Fascist fashion, and remained for some time with extended arms', thus marking the Irish debut of perhaps the most notorious symbol of the inter-war era.¹²⁹ Not only did the ceremony involve 'the entire Italian community in the city'—according to the *Irish Times*, approximately two hundred persons—it also attracted the foreign diplomatic corps, leading ecclesiastics, representatives from every government department, socialites, academics, and high-ranking members of the Irish military, virtually all of whom adorned themselves with an Italian emblem.¹³⁰ Of this assembly, perhaps the most conspicuous Irishman was Lieutenant General Jeremiah Joseph "Ginger" O'Connell. As demonstrated by press footage of the event, throughout the ceremony and afterwards, Lt Gen. O'Connell took pride of place alongside Capt. Radoani.¹³¹ Photographic collegiality aside, the Assistant Chief-of-Staff of the National Army revealed an underlying sympathy for the Italian position in an article that he wrote at the time. Examining the root causes of the controversy, he reiterated staple Fascist propaganda that proclaimed the Greeks guilty of murder and excused Italian imperialism on the grounds of demographic growth.¹³² An amateur classical historian in his own right, he also pointed out that between them, for nearly two thousand years, the Romans and the Venetians had enjoyed possession of an island only awarded to Greece by the British in 1864.¹³³ Ignoring the minor point of the Greek ethnicity of the islanders themselves, O'Connell thus concluded that: 'In all the circumstances, one must admit that "outrageous" is a very strong adjective to apply to the action of Signor Mussolini'.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ *Irish Times*, 14 Sept. 1923.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*; *Freeman's Journal*, 14 Sept. 1923.

¹³¹ See pictorial supplements, *Irish Independent*, *Freeman's Journal*, *Irish Times*, 14 Sept. 1923.

¹³² *Freeman's Journal*, 11 Sept. 1923.

¹³³ *Ibid.*; cf. J. J. O'Connell manuscript re Punic Wars (N.L.I., O'Connell papers, Ms. 22,166–9).

¹³⁴ *Freeman's Journal*, 11 Sept. 1923. Subsequent articles written by O'Connell suggested that he held Mussolini and Italian military prowess in high regard. Two further pieces on Italian Mediterranean policy, respectively treating with the prospect of a rupture between Rome and London over the status of Malta (which did indeed become a source of tension in 1927), and, *á*

3.10. Eoin MacNeill at Geneva

If Radoani and his colleagues could feel pleased with the fruits of their labour in Dublin, Italian diplomats in Geneva also felt satisfied with the contributions made by Irish speakers. As noted, the carefully worded admission speech made no direct reference to Fascist Italy. Nor did an important contribution later made by Eoin MacNeill. With Cosgrave's departure for Ireland, MacNeill headed a rump delegation that revelled in the cut and thrust of the Fourth Assembly.¹³⁵ On 27 of September, the long awaited report of the Conference of Ambassadors revealed itself to the world. As expected, the Greeks emerged as the scapegoats of the affair.¹³⁶ Found guilty of negligence, they were obliged to pay the indemnity sought by Italy, whilst the Greek navy was obliged to render humiliating honours to a visiting Italian fleet.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, following discreet threats to deploy the Royal Navy in defence of Britain's Mediterranean interests, Mussolini lost the salient point, and reluctantly agreed to withdraw from Corfu.¹³⁸ However, for the representatives of the so-called "small nations" at Geneva, amongst whom the Irish had immediately found an important niche role, the real issue was not the conditions imposed upon Greece or Italy, but that the League had played no part in the judgement rendered.¹³⁹

With debate on the Corfu crisis stifled for several weeks, and a resolution imposed that paid no heed to the League or its Covenant, a sense of outrage permeated the closing sessions of the Fourth Assembly. As such, the chief spokesperson of the League Council, Lord Robert Cecil, found himself in an

la the shared hopes of Dónal Hales and others, the possibility of a Spanish–Italian alliance emerging to challenge France and Great Britain, appeared in the *Freeman's Journal* (8 Oct. 1923 & Jan. 18 1924).

¹³⁵ Report of the Irish Delegation to the Fourth Assembly of the League of Nations, c. Sept. 1923 (N.A.I., DFA, 26/102).

¹³⁶ Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy*, p. 124.

¹³⁷ Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, p. 672.

¹³⁸ Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy*, p. 118.

¹³⁹ Eoin MacNeill, 'Report on the Fourth Assembly of the League of Nations', 4 Oct. 1923, (N.A.I., DT, S3332).

unenviable position. An ardent champion of the League project, he was bitterly disappointed by the actions of his government.¹⁴⁰ Lord Cecil knew, however, that if the Assembly condemned the Allies, the future prospects of the League would suffer further, perhaps irreparable, damage. As a face-saving measure, the League Council thus presented a report to the Assembly that included a declaration announcing ‘the competency of the League to require its members to submit to the terms of the Covenant’.¹⁴¹ Sensing that the Irish had assumed a position of importance within the ranks of the small nations, Lord Cecil then canvassed Eoin MacNeill to speak in favour of this report.¹⁴² MacNeill agreed, but only to a point. Writing after the event, he described the declaration on League competency as ‘obvious façade—windowdressing’.¹⁴³ In his maiden address to the League Assembly, he therefore spoke with great reserve. As explained in a memorandum subsequently submitted to the Department of External Affairs, MacNeill remained true to the Irish policy of ‘Critical Support’:

I made a short speech, in which I excused the Report on the ground that the League was still too immature to make use of its formal powers. I said that the affirmation of competence—which I quoted—would give some reassurance. I ended by saying it was the plain duty of all members of the League—a duty to which they were solemnly engaged—to have recourse to the League *in the first instance*, before taking any hostile step, when a dispute should arise that threatened a rupture of the peace.¹⁴⁴

Gently chastising Mussolini and Lord Cecil both, MacNeill gave little cause for actual offence. As identified by the Permanent Irish Representative at Geneva, Michael MacWhite, the key to the address was not that the reproaches ‘went further than those of any other delegate’, but that they were framed ‘in wide and general terms irrespective of the case under consideration’.¹⁴⁵ This approach enabled MacNeill to insist upon the essential point, i.e. respect for

¹⁴⁰ Spencer-Bassett, *The League of Nations*, p. 220.

¹⁴¹ MacNeill, ‘Report on the Fourth Assembly’ (N.A.I., DT, S3332).

¹⁴² Michael MacWhite to Desmond Fitzgerald, enclosing a report on the admission of Ireland to the League of Nations, 7 Nov. 1923 (ibid., DFA, 26/102).

¹⁴³ MacNeill, ‘Report on the Fourth Assembly’ (ibid., DT, S3332), quoted in Kennedy, *Ireland and the League of Nations*, p. 45.

¹⁴⁴ MacNeill, ‘Report on the Fourth Assembly’ (N.A.I., DT, S3332).

¹⁴⁵ MacWhite to Fitzgerald, 7 Nov. 1923 (ibid., DFA, 26/102), quoted in Kennedy, *Ireland and*

the League Covenant, without censuring Mussolini and Italy. MacNeill subsequently claimed that his speech (which, it is worth noting, was delivered ‘ad-lib’ for he somehow managed to lose the written version on his way to the rostrum) ‘gave wide satisfaction and gained very general approval’.¹⁴⁶ MacWhite, who wrote that ‘even the Italians were relieved by his speech as, unlike the other delegates, he did not single them out as the only culprit’, backed up this contention.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, MacNeill’s tactful approach stood in stark contrast to the contributions made by other delegates. Previous speakers, most notably on behalf of South Africa and the Scandinavian countries, railed against Mussolini and the injury done to the League.¹⁴⁸ Two obvious points help to explain MacNeill’s refusal to join this chorus of anti-Fascist condemnation. In the first instance, thanks largely to the efforts of Pellizi, Radoani and the *Fasci Italiani all’Estero*, MacNeill and his colleagues had recently enjoyed the best of Fascist hospitality whilst in Genoa and Bobbio.¹⁴⁹ In light of the Columbanus celebrations, the Irish believed that they had established an excellent diplomatic rapport with the Italians, and MacNeill saw no good purpose in jeopardising this friendship by castigating Mussolini in public. Secondly, the religious ties between Ireland and Italy meant that the Irish had not the same freedom to speak their mind as the Finns or the South Africans. Unlike their counterparts in Helsinki and Cape Town, politicians in Dublin could not afford to offend a regime with ample powers of interference over the constant flow of pilgrim traffic between Ireland and Italy, not to mention the substantial Irish colony in Rome itself.

MacNeill’s final words on the dispute occurred in the context of Irish manoeuvring to protect the diplomatic independence of the Free State. Briefly, following the Assembly debate, a British official circulated a letter to the

the League of Nations, p. 45.

¹⁴⁶ MacNeill, ‘Report on the Fourth Assembly’; Francis Shaw, ‘MacNeill the Person’ in F. J. Byrne & F. X. Martin (eds), *The Scholar Revolutionary: Eoin MacNeill, 1867–1945, and the making of the new Ireland* (Shannon, 1973), p. 301.

¹⁴⁷ Michael MacWhite to Desmond Fitzgerald, 7 Nov. 1923 (N.A.I., DFA, 26/102).

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*; cf. *Irish Times*, 29 Sept. 1923.

¹⁴⁹ Memo. on protocol, etc. (U.C.D.A., MacNeill papers, LA1/G/206).

Commonwealth delegates. Singling out Lord Cecil for particular praise, the letter asked its readers to register their ‘conviction that it has been largely due to the resolute and wise action of the League that the issue has been resolved’.¹⁵⁰ Although the other Dominions, including the South Africans, readily endorsed the petition, the Irish demurred. Already disapproving of the whitewash presented to the Assembly, MacNeill and his colleagues had no desire to undersign a document, apparently intended for publication, that they interpreted as partly planned ‘to advertise the signatories as representing a distinct unit’.¹⁵¹ Arguing that a united imperial front, ‘however proper elsewhere, was not desirable in connection with the League of Nations’, and that ‘claiming success for the League in settling the Italo–Greek crises would stultify both the League and the signatories and be nowise helpful to Lord Cecil’, MacNeill, much to the chagrin of the British delegation, returned the proposed round-robin unsigned.¹⁵²

3.11. Chapter summary

The ultimate failure of the enterprise notwithstanding, the plot to obtain Italian arms remains an interesting footnote in the history of the Anglo–Irish War. Endeavouring to exploit the radical internationalism of D’Annunzian Fiume, the I.R.A. discovered new patrons in the form of Benito Mussolini and senior officials within the Italian War Ministry. Not alone did this imbroglio demonstrate an unusual interconnectivity between the post-war strife in Ireland and Italy, it also, perhaps, rendered anachronistic an oft-quoted Mussolini boast. When discussing the by then deceased D’Annunzio in 1938, Mussolini allegedly claimed that ‘When you have a rotten tooth you have two possibilities open to you: either you pull the tooth or you fill it with gold. With D’Annunzio I chose the latter treatment.’¹⁵³ Certainly, frequent emoluments to secure the former *Commandante* of Fiume against adverse international

¹⁵⁰ Petition authored by Sir Willoughby Dickinson, 27 Sept. 1923 (ibid., MacWhite papers, P194/199).

¹⁵¹ MacNeill, ‘Report on the Fourth Assembly’ (N.A.I., DT, S3332).

¹⁵² Tierney & Martin, *Eoin MacNeill*, p. 336.

¹⁵³ Fred Licht, ‘The Vittoriale degli Italiani’ in the *Journal of the Society of Architectural*

publicity were, in latter years, Mussolini's preferred method of dealing with an increasingly disaffected D'Annunzio.¹⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the evidence also suggests that during the autumn and winter of 1920–1, Mussolini and the reigning government believed they had found a cheaper and more effective way of extracting the troublesome tooth that was Gabriele D'Annunzio by foisting him upon the Irish Republic.

The Corfu Crisis of 1923, meanwhile, had a major impact upon Irish foreign policy and public opinion. Not overly affected by the grand ideals of Geneva, Irish delegates travelled to the Fourth Assembly clearly aware that the machinery of the League was far from perfect. In line with this outlook, the Corfu fiasco, providing as it did an introduction to power politics, acted as a catalyst for the Irish policy of 'Critical Support'. Repeatedly invoked during subsequent crises, this approach enabled Irish diplomats to champion the principles of collective security without condemning a particular League member. Ultimately, the demands of *Realpolitik* shaped the contributions they made. Although novices at Geneva, the Irish recognised that international institutions like the League of Nations only amount to the sum of the Great Powers that support them.¹⁵⁵ Hoping for better things to come, sensitive language thus surrounded Irish reservations about the handling of the Corfu incident. Yet it would be an exaggeration to interpret the Irish performance at the League Assembly as somehow an act of appeasement. In signing up to the Covenant, the Free State undertook to comply (as it did in the 1930s) with possible League obligations concerning military and/or economic sanctions.¹⁵⁶ Regardless of Fascist pageantry in Bobbio and Dublin, if called upon to do so, the Free State would have acted accordingly. Furthermore, apart from the profound indifference of the republican camp, there were enough indications elsewhere to suggest that this policy would have enjoyed popular support. Scepticism was one thing, but at this early stage, the League was not yet the

Historians, xli, no. 4 (Dec. 1982), p. 318.

¹⁵⁴ Denis Mack Smith, *Modern Italy: a political history* (3rd ed., Yale, 1997), p. 360.

¹⁵⁵ MacNeill, 'Report on the Fourth Assembly' (N.A.I., DT, S3332).

completely discredited organisation that, some fifteen years and several inept performances later, gave birth to the policy of Irish neutrality. The fact that the League failed its first real test, should not disguise the fact that a majority would have supported a proactive defence of the Covenant. Mussolini, the diplomatic gambler, underestimated the pacifist spirit of the immediate post-war era. Emerging from the crisis with an enhanced reputation as a bully and a trickster,¹⁵⁷ his potentially explosive attack upon Corfu won him no new friends amongst an Irish audience just as familiar with the cost of a general war as their counterparts in Britain and the continent.

¹⁵⁶ Kennedy, *Ireland and the League of Nations*, p. 255.

¹⁵⁷ Mack Smith, *Modern Italy*, p. 383.

CHAPTER 4:

THE SPECTRE OF FASCISM? ELEMENTS OF CUMANN NA NGAEDHEAL POLICY

Refocusing on Ireland, this chapter considers treatyite policymaking in the context of opposition unease about a developing Irish fascism. Under the topics of prospective militias, local government reforms and mooted changes to the national electoral system, it examines why labour and republican circles readily perceived an unhealthy Italian influence upon Irish politics.

4.1. Establishment of the Fascist Militia

If Mussolini's first aggressive foray in the international arena provoked a noticeable Irish backlash, more subtle debates attended an important early development in Fascist domestic policy. In January 1923, Mussolini announced the establishment of the Voluntary Fascist Militia for National Security (*Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale*, or M.V.S.N.). Officially enjoined to act as a political police force and to protect the so-called "Fascist Revolution", the Militia effectively provided a legal status to the insurrectionary Squads of 1919–1922.¹ Challenging as it did the state's monopoly of physical force, the introduction of this overtly unconstitutional body did not pass unopposed.² Nevertheless, by promising to confine the militia to a non-military policing role, and by acknowledging the genuine need to discipline the anarchic forces of *Squadrisimo*, Mussolini soon convinced conservatives and the Crown that the M.V.S.N. would contribute to the

¹ Duggan, *Force of Destiny*, p. 437.

² McGregor Knox, 'Conquest, Foreign and Domestic, in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany' in the *Journal of Modern History*, lvi, no. 1 (Mar. 1984), p. 32.

process of “normalisation”.³ Once established, however, the Militia quickly expanded to perform specialised functions in multiple fields. With supplementary militias emerging in state enterprises (railroads, ports, posts and telegraphs, forests, roads, and airports, etc.) the M.V.S.N. protected the regime at vulnerable points where opposition might otherwise develop.⁴ Rather than support the traditional pillars of the state, therefore, it provided the Fascist Party with an overbearing network of coercion and surveillance that proved instrumental in transforming Liberal Italy into the totalitarian dictatorship synonymous with Mussolini’s reign.⁵

Apart from the dedicated organs of the Left, however, few commentators in Ireland sensed anything sinister about the M.V.S.N. or the Squads that came beforehand. As noted previously, Irish scrutiny of Fascist political violence was sparse and lacked analytical vigour.⁶ Understandably preoccupied with domestic concerns, few commentators found it necessary to examine *Fascismo* from any perspective other than the general European crisis that pitted conservatives and nationalists against the revolutionary-left. There were, of course, exceptions to this general rule. The Roman correspondent of the *Irish Catholic*, for instance, stood out as an early chronicler of Fascist violence against the P.P.I. Yet in portraying the Black Shirts as mere thugs and opportunists, this reporter contradicted positive despatches from other members of the Irish colony, and invited criticism from hostile correspondents determined to portray the Fascists as a legitimate response to the actions of the Italian Communists.⁷ The pro-Fascist despatches of Gertrude Gaffney, on the other hand, suffered no such censure. Then cutting her teeth as a European correspondent for the *Irish Independent*, Gaffney would subsequently become a household name as that journal’s frontline

³ Lyttelton, *Seizure of Power*, p. 105.

⁴ Arthur H. Steiner, 'The Constitutional Position of the Partito Nazionale Fascista' in the *American Political Science Review*, xxxi, no. 2 (Apr. 1937), p. 236.

⁵ Lyttelton, *Seizure of Power*, p. 147.

⁶ See above, pp 12–14.

⁷ *Ibid.*; *Irish Catholic*, 13 Oct. 1922.

correspondent during the Spanish Civil War.⁸ Travelling throughout Italy during the “seizure of power”, she was thrilled to discover the Fascists likening themselves to Sinn Féin.⁹ Clearly impressed, she provided an insight into their thinking that must have resonated strongly with an audience then transfixed by the depredations of the Irish Civil War. After one interview with an officer of the *Fascisti*, Gaffney described how:

He told me, with simple sincerity and glowing enthusiasm, of the object and work of the Fascisti; the rescuing of Italy from what he termed the nation-destroying insect of Communism; the continuation of old traditions and the preservations of the rights of citizens. They were entirely national and intensely patriotic. The movement was sweeping young Italy off its feet, men and women, and I, too, was swept off mine by the glamour of it as I listened.¹⁰

4.2. Prospective Irish militias in the Civil War era

Unsurprisingly, this type of endorsement struck a chord with some members of the Free State government. Still grappling with political violence and criminal activity across large swathes of the Irish countryside, pro-treaty figureheads, taking their cue from European affairs, debated the idea of establishing an armed citizens’ militia independent of the National Army and the recently established Civic Guard. Discreetly expressed by Séamus Hughes in late July 1922, an early suggestion along these lines actually occurred many months before the Fascist seizure of power. Previously a stalwart of the labour movement until the establishment of the Irish Communist Party in 1921, Hughes, then Secretary of the pro-treaty General and Election Committee, would go on to become the first General Secretary of Cumann na nGaedheal. Retiring from national politics in 1926, he became increasingly active in radical Catholic social movements, culminating in his role as founder and organiser of the pro-Franco Irish Christian Front in 1936.¹¹ Notably, however,

⁸ Patrick Maume, ‘Gaffney, Gertrude’ in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁹ *Irish Independent*, 31 Oct. 1922.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Paul Rouse, ‘Hughes, James Joseph (Séamus)’ in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009). Hughes was at once a member of *An Ríoghacht*, the Knights of Columbanus and *Muintir na Tíre*, all of which he balanced with his

in his communications Hughes did not directly refer to the Italian *Fascisti*.¹² Rather, in common with the Government's chief law advisor Hugh Kennedy, and his deputy, the aforementioned Kevin O'Shiel, who also alerted ministers to the effectiveness of paramilitarism against the Spartacists of 1919–1920, Hughes more than likely had the German *Freikorps* in mind.¹³ Whichever organisation(s) Hughes wished to emulate, some members of the Cabinet, most notably the Minister for Finance, Ernest Blythe, who publicly held that his compatriots were by nature given to indiscipline and lacking in civic consciousness, enthusiastically endorsed his proposal.¹⁴ However, the plan ultimately fell foul of reservations held by Michael Collins, who opposed the scheme for several reasons. In the first instance, he felt buoyed by the swift successes of Free State arms, and was still optimistic about a future reconciliation with elements of the anti-treaty I.R.A. It was hard to imagine how such a rabidly sectional force as that proposed by Hughes could contribute to this end. Collins also sensed dangerous parallels with republican policing experiments during the War of Independence. As such, he quashed the establishment of a paramilitary organisation based on the treatyite election machinery. Arguing that law and order should remain the preserve of the existing state security forces, he advised his colleagues in government that:

What we have to guard against is the setting up of any kind of organisation that might weaken government control although possibly helpful in the initial stage. It is not necessary for me to illustrate this message by pointing to the wretched Irish Republican Police System and the awful personnel that was attracted to its ranks. The lack of construction and the lack of control in this force have been responsible for many outrageous things which have occurred throughout Ireland.¹⁵

occupation as the first announcer of 2RN, the forerunner of R.T.É.

¹² Memorandum by Seamus Hughes entitled 'Suggested scheme of Civil Organisation for restoration of public peace and security', 22 July 1922 (U.C.D.A., Mulcahy papers, P7/B/29); Seamus Hughes to Arthur Griffith, 28 July 1922 (ibid.)

¹³ R. M. Douglas, *Architects of the Resurrection: Ailtirí na hAiséirghe and the Fascist 'new order' in Ireland* (Manchester, 2009), p. 18.

¹⁴ Thomas J. Morrissey, *A Man Called Hughes: The Life and Times of Seamus Hughes, 1881–1943* (Dublin, 1991), p. 158; Patrick Buckley, 'Blythe, Ernest' in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

¹⁵ Michael Collins to William T. Cosgrave, 6 Aug. 1922 (U.C.D.A., Mulcahy papers, P/7B/29), cit. in Regan, *Irish Counter-Revolution 1921–1936*, p. 123.

Frustrated at the first attempt, Hughes and his supporters received a new lease of life that autumn. With the death of Collins in August 1922, and with the anti-treatyites retreating into the tried and proven tactics of guerrilla warfare, the Government, now dominated by civilians far less tolerant of the irregulars than the military had been, set out to crush its opponents with the utmost severity.¹⁶ In anticipation of increased violence following the passing of the Army Emergency Powers Resolution that October, Hughes obtained permission to put his plans into effect.¹⁷ November 1922 thus marked the appearance of the short-lived and tragically ineffective Citizens Defence Force (C.D.F.). This establishment was hardly the type of mass organisation originally envisaged by Hughes and Blythe. Never more than a hundred members strong, instead of imposing itself across the country, it was confined to Oriel House on Westland Row, where it shared a Head Quarters with the notorious Criminal Investigation Department (C.I.D.). Supplemented by the Protective Officers Corps, a unit of plain-clothes police officers tasked with safeguarding government personnel and preventing sabotage, the C.D.F. undertook responsibility for the defence of vital buildings and intelligence gathering.¹⁸ In this capacity, the members of Hughes' imagined Praetorian Guard, nearly all of whom were ex-British Army servicemen, suffered more casualties from self-inflicted wounds and friendly fire than any contact with the anti-treaty I.R.A.¹⁹ Indeed, in terms of career development, Hughes was himself a long-term casualty of the C.D.F. Two years later, his links with Oriel House cost him dearly in a Dáil election, thus paving the way for an anti-treaty

¹⁶ See, policy proposals for a 'Special conference on Law and Order', convened on 26 Sept. 1922 (N.A.I., DT, S3306).

¹⁷ Regan, *Irish Counter-Revolution*, p. 124. The Army Emergency Powers Resolution introduced Military Courts and executions as legal instruments of the National Army. On this and subsequent security legislation, see, Bill Kissane, 'Defending Democracy? The Legislative Response to Political Extremism in the Irish Free State, 1922-1939' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxxiv, no. 134 (Nov. 2004), pp 156-74; cf. Seosamh Ó Longaigh, *Emergency Law in Independent Ireland, 1922-1948* (Dublin, 2006).

¹⁸ Eunan O'Halpin, *Defending Ireland: the Irish State and its Enemies Since 1922* (Oxford, 2000), p. 12.

¹⁹ Regan, *Irish Counter-Revolution*, p. 125.

candidate named Seán Lemass.²⁰

Whilst the C.D.F. muddled its way through the remainder of the Civil War, further proposals to imitate the specifically Italian model of political paramilitarism emerged from the upper echelons of Cumann na nGaedheal. On 12 January 1923, some two weeks after Mussolini had announced his planned Militia to the world, James Joseph ('J. J.') Walsh, something of an "outsider" in terms of the party elite, urged his colleagues to introduce an 'Irish Fascisti.'²¹ Walsh was Postmaster General of the new regime, a title subsequently changed to Minister for Posts and Telegraphs. His, therefore, was one of three 'External' ministries (the others being those of Fisheries, and Local Government and Health) originally intended to allow anti-treatyites to participate in a government of national unity. As the externs were not bound by collective cabinet responsibility, Walsh was able to publicly criticise the Government, for, as an "Irish Irelander" in the mould of Griffith, he abhorred the free trade policies of Cumann na nGaedheal.²² Indeed, so frustrated was Walsh with the Government's refusal to embrace autarkic economics, that he subsequently withdrew from electoral politics in 1927, before departing for Padua in Italy, where he presumably spent some part of his self-enforced exile admiring the protectionist agricultural policies of the Fascists.²³ An early admirer of the Mussolini regime, in later life Walsh also embraced Nazism.²⁴ Like so many others, his admiration for Hitler was inspired by Anglophobia and fond memories of the 'gallant ally' of 1916. Yet anti-Semitism affected Walsh also,²⁵ and he was one of a select group who, during the early stages of the Second World War, established and financed the pro-Axis Irish

²⁰ Morrissey, *Man Called Hughes*, p. 161.

²¹ *Irish Independent*, 29 Dec. 1922; Cumann na nGaedheal parliamentary party meeting, minutes, 12 Jan. 1923 (U.C.D.A., Mulcahy papers, P7/B/325), cit. in Regan, *Irish Counter-Revolution*, p. 122.

²² T. K. Daniel, 'Griffith on his Noble Head: The Determinants of Cumann na nGaedheal Economic Policy, 1922–1932' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, iii (1976), p. 55.

²³ *Irish Independent*, 14 Sept. 1927.

²⁴ Patrick Maume, 'Walsh, James Joseph' in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

underground. This movement embraced failed politicians, ‘old’ I.R.A. men and cranks, all of whom professed disillusionment with the Westminster model of government inherited by the Free State, which they viewed as an inadequate bulwark against the supposed machinations of Jews, Masons and Bolsheviks. Various styling themselves the ‘Irish Friends of Germany’, ‘Cumann Náisiúnta’ and the ‘People’s National Party’, Walsh and his colleagues expected to perform the role of Irish Quislings in the event of a Nazi takeover.²⁶ As Germany’s fortunes waned, however, so too did the fifth columnist following of the Third Reich. Nevertheless, from 1942 Walsh placed his considerable financial clout at the disposal of the Gearóid Ó Cuinneagáin led *Ailtíri na hAiséirighe* (‘Architects of the Resurrection’), an ephemeral movement that looked to establish a single-party, Gaelic-speaking totalitarian state by imitating the shallow corporatism of the Mussolini, Salazar, Dollfuss and Perón regimes.²⁷

In 1923, however, Walsh, like Hughes, was determined to transform Cumann na nGaedheal into a mass organisation held together by patronage (hence their common interest in militias).²⁸ Moreover, military reports from the Munster area added a sense of urgency to Walsh’s plans. Specifically, a National Army officer, Comdt William Murphy, had penned an alarmist overview of conditions in rural Cork.²⁹ At once despondent and potentially mutinous, Murphy’s account outlined a crisis of morale affecting the men under his command. According to this report, the public retained no confidence in the National Army, which supposedly remained ineffective outside of the major urban centres. Claiming that not alone was the army undermined by subversives within and the ‘unfortunate peace movement’

²⁵ Ibid.; cf. J. J. Walsh, *Recollections of a Rebel* (Tralee, 1944), pp 89, 91.

²⁶ See, R. M. Douglas, ‘The Pro-Axis Underground in Ireland, 1939–1942’ in the *Historical Journal*, xlix, no. 4. (Dec. 2006), pp 1155–83.

²⁷ Idem, *Architects of the Resurrection*, pp 153–4.

²⁸ Regan, *Irish Counter-Revolution*, p. 204; Maume, ‘Walsh, James Joseph’.

²⁹ Cmdt William Murphy to Michael Hennessy, 7 Jan. 1923 (U.C.D.A., Mulcahy papers, P7/B/325).

without, Murphy also fretted that ‘the Government will ultimately let down the faithful servants and make an ignominious peace with the irregulars’, thus enabling republicans to conduct a campaign of assassination under the cloak of a ceasefire.³⁰ Suitably perturbed, Walsh, on the grounds that the ‘people [are] under the impression that the situation is not improving’, that ‘our military organisation is not up to the job’ and that there was ‘no improvement during the last three or four months’, therefore demanded an Irish version of the Italian M.V.S.N.³¹

This suggestion came to nought. The cooler counsel of the Minister for Home Affairs and Vice-President of the Executive Council, Kevin O’Higgins, who tersely announced there would be ‘no Fascisti’, ultimately prevailed.³² O’Higgins was determined to remain responsible to the Dáil, not any sectional party, in pursuit of his role as a state builder.³³ Although he had directed the passage of the draconian Army Emergency Powers Resolution, the type of civilian militia proposed by Walsh and Hughes was anathema to his interpretation of legitimate state authority. Like Collins, O’Higgins was anxious lest paramilitarism should subvert the Civic Guard, an agency for which he was directly responsible. Formed in the spring of 1922, the Guards had largely avoided the treaty feud that ruptured Sinn Féin and the I.R.A. Then tentatively establishing themselves across the twenty-six counties, the ability of the Guards to retain popular support would depend on their remaining above the Civil War conflict.³⁴ As O’Higgins well knew, therefore, the appearance of an armed political militia, which force of circumstances would place alongside the unarmed Guards under the umbrella of the “Forces

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Minutes of Cumann na nGaedheal parliamentary party meeting, 12 Jan. 1923 (U.C.D.A., Mulcahy papers, P7/B/325).

³² Ibid.

³³ See, Regan, ‘O’Higgins and His Party’ in idem, *Irish Counter-Revolution*, pp 244–78; cf. McCarthy, *Kevin O’Higgins*, pp 157–62.

³⁴ On the Gardaí in Civil War Ireland, see Liam McNiffe, *A history of the Garda Síochána: a social history of the force 1922–52, with an overview of the years 1952–97* (Dublin, 1997), pp 11–31; cf. Gregory Allen, *The Garda Síochána: Policing Independent Ireland, 1922–1982*

of the State”, could have had fatal consequences for the long-term mission of the regular police. Moreover, despite the popular perception of O’Higgins as the “strong man” of the regime, the many atrocity stories that surrounded the National Army genuinely appalled him.³⁵ He must have felt apprehensive, therefore, that a political militia, not bound by the rigour of military discipline (such as it was in 1922–3), would itself behave in a worse manner. O’Higgins firmly believed that the quickest road to recovery lay in re-enforcing the impartiality of the state, not undermining its authority by sponsoring sectional movements whose lifetime, once established, would prove anything but certain. This attitude demonstrated the inaccuracy of republican propaganda of the day, which, because of his role as chief government spokesperson during the Civil War, contemptuously labelled him a tyrant and ‘crypto-Fascist’.³⁶ O’Higgins was certainly stern and severe when debating with colleagues and opponents alike, and these characteristics tended to re-enforce the sobriquet of an ‘Irish Mussolini’.³⁷ Yet despite his deserved reputation for austerity, colleagues and (non-republican) opponents remembered O’Higgins as someone who had ‘no trace of ambition for personal power for its own sake’, and who was ‘by temperament, liberal and generous to the utmost limit that justice would allow’.³⁸ His biographers have reached similar conclusions, arguing that his political outlook, which combined the principles of English liberalism with a socially conservative Catholicism, made O’Higgins a firm democrat who held no brief for the type of dictatorship practiced in Italy.³⁹

Lobbying in favour of a Fascist-like organisation continued even after the end of the Civil War. Following the solid anti-treaty performance in the August 1923 election, Margaret Collins-O’Driscoll, elder sister of the slain Michael

(Dublin, 1999), pp 49–73.

³⁵ Terence de Vere White, *Kevin O’Higgins* (2nd ed., Tralee, 1966), p. 122.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, ‘Introduction’.

³⁷ *Irish Independent*, 15 Feb. 1927; *Anglo-Celt*, 5 Mar. 1927; *Nenagh Guardian*, 27 May 1927.

³⁸ Thomas Bodkin, ‘Some Personal Reminiscences of Kevin Christopher O’Higgins’ in *The Clongownian*, xi, no. 3 (June 1928), p. 18; cf. *The Irishman*, 16 July 1927.

³⁹ De Vere White’s portrait has recently been surpassed by McCarthy, *Kevin O’Higgins* (Dublin, 2006).

Collins, became the latest high profile member of Cumann na nGaedheal to endorse Italian methods. First elected to the Dáil in the 1923 election, Collins-O'Driscoll was a primary-school teacher and mother of fourteen.⁴⁰ Despite her stature as the only female representative in the Oireachtas from 1927–1933, her political career was not known for inventiveness or concern for the social, political and legal freedoms of her sex.⁴¹ With regard to Italian developments, she was inspired less by her own investigations than by the prompting of a firebrand Dominican priest named Fr Benedict O'Sullivan. Collins-O'Driscoll received a lengthy letter from the Tallaght based cleric on 18 October 1923. Believing the communication to be 'of such outstanding importance' that it was worthy of the attention of 'every Cumann na nGaedheal deputy', she duly circulated the letter amongst the government benches.⁴² A rambling diatribe that mixed confessional politics with current events, O'Sullivan's epistle struck out in several different directions at once. In a tone that was anything but Christian, he denounced the republican leanings of Mgr John Hagan and the Irish College in Rome; asserted that nests of subversives existed within the ranks of the public service; lamented that a traitor's death had not befallen de Valera and Austin Stack; criticised the recent release of republican hunger strikers as a 'missed opportunity'; and suggested that the remaining internees be swiftly removed to some offshore depository:

Whether we like it or not, there is not room for ourselves and these people together. I hope then you will not consider the suggestion preposterous that the government should take over, say Achill Island, remove its inhabitants to the rich grazing lands of Roscommon etc and bundle the entire active Irregular element into the place, giving them cattle, seeds, implements and whatever they require to raise enough to support themselves; stationing

⁴⁰ Marie Coleman, 'O'Driscoll, Margaret Collins' in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁴¹ Ibid. An inflexible supporter of Government legislation, Collins-O'Driscoll voted in favour of the Juries Bills (1924 & 1927) which, as already noted, restricted the right of women to perform jury service. She was also an outspoken supporter of the Censorship of Publications Bill (1928), the pro-natalist provisions of which banned as "indecent" all publications that referred to birth control.

⁴² Collins-O'Driscoll to the Cumann na nGaedheal deputies of Dáil Éireann, 19 Oct. 1923 (U.C.D.A., Kennedy papers, P4/1387), quoted by J. M. Regan in 'Michael Collins: the legacy and intestacy' in Gabriel Doherty and Dermot Keogh (eds), *Michael Collins and the Making of the Irish Free State* (Dublin, 1998), p. 123.

armed vessels around the island so as to absolutely cut off all communications from the outside ... Personally I should love beyond anything on earth to see Mary Mac [Swiney] having to milk the cow and bake the bread before sitting down to breakfast.⁴³

Prospective 'Irish Mussolinis', then, lurked elsewhere outside the confines of the political elite. In fact, and somewhat ironically, Fr O'Sullivan was convinced that Kevin O'Higgins was but a poor imitation of the Italian Premier. Contrary to the views of his clerical superiors, who were highly impressed by the speech in question, O'Sullivan was particularly annoyed about the content of a keynote address given by O'Higgins to the 1923 C.T.S.I. Annual Conference. At this forum, O'Higgins denounced what he described as a 'feeble' civil spirit, ascribing this state of affairs to 'the fact that until 1917 the Catholic layman in Irish public life was either a recreant, a minor official, an emigrant or a rebel against an illegitimate state of government'.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, O'Higgins maintained that the democratic instincts of the Irish, jointly preserved by the actions of the Government and the teachings of the Church, would invariably thrive, and that the Free State would never succumb to the fate of 'other European democracies', which 'had been weighed in the balance and found wanting'.⁴⁵ Annoyed by this disavowal of the coups so recently staged in Italy, Greece and Spain, O'Sullivan fulminated that: 'Windy diatribes against the prevailing civic apathy, and empty platitudes about the beauties of ideal democracy, do not bring us far. No people are reformed from below, that is the inspiration from great men at the top'.⁴⁶ Worrying that O'Higgins and his colleagues had embarked upon a foolish policy of playing 'Kings with Opposition', and apparently immune to the crushing defeats suffered by the irregulars, he offered an alternative course of action. According to O'Sullivan, the Government was to 'energetically assert the authority of the State on all who live within its borders', and 'immediately proceed to suppress

⁴³ Fr Benedict O'Sullivan O.P. to Margaret Collins-O'Driscoll, 18 Oct. 1923 (U.C.D.A., Kennedy papers, P4/1387).

⁴⁴ *Irish Independent*, 13 Oct. 1923.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ O'Sullivan to Collins-O'Driscoll, 18 Oct. 1923 (U.C.D.A., Kennedy papers, P4/1387).

the entire [Irregular] movement, forbidding meetings, press references, publication of their papers or entrance into Ireland of American papers favouring them.⁴⁷ Mussolini, not the egalitarian niceties of democratic discourse, provided the key to obtaining this end:

What then in particular should the Government do? It should first of all imbue itself with the spirit of Fascism, which briefly means government by those naturally fit to rule, as possessing superior intelligence, patriotism, enlightened common sense and prudence in the affairs of the State. I have often felt that the rather mealy-mouthed assurances of Ministers to the effect that they were the mere instruments of the people ... betray a poverty of spirit alien to those who are born rulers of men. The problem of the moment with us, is in fact the discovery of a Mussolini. I believe he could be easily found if certain members of the Government became less humble.⁴⁸

Such counsel, however, did not provoke the enthusiastic response expected by Collins-O'Driscoll. Given the timing of O'Sullivan's communication, this was hardly surprising. Having just crushed a prospective military dictatorship, and with the reputation of the Italian Premier still overshadowed by Corfu, there was little appetite within government circles for pursuing 'the discovery of a Mussolini'. Nevertheless, in addition to demonstrating the impact of Fascist antics at Bobbio and the Dublin pro-Cathedral, O'Sullivan's letter does shed light on the anxieties awakened in Irish clergymen by the recent Civil War. Contrary to the position taken during the Anglo-Irish conflict, the Irish Church did not remain neutral in 1922. Rather, when prevailed upon to do so, the hierarchy controversially denounced the irregulars, and denied the sacraments to those who refused to recognise the Free State.⁴⁹ Accordingly, O'Sullivan and others were alert to the possible historical parallels between Ireland and Italy. Not yet certain the republicans were a spent force, O'Sullivan, like his fellow Dominican and Fascist devotee, the above mentioned Fr Michael P. Cleary, was possibly haunted by visions of 1849, 'when the Irish Dominican Prior of *San Clemente* had to go through Rome

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ See, Keogh, *The Vatican, the bishops and Irish politics*, pp 95–6.

disguised as a baker'.⁵⁰ In years to come, the sanctimonious bearing of de Valera's Fianna Fáil served to reassure this type of mindset, but in the context of the Civil War era, it was not unusual for nervous priests to take solace from the emergence of strong-armed and supposedly pro-clerical dictatorships elsewhere.

4.3. The Volunteer Reserve

Despite resisting these early pressures, allegations that some members of the Executive Council intended to forestall the winds of change by introducing a fascist-style militia dogged the final years of the Cumann na nGaedheal administration. These accusations centred upon the short-lived Volunteer Reserve. Officially inaugurated in the winter of 1929, the Volunteer Reserve was ostensibly in line with the Government's long-standing objective to replace the standing army with a territorial force. Hoping to attract 50,000 men over the course of ten years, the Government sponsored a major propaganda drive to encourage recruitment.⁵¹ Central to this campaign was the Cumann na nGaedheal organ, *The Star*, which announced that the creation of the new citizen force recalled 'memories of the old Volunteer days when the manhood of the country after work turned up at the Volunteer Hall or elsewhere to take part in the weekly or bi-weekly drill lessons.'⁵² Desmond Fitzgerald, meanwhile, anticipated a movement with which he subsequently became intimately involved—the Blueshirts—by introducing an intriguing new title for the proposed force.⁵³ Interviewed in New York whilst on a five week speaking tour of the United States, the Minister for Defence informed American reporters that 'it is hoped, to enlist in the National Guard many thousands of young men who have never before borne arms. Physically as well as mentally this element of the community is regarded as offering the ideal

⁵⁰ Cleary, *Rome Revisited*, p. 162.

⁵¹ *Irish Independent*, 4 June 1929.

⁵² *The Star*, 27 Sept. 1929.

⁵³ *Irish Independent*, 26 Sept. 1929.

material for the projected civilian force'.⁵⁴ To this end, Cumann na nGaedheal invited co-operation from the universities, colleges, farming and labour interests, while the party also made extensive efforts to popularise the force within the civil service.⁵⁵ Indeed, imitating the practices of English public schools, the higher education institutes were to play a crucial role in the formation of the new force. As explained by the *Irish Independent*, which devoted considerable time and space to promoting the Volunteer Reserve, 'efforts will be made to form Officer's Training Corps in the universities and public schools, and classes for the special instruction of young men likely to become suitable officers will also be formed.'⁵⁶ Nevertheless, to avoid the stigma of elitism or favouritism, it was made clear that 'Farmer's sons and farm labourers are to be especially catered for, but for a time, perhaps for a year or two, the scheme will be confined to the principal cities and towns ... If the success upon which the Government counts is achieved in the towns, the rural districts will be gradually catered for.'⁵⁷

Almost immediately, however, and despite cross party consensus about replacing the standing army with territorials, a worried opposition alleged that the Government had more in mind than simply facilitating the rapid development of an apolitical military force. The precipitate actions of Ernest Blythe, who temporarily assumed the Defence portfolio whilst Fitzgerald was away in America, provoked the storm. Despite the fact that no act of parliament covered the type of civilian force proposed, Blythe decided that the Volunteer Reserve did not need to receive the prior approval of the Oireachtas. Instead, he exploited a loophole in existing legislation. At that time, the annually renewed Defence Forces (Temporary Provisions) Act of 1923 governed the military arm of the state. Although this Act allowed the

⁵⁴ Originally published in the *New York Sun* (date unknown), reprinted by *An Phoblacht*, 14 Sept. 1929.

⁵⁵ *Irish Independent*, 10 Sept. 1929.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 4 June 1929; cf. assorted newspaper cuttings relating to the Defence Forces and the Volunteer Reserve, Sept. 1927–Dec. 1929 (U.C.D.A., Aiken papers, P104/2437).

⁵⁷ *Irish Independent*, 4 June 1929.

formation of an Army Reserve, it clearly stipulated that only officers and men that had served their prescribed time in the regular army could join such a force.⁵⁸ However, the same act also contained a proviso that empowered the Minister for Defence to alter a soldier's conditions of service so as to permit him 'to enter the Reserve at once for the residue of the unexpired term of his original enlistment'.⁵⁹ Utilising this clause, Blythe directed that prospective recruits should first join the regular Army, from which, by dictate of the Minister, they immediately transferred to the Volunteer Reserve. Although technically legal, this subterfuge clearly contradicted the spirit of the legislation. Moreover, Blythe announced curious terms of service that raised serious questions about the real intent and purpose of the Volunteer Reserve. Implicitly challenging the long-term strategy of Fianna Fáil, recruits were subject to a controversial oath whereby they pledged to 'bear true faith and allegiance to, and against all enemies whomsoever, defend Saorstát Éireann and *its Constitution as by law established*'.⁶⁰ Apart from the oath, the prescribed duties of a Volunteer also suggested that the envisaged enemies of the new force were domestic rather than foreign. Apparently, if called on to do so by an individual Executive Minister or District Justice, Volunteers would be required to 'aid in the preservation of public order' of their respective towns and districts.⁶¹

Suspecting a ruse to suppress their respective constituencies, Sinn Féin, Labour and Fianna Fáil all denounced the force. For instance, the increasingly left-leaning editor of *An Phoblacht*, Frank Ryan, detected both Fascist and imperialist undertones. Reporting upon an address delivered by Desmond Fitzgerald to the Dublin Rotary Club at Clery's Restaurant, Ryan described how 'the setting up of an imperial Fascisti in Ireland was outlined by the Free State Warlord before the employers' mutual boosting association'.⁶² The

⁵⁸ Defence Forces (Temporary Provisions) Act, 1923, sections 212–14.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, section 146; *Irish Independent*, 18 Dec. 1929.

⁶⁰ *The Nation*, 9 Nov. 1929.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *An Phoblacht*, 14 Sept. 1929.

objective, he continued, was to 'secure reliable men with no nationalist or labour tendencies ... Yes, young West Britons, poked by the Dublin Bosses, who will provide fine material for a force to suppress Irish nationalism, or to break strikes'.⁶³ Ryan also kept a close watch to make sure that the union bosses themselves performed no act of betrayal. Pouncing upon a visitation paid by the officer responsible for organising the new force, Colonel James Costello, to the General Secretary of the I.T.&G.W.U., William O'Brien, he warned against those 'who, pretending to speak on behalf of the Irish workers, would assist in the creation of the new terrorist force'.⁶⁴ Appealing to the patriotic instincts of the labour rank-and-file and again defining the Volunteer Reserve as an 'Imperial Fascisti', Ryan explained that the new force intended to:

...crush by armed violence any attack on British rule in Ireland. It is to assist in strike breaking, in repressing revolutionary movements of the workers, and in enforcing the payment of tribute to England. In these matters it will co-operate with the other British Forces—the R.U.C., C.I.D., Civic Guards, "Free State" Army, and the regular British troops quartered in the Six Counties and in the "reserved" harbours.⁶⁵

Ignoring these insinuations against the Labour leadership, the organ of that party, *The Irishman*, nevertheless revealed the outcome of the Government's overtures to the unions. Asking the questions, 'What is this Volunteer Reserve for? In particular, why is a Volunteer required to accept liability to be called out for the preservation of public order?' it too implied that sinister motives lay behind the Volunteer Reserve.⁶⁶ Remembering the activities of the Special Infantry Corps in 1923,⁶⁷ this journal also pointed out that there was nothing to prevent 'the exercise of this power of mobilisation during an industrial dispute, so that men on strike would find themselves called up as volunteers for the purpose of breaking a strike.'⁶⁸ Considering the industrial climate of 1929, this was a pertinent point. In this year alone, approximately fifty-three

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 12 Oct. 1929.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ *The Irishman*, 2 Nov. 1929.

⁶⁷ See below, p. 243.

strikes and lockouts were recorded, resulting in a total loss of more than 100,000 working days (almost double the figure for 1928).⁶⁹ In a miniature re-run of 1913, the most serious of these involved the Dublin Bus and Tramways Company. This dispute, which, coincidentally or not, was at its height when Blythe introduced the Volunteer Reserve, was responsible for more than 60,000 of the lost days.⁷⁰ Accordingly, it is not hard to imagine Labour's concerns with regard to the real purpose of the new force. Nevertheless, although criticising the introduction of the Volunteer Reserve as 'scandalously improper' and a 'gross abuse of the powers conferred by the Defence Forces Act', *The Irishman* avoided the polemical invective of non-constitutional republicans.⁷¹ Instead, anticipating the forthcoming renewal of the Defence Forces Act, this paper, as was its consistent wont, adopted a respectably legalistic pose. Inviting Labour deputies not to let the Minister 'get away with it unquestioned', *The Irishman* was optimistic that 'Even if he does, it seems doubtful whether the obligations imposed upon reservists thus improperly recruited could be enforced if challenged in a Court with any regard for constitutional propriety.'⁷²

Frank Gallagher and *The Nation*, meanwhile, also had "constitutional propriety" in mind. Not forgetting to stoke left-wing fears about the strikebreaking potential of the Volunteer Reserve, Gallagher alleged that the new force specifically targeted Fianna Fáil supporters. To reinforce his argument, he focused upon the precise wording of the oath that bound the new recruits:

It is evident at once that the Constitution is purposely emphasised, the Constitution "as by law established". The fidelity of the new force is not to the Parliament and Government of the Free State, but to the Parliament and Government of the Free State "under the Constitution". This is significant emphasis at such a time as the present. The Free State Party hold that the Constitution cannot be amended in conflict with the Treaty.

⁶⁸ *The Irishman*, 2 Nov. 1929.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 17 May 1930.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 14 Dec. 1929.

⁷² *Ibid.*

They consequently declare that Republicans cannot carry out their policy without violating the Constitution. Are they, therefore, preparing an army sworn not to obey a Fianna Fáil government if it endeavours to re-establish the independence of Ireland?⁷³

Party activists in University College Dublin certainly thought so. Joining forces with like-minded Sinn Féin supporters, students sympathetic to Fianna Fáil pre-empted the forthcoming parliamentary struggle by orchestrating on-campus demonstrations that seriously disrupted the development of the Officer Training Corps. In this regard, the bane of the U.C.D. authorities was a young Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh. In November 1929, a week after Gallagher's article appeared in *The Nation*, the future Chief Justice and President of Ireland headed a large body of protesters who 'rushed the recruiting office ... tore up recruiting forms, wrecked the office fittings and suspended all recruiting'.⁷⁴ This task achieved, Ó Dálaigh and his fellows organised a successful picket. The protesters carried placards referring to Bob Bondfield and Frank McEvoy (republicans and university students executed during the Civil War), and a large photo of Kevin Barry underneath the inscription "Would he join"?⁷⁵ Such tactics had the desired effect: of the few intending recruits that did turn up, only three braved their heckling colleagues to enlist. Allied to the recruiting officers themselves, these were the only dissenting voices when the protestors passed a resolution that defined the Volunteer Reserve as 'a political force, sanctioned by none save the Free State Party'.⁷⁶ Accordingly, 'in the interests of peace and unity in the University', they demanded that 'the responsible College Authorities ... take immediate steps to have the O.T.C. scheme abandoned.'⁷⁷

Within the Oireachtas, the former leader of the Labour Party, Senator Thomas Johnson, opened the debate. However, and unfortunately for those anxious to

⁷³ *The Nation*, 9 Nov. 1929.

⁷⁴ *An Phoblacht*, 16 Nov. 1929.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

shed some light on the Volunteer Reserve, his condemnatory motion was scheduled as the last item of business before the Christmas recess. Opposing discussion on the grounds that it was scheduled for ‘the fag-end of the session’ or that ‘a number of us have to catch trains this evening’, a majority of Cumann na nGaedhael Senators staged a walkout, thus forcing the chair to adjourn the debate.⁷⁸ Whether this exodus was a deliberate ploy to forestall any inadvertent disclosures or simply a stunt to expedite the Christmas holidays remains unclear. At the time, however, a disgusted Senator O’Farrell insinuated that the former was the case.⁷⁹ So too did *The Irishman*. Commenting on the ugly scenes in the Seanad, this paper alleged that ‘The Minister for Defence wants to be able to present the Seanad with a *fait accompli*, and to talk about the Reserve as a highly successful and popular force’.⁸⁰ Given that Blythe and the Government’s law advisors spent the previous days briefing the recently returned Fitzgerald about the Volunteers, there were good grounds for suspecting foul play.⁸¹ Either way, few Senators remained on hand to hear the chastisements of Michael Comyn of Fianna Fáil, who, delving back into the annals of British and European history, and without any hint of irony, warned that ‘If parliament neglects its duties, abrogates its powers, or derogates its authority, if members run away from meetings where the question is discussed, then, whatever may be said about political liberty, personal liberty is in danger, and the soil is being cultivated and prepared for the dictatorship which is to come.’⁸²

When Parliament did resume in February 1930, Desmond Fitzgerald, by now suitably briefed on the actions of his temporary replacement, was subjected to awkward questions in both houses. In the Seanad, a normally composed Col Maurice Moore of Fianna Fáil, reacting to barbs from the inimitable Dr Oliver St John Gogarty, simplified the issue. Denouncing the Volunteers as further

⁷⁸ *Seanad Éireann deb.*, xiii, 538 (18 Dec. 1929).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, col. 540.

⁸⁰ *The Irishman*, 4 Jan. 1930.

⁸¹ *Irish Independent*, 18 Dec. 1929.

evidence of a wider government policy to conduct its business ‘behind curtains, with tricks, and dodges and deceits’, he suggested that the deed had been done ‘to enable a body of people of the Ministers’ own political opinion to be scattered around the country, so that the Ministers will get their support’.⁸³ In the Dáil, meanwhile, two of de Valera’s leading speakers, Frank Aiken and Seán Lemass, led the attack. Aiken played the republican card: addressing popular fears about another general war, and with a nod to a long-running campaign in *The Nation* that inferred a secret military alliance supposedly confirmed at the 1926 Imperial Conference, he described the Volunteer Reserve as ‘a wing of the British Army’.⁸⁴ Fitzgerald had little trouble in handling this charge, but the points raised by Lemass were not so easily disposed of. Singling out the actions of Ernest Blythe, Lemass complained that by his ‘clumsy’ actions, the Minister for Finance had destroyed cross-party support for a territorial army, thereby ensuring that the Volunteer Reserve would never amount to anything other than a costly failure. In addition, the system of attestation introduced by Blythe was roundly condemned. Noting that, for obvious reasons, ex-standing army officers tended to be ‘the most vituperative opponents of Fianna Fáil’,⁸⁵ Lemass sensed that many of these men would subsequently find themselves in the Volunteer Reserve, which, unlike the Guards and the regular army, expressly allowed the open practice of political affiliations. Hence, he suggested that these officers would be in a position to indoctrinate their subordinates against the government-in-waiting. Lemass then proceeded to examine the public order role of the new force. Pointing out that ‘There is a Civic Guard, there is the Regular Army, and there is the Reserve Army available to deal with all matters in which public order may be involved’, he argued that the Volunteer Reserve ‘should, in our opinion, be distinct and separate from these bodies. If it was kept distinct and separate, I do not think that it would be subject to the same disabilities in the

⁸² *Seanad Éireann deb*, xiii, 546 (18 Dec. 1929).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, xiii, 606–07 (26 Feb. 1930).

⁸⁴ *Dáil Éireann deb*, xxxiii, 443 (19 Feb. 1930).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 446 (19. Feb. 1930).

public mind which those of other bodies are subject to in the special circumstances existing here'.⁸⁶ Thereafter abandoning tactful phraseology, Lemass concluded that, should the Government persist with a force clearly constituted 'to maintain the traditions of the Civil War', then it could expect to receive little uptake at the recruitment centres, for 'The young men of the country will not join that volunteer force if there is any possibility whatever that by doing so they may be jockeyed into the position of acting as Fascist Militia for the Cumann na nGaedheal Party'.⁸⁷

Ultimately, this forecast proved to be correct. Although the Government continued in its propaganda efforts to encourage recruitment, in the interim between the establishment of the Volunteer Reserve in late 1929 and its suspension by Fianna Fáil in 1932, less than one and a half thousand men, a tiny fraction of the intended force, ever enlisted.⁸⁸ The reasons for this abysmal failure are not hard to discern. Whether or not the average Cumann na nGaedheal supporter believed that the Volunteer Reserve was a Fascist-inspired force intended to suppress Fianna Fáil or the unions, it was enough that the opposition parties denounced it as such. At this stage, there was more than a distinct possibility that, thanks largely to the inflexible austerity of the Ministry of Finance, Cumann na nGaedheal would lose the next election. Thus, either hoping for better times under Fianna Fáil or because they were anxious to protect their positions under the incoming government, likely candidates such as the civil servants thought it better to stay away. The available figures suggest that this was so. By admission of *The Star*, in the first four months of recruitment, only thirty civil servants, which equated to one out of every seven hundred state employees (many of whom, admittedly, were beyond military age), saw fit to join the force.⁸⁹ So too the Labour movement, in no ways happy with the depressed wages and social conditions that defined

⁸⁶ Ibid., xxxiii, 1962 (15 Mar. 1930).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ *Irish Independent*, 11 May 1932.

⁸⁹ *The Star*, 24 Jan. 1930; *The Nation*, 1 Feb. 1930.

the late Cumann na nGaedheal era, was never going to provide manpower for a force that its own leadership, in spite of government overtures, immediately denounced as a force intended to break the negotiating power of the working class. Moreover, despite propaganda that intimated the force was open to all citizens, the unemployed were apparently unwelcome. In reality, and it might be argued that this statistic in itself gave a good indication as to the accuracy of the labour movement's instincts, the only fully staffed unit of the Volunteer Reserve, the First Dublin Battalion, depended almost exclusively upon clerks, shopkeepers, members of the professions and officers drawn from the universities.⁹⁰ Indeed, the furore at U.C.D. notwithstanding, it was only amongst the student body (in particular the traditional unionist bastions of Trinity and the Royal College of Surgeons, where enthusiasm for the force was a cause of acute embarrassment to the Government)⁹¹ that the Volunteer Reserve enjoyed any noticeable success: of the men who enlisted, some six hundred did so through the aegis of the Officer Training Corps.⁹²

More relevant to the purpose of this study, however, is whether there was any truth to the accusations of Fascist inflection levelled at the Volunteer Reserve. That there may have been is revealed by some remarkable articles penned by the figure at the centre of the controversy, Ernest Blythe. Writing anonymously for *The Star* newspaper, Blythe not only undermined the position of his colleagues in Dáil Éireann, but also the Inspector-General of the Army, Major-General Michael Brennan. In early March 1930, Brennan addressed the recently opened U.C.G. branch of the Officer Training Corps. Questioned by a Fianna Fáil representative, the General confirmed that 'If there was a change of Government, the Army would have to take its orders from the new Government, and if the Government wanted to alter the Constitution, that was no business of the Army'.⁹³ This commitment earned a

⁹⁰ *Irish Independent*, 23 Jan. 1930.

⁹¹ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xxxiii, 443 (19 Feb. 1930); *Seanad Éireann deb.*, xiii, 605 (26 Feb. 1930).

⁹² *Irish Independent*, 11 May 1932.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 8 Mar. 1930.

rebuke from Blythe, who, writing *as Gaeilge*, demonstrated an ambiguous attitude to the principles of parliamentary democracy. Ignoring the fact that Fianna Fáil could only assume power through an electoral victory, Blythe crassly inverted the opposing positions adopted during the Civil War:

In a way, [Brennan's address] that was true. But if Fianna Fáil were to set about changing the Constitution against the will of the people, or if they were to set about reducing the Constitution to fragments ... it would be a different state of affairs, in our opinion. In these circumstances, the Fianna Fáil government would only be a tyranny ... It is difficult to smash a tyranny except with sword and rifle. If it should become a duty to destroy a tyranny in the Saorstát, it would be the duty of the soldier to move first, as he is best equipped for the work. Thus, the position is: Fianna Fáil has nothing to fear from the Army if they are good boys; but if they are bad boys, the army will be highly dangerous to them.⁹⁴

Inevitably, critics of the Volunteer Reserve made further political capital from this outburst.⁹⁵ Not alone did the opposition journals immediately identify Blythe as the author and thus proclaim their suspicions about the Volunteer Reserve confirmed, previously neutral observers like the *Derry Journal* also arrayed themselves against the Government. Not bothering to distinguish between Blythe and the ministry at large, this organ expressed disbelief that 'The Party that has since its inception proclaimed itself the champion of the free and peaceful expression of the people's will, and that, on its own professions embarked on a civil war and shot hundreds of its former comrades to obtain that end and banish forever the rule of the gun, now preaches what it so vigorously and with such terrible loss of life crushed.'⁹⁶ Such was the furore that surrounded this blatant incitement to mutiny, that a discomfited Desmond Fitzgerald and an equally embarrassed *Star* hurried to downplay the article.⁹⁷ Blythe, however, adopting a position that said much about his views on the Irish people—aptly described by a recent biographer as 'bleak'—remained unrepentant.⁹⁸ Obviously, Blythe's disdain for the public at large,

⁹⁴ (Irish language original) *The Star*, 22 Mar. 1930. (Translation used) *Sunday Independent*, 23 Mar. 1930.

⁹⁵ *The Irishman*, 29 Mar. 1930; *The Nation*, 29 Mar. 1930.

⁹⁶ Quoted in *The Nation*, 12 Apr. 1930.

⁹⁷ *Seanad Éireann deb.*, xiii, 863 (26 Mar. 1930); *The Star*, 12 Apr. 1930.

⁹⁸ Buckley, 'Blythe, Ernest'.

starkly evident during the Civil War, when, as already noted, he canvassed the Executive Council in favour of Seamus Hughes' proposals to establish a political militia, had not altered over the years. Moreover, *The Star* article adds substance to subsequent claims made by David Neligan (head of the C.I.D.) and Peadar MacMahon (Secretary to the Council of Defence), that Blythe, once more acting as stand-in for Fitzgerald, was somehow involved in a prospective coup planned by Eoin O'Duffy and others in 1931.⁹⁹

Although falling outside the parameters of this study, some of Blythe's political writings during the Blueshirt era also serve as a useful pointer toward his possible thinking about the Volunteer Reserve. From late 1932, Blythe played an important role in the transformation of the Army Comrades Association, originally a benevolent welfare association, into the nakedly political Blueshirts, which, whatever about the disputed motives of that movement, certainly embraced the liturgical element of generic fascism.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, a pamphlet he helped write and publish in mid-1933 made plain that Blythe, for one, intended the movement to go far beyond the symbolic trappings—salutes, uniforms, mass rallies, demagogic speechifying and all the rest—of the era. Recently explored by Fearghal McGarry, *The Diast* outlined a new system of government for the Irish Free State.¹⁰¹ Issued on behalf of 'a group of Irishmen who feel that national progress is not possible unless a new type of organic or integrative state is created in the twenty-six counties', it asserted that parliamentary democracy had recently succumbed to 'the disease and weakness of over maturity'.¹⁰² Consequently, 'auction politics', whereby 'every party is obliged largely to neglect the outlook and views of the most patriotic and worthy citizens, and to cater principally for the basest, the most selfish and the most ignorant' had taken a hold of public life. Furthermore, 'the growing complexity of the economic structures of society had put strains

⁹⁹ See, Regan, *Irish Counter-Revolution*, pp 291–5.

¹⁰⁰ Manning, *The Blueshirts*, p. 239.

¹⁰¹ McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy*, p. 205.

¹⁰² *The Diast (An Occasional Bulletin)*, i, no. 1. (May 1933) (U.C.D.A., Blythe papers, P24/691).

on parliamentarianism that it never could have borne in its best days'.¹⁰³ Confronted with this apocalypse, *The Diast* proclaimed that 'the prolongation of parliamentary democracy was no longer justified', and that 'a new device or principle' was required to overcome the challenges faced. The principle envisaged was government by oligarchy, the device to obtaining this end was:

... the creation of a great, voluntary, disciplined public-service organisation, with say, fifty thousand members ... that will stand between the ordinary elector on the one hand and the Parliament and the Government on the other. This new organ, which may be called the Diastal Association should be, in a sense, a Mass Commission of Political Investigation and Supervision comprising the more active and public-spirited citizens. It will be charged with the duty of guiding and instructing the less active citizens, of securing general popular co-operation with the Administration, and of spurring the Government to unceasing effort.¹⁰⁴

The "Diastal Association" (elsewhere described in Blythe's personal papers as a 'National Service Union')¹⁰⁵ was to be granted 'a definite constitutional status', and would be responsible for nominating political representatives, appointing members of the judiciary, and conducting industrial relations along blatantly fascist lines.¹⁰⁶ For Blythe and his fellow "Diasts", the Army Comrades Association was the 'one body in existence that might, perhaps, be turned into the sort of organisation that is needed' and which should be honoured to 'take up the burdens and endure the toils' of forging a new national consciousness.¹⁰⁷

Without re-opening the debate as to whether Blueshirtism was essentially a

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ 'Draft Constitution', n.d. (U.C.D.A., Blythe papers, P24/1760).

¹⁰⁶ *The Diast* (U.C.D.A., Blythe papers, P24/691).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. Noted for its fascist tendencies by Mike Cronin (*The Blueshirts and Irish Politics*, pp 96–7), another document authored by Blythe that complements the thrust of *The Diast* is 'An Agricultural Corporation: Basis for Discussion', c. 1934 (U.C.D.A., Blythe papers, P24/680(a)). Therein Blythe described how the Blueshirts should act as perpetual and exclusive overseers of a future Irish Corporate State. According to Cronin, this memorandum indicates that Blythe was the Blueshirt 'intellectual steering most closely to fascism. Blythe's thinking, and the use of the Blueshirts, go far beyond an Irish adoption of Quadragesimo Anno. Blythe is using the encyclical as a basis for ideas that will lead to a Blueshirt control of all spheres of life.'

fascist phenomenon or merely ‘a final instalment of the Civil War saga’,¹⁰⁸ it should be obvious that the authors of *The Diast* were heavily influenced by the foremost diarchy of the day, Mussolini’s Italy. Clearly intent on replicating the Black Shirts’ achievement of establishing a state within a state, they believed that the A.C.A. was the vehicle to realise this end. Far removed from the position adopted by other leaders of the deposed treatyite regime, these plans suggest that Blythe was not, as some have held, and as he himself later liked to project, a party to the controlling element of ex-Cumann na nGaedhael parliamentarians who prevented the radical elements from dominating the policies of Fine Gael.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, taken as a barometer of Blythe’s attitude to parliamentary democracy, this pamphlet demonstrates that the major difference between Blythe and the unashamedly hostile Eoin O’Duffy was an emphasis on tact.¹¹⁰ Consequently, it was not without good cause that following the unceremonious dumping of O’Duffy in 1934, Blythe became a marginal figure within Fine Gael. As with his earlier contributions to *The Star*, and as would later be repeated in polemical activities he undertook on behalf of *Ailtirí na hAiséirghe*,¹¹¹ when it came to airing his fascist tendencies, *The Diast* simply confirmed Blythe’s penchant for anonymity. As such, particularly in light of his envisaged role for the Blueshirt movement, it is hard not to suspect that the Volunteer Reserve as conceived by him was a political militia that, not unlike the M.V.S.N. in Italy, would protect the treatyite regime if called upon to do so.

¹⁰⁸ Manning, *Blueshirts*, p. 248; quoted in Robert Fisk, *In Time of War: Ireland, Ulster and the Price of Neutrality, 1939–1945* (2nd ed., London, 1996), p. 426, and Mike Cronin, ‘The Blueshirt Movement, 1932–5: Ireland’s Fascists?’ in the *Journal of Contemporary History*, xxx, no. 2 (Apr. 1995), p. 311.

¹⁰⁹ Buckley, ‘Blythe, Ernest’; cf. Blythe, ‘Blueshirt Memories’, c. 1940 (U.C.D.A., Blythe papers, P24/1942).

¹¹⁰ On O’Duffy’s indiscretions, see, notes by Thomas Johnson on the League of Youth, including quotes printed by *United Ireland*, c. 1934 (N.L.I., Thomas Johnson papers, Ms. 17,186).

¹¹¹ Drafts of *Ailtirí na hAiséirghe* pamphlets, with annotations by Blythe (U.C.D.A., Blythe papers, P24/1969).

4.4. Local Government reform

The vexed area of local government reform was another arena wherein Cumann na nGaedheal faced allegations of pursuing policies analogous to those imposed in Mussolini's Italy. Legislation introduced during the 1920s marked a significant departure from the established structures and practices of Irish local authorities. Taken as a whole, the various reforms served to divest the local authorities of many of the powers and functions granted them by the Local Government Act of 1898.¹¹² An integral part of the campaign to "kill Home Rule with kindness", this Act placed Irish local government on a (rate-paying) democratic footing, establishing new administrative organs with wide-ranging powers over contracts, expenditure and administrative appointments. Rather than reinforce the Union, however, these reforms facilitated the emergence of a new political class, which eventually provided a body of experienced politicians that proved essential to the success of revolutionary Sinn Féin.¹¹³ Yet the disturbed circumstances of 1919–1921 also highlighted serious deficiencies in how the County Councils, City Corporations and other minor authorities (viz, Urban and Rural District Councils, Asylum Boards and Boards of Guardians) conducted their business. With the conflicting claims of different governments came a breakdown in supervision and control.¹¹⁴ Indeed, to cover both the cost of unregulated expenditure and the loss of British subvention, some counties and cities experienced an enormous increase in rates, which in turn led to discontent amongst ratepayers. Elsewhere, County Councils collected no rates at all, thus casting their finances hopelessly into arrears.¹¹⁵ The Civil War had a further damaging effect on the administration of local government. In many rural regions, republicans, who declined to carry out their statutory functions, dominated

¹¹² Diarmaid Ferriter, *Lovers of Liberty?: Local Government in 20th Century Ireland* (N.A.I., Dublin, 2001), p. 55.

¹¹³ J. P. D. Dunbabin, 'British Local Government Reform: The Nineteenth Century and after' in the *English Historical Review*, xcii, no. 365 (Oct. 1977), pp 799–800.

¹¹⁴ J. J. Horgan, 'The Development of Local Government in Ireland' in the *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, xvii, no. 3 (1945/46) p. 424.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the various councils and boards.¹¹⁶ Consequently, in some counties, most notably Kerry and Leitrim, chaos reigned and local administration ceased to function altogether. Applying powers provided by the Local Government (Temporary Provisions) Act of 1923, the incumbent government therefore found it necessary to replace some councils with centrally appointed Special Commissioners.¹¹⁷ Born by sheer force of circumstances, this measure nevertheless paved the way for far reaching developments in Irish local government.

With the new regime indicating a clear intent to impose its authority and overcome ineffective administration in the provinces, severe criticism of the existing system appeared in the academic press. The Jesuit Professor of Ethics and Politics at University College Dublin, Mgr Michael Cronin, and the prominent Cork solicitor and social commentator, John J. Horgan, called for widespread reforms. In various contributions made to *Studies*, they argued that municipal government in Dublin and the other major cities suffered from a lack of accountability to the electors, was bloated and unwieldy, and failed to incorporate expert opinion.¹¹⁸ Accordingly, the solution to these defects lay in abandoning the inherited English model of local administration, and replacing it with a new ‘organic framework of government suitable to Irish needs’.¹¹⁹ To this end, both Cronin and Horgan invited legislators to apply themselves to the study of German and American systems of municipal government. In these countries, administrative detail was respectively the preserve of *Bürgermeisters* and City Managers, leaving smaller elected councils than those obtaining in Ireland to exercise their legislative powers with regard to rates, loans and byelaws.¹²⁰ Arguing that democracy and efficiency are not

¹¹⁶ Eunan O’Halpin, ‘The Origins of City and County Management’, in R. Haslam, J. Boland, B. Johnson, B. Kiernan, J. O’Donnell and G. Ward (eds.), *City and County Management, 1929–1990: A Retrospective* (Institute of Public Administration, Dublin, 1991), p. 5.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*; Horgan, ‘The Development of Local Government in Ireland’, p. 424.

¹¹⁸ Horgan, ‘City Management in America’ in *Studies*, ix, no. 33 (Mar. 1920), pp 41–56; Michael Cronin, ‘City Administration in Ireland’, *ibid.*, xii, no. 47 (Sept., 1923), pp 345–55.

¹¹⁹ Horgan, (response to) ‘City Administration in Ireland’, *ibid.*, p. 360

¹²⁰ Horgan, ‘Local Government Developments at Home and Abroad’, *ibid.*, xv, no. 60 (Dec.

mutually exclusive terms, Cronin and Horgan were optimistic that this model, equally applicable to urban and rural administration, would best fulfil Irish needs.

The Government, however, was slow to absorb the advice proffered in *Studies*. Instead, the Minister for Local Government and Health, Tipperary T.D. James A. Burke, made widespread use of the suppressive powers granted him by the Civil War legislation. A barrister by profession, Burke had previously played an important role in the Dáil Éireann Local Government Department under William T. Cosgrave. Succeeding to complete control of the Free State portfolio in October 1923, he proved himself something of a social reactionary in the mould of O’Higgins, demonstrating an innate conservatism by refusing, amidst much controversy, to broaden the remit of the Unemployment Insurance Acts in 1926.¹²¹ Burke also displayed authoritarian tendencies similar to those affecting Ernest Blythe, within whose compass he operated for large parts of his parliamentary career. Blythe preceded Burke in Local Government, and, when the latter lost out in the cabinet reshuffles of 1927, the Ministry of Finance provided a new opportunity for gainful employment, with Burke acting as Blythe’s parliamentary secretary until 1932. This association continued into the Blueshirt/Fine Gael era, when Burke, like Blythe, displayed strong sympathies for the various fascist movements in Europe.¹²² Not surprisingly, therefore, patience with the failings of the regional assemblies was not the salient feature of Burke’s tenure as Minister for Local Government. Rather, between 1923 and 1926 he abolished nineteen local authorities and replaced them with centrally appointed Commissioners.¹²³ Ostensibly, Burke pursued this policy to counter inefficiency and corruption. In private, however, he acknowledged a wider political dimension. According

1926), p. 540.

¹²¹ Pauric J. Dempsey, ‘Burke (Bourke), James Aloysius’ in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009) .

¹²² Ibid.; McGarry, *Eoin O’Duffy*, pp 190, 223.

¹²³ Dempsey, ‘Burke (Bourke), James Aloysius’; Horgan ‘The Development of Local Government in Ireland’, p. 425.

to an American diplomat and confidante, the Minister did not intend to allow republicans to transform local politics into a platform from which to embarrass the Government.¹²⁴ Either way, the most notable casualties of this policy were the City Corporations of Cork and Dublin. In 1925, Burke also introduced a series of successor Acts to the 1923 legislation, which largely reversed the decentralising tendencies of the late imperial system.¹²⁵ The new legislation abolished the Rural District Councils and the Boards of Guardians, reassigning their functions and some of their personnel to the County Councils and City Corporations. It also extended the Minister's right to dissolve these latter bodies, and transferred all purchasing powers to the central authority. Finally, to the horror of patrons, brokers and prospective clients across the twenty-six counties, local appointments became subject to competitive examinations supervised by a newly established Local Appointments Commission.

4.5. Conflicting responses to the reforms

Perhaps inevitably, the confrontational approach adopted by Burke created something of a furore. Councillors across the land hurried to accuse the Government of autocratic tendencies. Distressed at the fate of their municipal colleagues, Dublin County Councillors, for example, denounced what they described as proposals to replace democratic government with 'bureaucratic dictatorship', and passed a resolution that roundly condemned each of the legislative reforms introduced in 1925.¹²⁶ Likewise, the members of Navan Council alleged that the intention was 'to establish a new ascendancy party in Ireland', and that the liberties of the people 'were to be filched away' by a government 'out to appoint a dictatorship'.¹²⁷ A similar motion was only narrowly defeated in Westmeath; but not before irate representatives of the famously impartial Farmers Party denounced a perceived attempt to establish

¹²⁴ O'Halpin, 'Origins of City and County Management', pp 6–7.

¹²⁵ Namely, the Local Government Act (1925); Local Authorities (Combined Purchasing) Act (1925); Local Authorities (Officers and Employees) Act (1925).

¹²⁶ *Irish Independent*, 11 June 1926.

Cumann na nGaedheal jobbery on a grand scale.¹²⁸ Other bodies from Sligo to Waterford aired similar views, and angry delegations traversed the country to attend ineffectual protest meetings with an immovable Minister.¹²⁹

Outside the council chambers themselves, groups not normally concerned with the principles of traditional democracy attempted to exploit regional apprehension about the reforms. One such group was the communist Workers Party of Ireland (W.P.I.). A short-lived but not inconsequential organisation, high-profile members of the W.P.I. included Roddy and Nora Connolly (offspring of James), Maud Gonne MacBride, Captain Jack White and Charlotte Despard.¹³⁰ Then campaigning to recruit republicans disillusioned by the recent split of the anti-treaty Sinn Féin party, Connolly warned that the attack on local administration was simply a prelude to national dictatorship. Preaching vigilance to a large crowd at Killeshandra, County Cavan, he alleged that Cumann na nGaedheal had succumbed to the fascistic *zeitgeist* then imposing itself upon the continent.¹³¹ Accordingly, the newly appointed Commissioners were ‘Government Dictators’ out ‘to stifle popular opinion’. Moreover, when placed in the context of moves then afoot to replace proportional representation with direct voting (discussed below), the dissolutions provided clear evidence that the Government intended to ape developments in ‘Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal and Bulgaria’, each of which

¹²⁷ *Irish Times*, 29 Jan. 1924.

¹²⁸ *Westmeath Examiner*, 28 Aug. 1926.

¹²⁹ *Irish Independent*, 5 Feb.; *ibid.*, 26 May 1924.

¹³⁰ Lawrence William White, ‘Connolly, Roderic James (‘Roddy’)’ in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009). The Workers’ Party of Ireland was formed in 1926 by veterans of the defunct Communist Party of Ireland. The Comintern, which chose to recognise Jim Larkin’s Irish Workers’ League instead, dissolved the C.P.I. in 1924. Despite its best efforts, the Workers’ Party likewise failed to make an impression upon Moscow. On the Workers’ Party of Ireland, see, Charlie Maguire, ‘Roddy Connolly and the Workers’ Party of Ireland in 1926’ in *Saothar*, no. 30 (2005), pp 33–45. On the radical left and its relationship with the Communist Internationals, see Emmet O’Connor, ‘Jim Larkin and the Communist Internationals, 1923–9’ in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxxi, no. 123 (May 1999), pp 357–72; cf. *idem*, ‘Bolshevising Irish Communism: The Communist International and the Formation of the Revolutionary Workers’ Groups, 1927–31’, *ibid.*, xxxiii, no. 132 (Nov. 2003), pp 452–69.

¹³¹ *Anglo-Celt*, 10 July 1926.

had been undone by ‘dictatorships of the landlords and capitalists, [intended] to continue the grinding of the faces of the poor.’¹³²

Backed by the national press, however, Burke and the Department of Local Government took a relaxed approach to the objectors. Contrary to the neutered councils and radicals like Roddy Connolly, both the *Irish Independent* and the *Irish Times* supported the drive toward centralisation. Championing the disaffected ratepayers, these journals concentrated their fire upon the municipal authorities.¹³³ Indeed, so intense were the broadsheet campaigns against the “extravagant” reign of the old Dublin Corporation, that former members sensed motives other than a simple desire to promote efficiency in local government. According to Seán T. O’Kelly, the municipality was a victim of begrudgery and thwarted commercial ambition. Addressing the Dáil, he claimed that a nostalgic longing for the unionist-controlled system that existed prior to 1898 motivated the *Irish Times*. The *Independent*, on the other hand, was supposedly actuated by the business concerns of William Martin Murphy, who, having failed to gain control of Dublin’s electricity supply, also feared that an elected council would not renew the long-term tramways lease first granted him in 1896.¹³⁴ Leaving aside this kind of conjecture, when it came to efficiencies in local government and elsewhere these papers were certainly not averse to celebrating the no-nonsense approach of Fascism at the expense of the ‘cumbrous and oratorical machinery of [Irish] elected boards’.¹³⁵ Similar sentiments appeared in the regional press. Demonstrating an obvious parochial pride in the accomplishments of the Minister for Local Government and Health, the *Nenagh Guardian* sensed that some regions were particularly deserving of dictatorial methods:

¹³² *Ibid.*, cit. in Maguire, ‘Roddy Connolly and the W.P.I.’, p. 38.

¹³³ See, for example, *Irish Independent*, 18 Sept. 1923; *Irish Times*, 24 May 1924.

¹³⁴ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xxi, 1755–7 (23 Nov. 1927). O’Kelly was not the only former Corporation member to allege that the tramways issue underlined the *Independent*’s campaign against the municipality. For an interesting account of the struggles in this regard, see *An Phoblacht*, 15 Mar. 1930.

¹³⁵ *Irish Times*, 23 June 1923; cf. Ed., ‘A Sound Policy’ in the *Irish Independent*, 9 Oct. 1923; *Irish Independent*, 14 June 1926.

The financial chaos in which the Clare County Council and some other public bodies in the Free State have got themselves into suggests that the only way out of their muddles is by a Fascist dictatorship in the county. It is obvious democracy in a half-educated county area does not make for either efficiency or economy, and it may be that a few more breakdowns here will force the Government to reconsider the whole inheritance of local government organisations we received from the old regime ... A few more muddles and we will find crowds here cheering some Irish Mussolini who will exult over the disintegrating body of democracy.¹³⁶

This new chapter in the inter-county rivalry between Tipperary and Clare notwithstanding, the implication that Fascism somehow provided a working model for Burke and Cumann na nGaedheal was misleading. In fact, the generalisations and analogies introduced at the time indicated that Irish observers had nothing more than a basic understanding of the far more drastic reforms introduced in Italy. The so-called *Podestà* Law of late 1925 epitomised Mussolini's contempt for municipalism, which he described as 'an Italian sore' and a cancerous threat 'to the collective good'.¹³⁷ Accordingly, this law abolished all elections and councils in municipalities with less than 5,000 inhabitants, meaning that the representative principle disappeared from more than eighty per cent of Italian communes.¹³⁸ Fascist appointees, or the portentously entitled *Podestàs*, a term previously used to denote the highest-ranking officials in the medieval city-states, replaced the elected councils.¹³⁹ These officials in turn operated under the auspices of several provincial Prefects, whose plenary powers also hung like the Sword of Damocles over the remaining councils in the larger towns and cities, until they too suffered dissolution in August 1926.¹⁴⁰ Intended for no other purpose than to extend executive control over every kind of provincial activity, the Fascist system did not endear itself to informed Irish commentators, who remained frustrated that their own Executive seemed incapable of defining a long-term strategy for

¹³⁶ *Nenagh Guardian*, 6 Feb. 1926.

¹³⁷ 'Fascist Reforms in Italy' in the *Round Table: A Quarterly Review of the Politics of the British Commonwealth*, xxvi, no. 62 (Mar. 1926), p. 267.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ 'Fascist Rule After Five Years' in the *Round Table*, xxvii, no. 63 (June 1927), p. 503.

the future development of Irish local government.¹⁴¹

4.6. Opposition to the Cork and Dublin Municipality Acts

By 1926, the reform lobby was complaining that the measures so far pursued by the Government hardly amounted to a definite and considered policy. Penning another seminal article for *Studies* in which he drew attention to the expanded workload and personnel of the unsuppressed councils, John J. Horgan was vexed that the Executive Council had ‘not really decided the fundamental question whether its local government policy is to be centripetal or centrifugal’.¹⁴² Horgan also worried about the growing acceptance of non-representative government in local affairs. To his mind, if allowed to continue indefinitely, the existing *intendant* system, born of a particular time and a very particular set of circumstances, must in the long-term have a negative impact upon Irish democracy. Asserting that the temperament and tradition of the Irish people demanded ‘an expert bureaucracy under ultimate democratic control’, he therefore continued to argue in favour of some form of Management System.¹⁴³ The Greater Dublin Commission, a board of inquiry convened some months previously to make proposals as to the future administration of the capital, agreed. Reporting to the Oireachtas in April 1926, it too found much to recommend in several American and European proto-types (none of them Italian) and endorsed the principle of managerial control, subject to a representative body, in civic affairs.¹⁴⁴ Vindicated by these recommendations, Horgan and a group of likeminded citizens were determined that their native Cork, not Dublin, should be the pilot city for a new departure along these lines. Thus, the Cork Progressive Association, a body dominated by local business interests and closely linked to the city Cumann na nGaedheal branch, hurried to frame a new scheme of municipal administration for Leaside, which, presented to the Government in the form of

¹⁴¹ Philip Morgan, ‘The prefects and party–state relations in Fascist Italy’ in the *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, iii, no. 3 (1998), p. 250; *Irish Tribune*, 11, 25 June, 20 Aug. 1926.

¹⁴² Horgan, ‘Local Government Developments’, p. 539.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 540.

a Bill, was introduced to the Oireachtas in 1928 by Burke's successor in Local Government, Richard Mulcahy.¹⁴⁵

Yet even with the introduction of a system clearly based on non-Italian models, inferences of Fascist influence upon government policy abounded. Initially, however, Fianna Fáil remained aloof from the controversy. In fact, when the Cork City Management Bill first appeared in the Dáil, it hardly raised a murmur from the main opposition party.¹⁴⁶ Rather, during the Committee stage of the Bill, Roscommon T.D. Gerry Boland, Fianna Fáil chief-whip and sometime stand-in for Seán T. O'Kelly as party spokesperson on local government, actually supported the principle of autocracy in municipal affairs. Countering the charge that he and his party were opposed to the Managerial System, Boland informed the Dáil that 'As a matter of fact, I would be inclined to agree that if we could get a good Mussolini it would not be a bad idea at all. I believe there is a good deal to be said for autocracy, especially if it is benevolent'.¹⁴⁷ Boland's attitude demonstrated that the Fianna Fáil elite were not so different to their Cumann na nGaedheal counterparts when it came to regional affairs. At leadership level, both parties tacitly agreed that local concerns were national issues, and that accordingly the councils amounted to expensive (and potentially troublesome) British anachronisms.¹⁴⁸ Consequently, beyond tabling a series of non-vital amendments and the occasional pious article in *The Nation* that lamented 'a most glaring decline in civic pride', Fianna Fáil offered only token resistance to the latest reforms.¹⁴⁹ In fact, so cordial was the atmosphere throughout the Cork City Management debate that some commentators optimistically predicted an end to the

¹⁴⁴ *Report of the Greater Dublin Commission*, 1926 (N.A.I., DT, S6532).

¹⁴⁵ Regan, *Irish Counter-Revolution*, p. 238; Horgan, 'The Development of Local Government in Ireland', p. 427.

¹⁴⁶ J. Collins, 'The Genesis of City and County Management' in *Administration: Journal of the Institute of Public Administration of Ireland*, vol. II (1954), p. 32.

¹⁴⁷ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xxvi, 209–210 (11 Oct. 1928).

¹⁴⁸ Ferriter, *Lovers of Liberty?*, pp 64–5.

¹⁴⁹ *The Nation*, 14 July 1928; minutes of Fianna Fáil Parliamentary Party meeting, 5 July 1928, (U.C.D.A., Archives of the Fianna Fáil party, P67/443).

personal enmity that often interrupted debates at that time.¹⁵⁰ Such optimism was short-lived, however. The removal of the “Direct Democracy” clauses of the 1922 Constitution (Articles 47 and 48) proceeded alongside the Cork Bill.¹⁵¹ In so doing, the Government had the simple objective of preventing Fianna Fáil from triggering a referendum on the Oath of Allegiance. The bitterness that surrounded this affray undid any rapprochement evident during the local government debates. Moreover, as defenders of the peoples’ right to initiate legislation, Fianna Fáil was somewhat given to ultra-democratic posturing.¹⁵² As a result, in addition to provoking yet more accusations that Cumann na nGaedheal was preparing the way for a fascist dictatorship,¹⁵³ this stance had a knock-on effect upon the passage of the Cork City Management Bill, with de Valera’s party withdrawing its qualified support during the final readings, before finally voting against the legislation.¹⁵⁴

In consequence, when the Government introduced similar legislation for Dublin it ran into very heavy weather indeed.¹⁵⁵ Now more closely tied to democratic principles, Fianna Fáil stood foursquare alongside the Labour Party in resisting the scheme. For the opposition parties, offensive features of the Local Government (Dublin) Bill of 1930 included a liberal measure of de-rating for bigger businesses, the establishment of a new coastal Borough of Dún Laoghaire, and the vaguely defined powers ascribed to both the City Manager and the reconstituted Corporation. The real focal point of opposition concerns, however, was the introduction of a new commercial franchise.

¹⁵⁰ *Sunday Independent*, 21 Oct. 1928.

¹⁵¹ Article 47 made it possible for a minority (two-fifths) of Dáil deputies, provided they obtained Seanad support or a petition of not less than one-twentieth of the voters, to suspend controversial legislation subject to a referendum. Article 48 contained the “Initiative”. This device allowed the people themselves to put forth proposals for laws or constitutional amendments. Should the Oireachtas fail to act on such proposals, a further petition of 75,000 voters would likewise compel a referendum.

¹⁵² *The Nation*, 16 June 1928.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xxvii, 1694–5 (28 June 1928); *ibid.*, 1155–8 (30 Nov. 1928).

¹⁵⁵ Edward Sheehy, ‘City and County Management’, in Mark Callanan and Justin F. Keogan (eds.), *Local Government in Ireland—Inside Out* (Institute of Public Administration, Dublin, 2003), p. 128.

Listed on a special register, such included ‘persons, partnerships or bodies, corporate or un-incorporate, occupying premises for the purpose of any business, profession, trade, manufacture, or other commercial or industrial pursuit’, with a rateable value of £20 or more.¹⁵⁶ Four of the twenty-five seats on the future Dublin Corporation were reserved for these electors, whom, depending upon the rateable value of a given premises, might have from one to six votes, to be exercised in the reserved and open elections alike. That a similar franchise had not featured in the Cork prototype said much about the intimate and long-established links between Cumann na nGaedheal and the commercial elite in Ireland’s second city.¹⁵⁷ In Dublin, however, party strategists worried that the business establishment, supposedly suffering from a general apathy toward treatyite politics, was insufficiently committed to keeping the Cosgrave administration in power.¹⁵⁸ Anxious to awaken the businessmen from their lethargy, the Government thus responded positively to canvassing from the Dublin Chamber of Commerce, which, as explained by the book purveyor J. C. M. Eason, had ‘for three years been hammering at the question of the franchise of the business community in connection with the Greater Dublin Bill’.¹⁵⁹

Distressed by the reactionary portent of the Bill, the Left protested furiously. Again, radical elements were to the fore. Busily pursuing the “class against class” philosophy of the Comintern, that body’s Irish mouthpiece, the *Workers’ Voice*, which had long since portrayed the interim Commissioners as the Irish equivalent of Mussolini’s *Podestàs*, suggested that in acting at the behest of ‘the capitalists, bankers and landlords’, the ‘Cumann na nGaedheal policy regarding municipal government both in Dublin and Cork is more openly showing its Fascist character.’¹⁶⁰ For their part, the non-Muscovites in

¹⁵⁶ *The Irishman*, 15 Feb. 1930.

¹⁵⁷ Regan, *Irish Counter-Revolution*, p. 238.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Irish Independent*, 30 Jan. 1930.

¹⁶⁰ *Worker’s Voice*, 30 Aug. 1930. As the organ of the reconstituted Communist Party of Ireland, this paper reproduced Stalinist propaganda from 1930 until its collapse in 1936. With

the Irish Labour Party organised a major street demonstration in Dublin city centre. Thereat, speakers supported a resolution that condemned the ‘undemocratic precedent of conferring special franchise rights’.¹⁶¹ One of those speakers, R. J. P. Mortished, a staunch critic of the various reforms introduced since 1923, forcibly denounced the Dublin Bill as ‘mean in its conception, arbitrary in its operation and humiliating in its effect’.¹⁶² Following up, Senator Thomas Johnson suggested that the legislation ‘reverted to the most objectionable form of Toryism. The action of the Government showed that they did not think the people of Dublin were fit to govern themselves. This was Crown Colony government over again—the governor and the council of advisers’.¹⁶³ Fianna Fáil, meanwhile, insinuated that the Dublin Bill was the latest indication that the broader economic, social and political policies of Cumann na nGaedheal were entirely dedicated to the imperial interest. Not for the first time appealing to the nationalist and protectionist instincts of Dublin’s *petit bourgeoisie*, the party newspaper, *The Nation*, portrayed Cumann na nGaedheal as the champion of free trade and big business. Accordingly, the legislation was ‘clearly designed at the dictation of the Unionists and other imperialists, particularly those who live directly or indirectly by the importation and distribution of British economic goods’.¹⁶⁴

These protests provoked an unrepentant response from *The Star*. On the grounds that ‘the success of the dictatorship in Italy and Spain, and the frequent breakdown of parliaments, have driven many democrats furiously to think whether, after all, the gods of democracy have not feet of clay’, an

relation to Commissioner Government in Dublin, the *Workers Voice* made some interesting observations. In early 1930, the Commissioners introduced new bye-laws relating to the distribution of leaflets and street collections, both of which were banned unless special police permission were obtained. As religious organisations were exempt from these regulations, The *Workers’ Voice* concluded that the laws were ‘clear proof of the Fascist attempts of the Free State Dublin Commissions and the police authorities to interfere and impede the working class movement in its work’ (*Worker’s Voice*, 26 July, 1930).

¹⁶¹ *The Irishman*, 1 Mar. 1930.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *The Nation*, 22 Feb. 1930.

anonymous lead writer in this paper launched a stinging attack on the representative principle *per se*.¹⁶⁵ Describing the outstanding characteristics of the multitude as ignorance, apathy and malleability, the author only grudgingly acknowledged the Managerial System as an interim solution to the supposed anarchy surrounding Irish local affairs, and announced himself personally opposed to “utopian” democratic forms in regional and national politics alike.¹⁶⁶

Not surprisingly, opposition indignation reached new heights. Polemical ripostes preceded and attended heated exchanges in the Dáil.¹⁶⁷ Here tempers were frayed by the delayed publication of the Bill, and yet another ruse involving Ernest Blythe. Ignoring the established procedure of informing the opposition whips beforehand, during the second reading of the Bill he moved a motion of closure, which, easily passed by a large body of Cumann na nGaedheal deputies specifically mobilised for the purpose, prevented any significant criticism.¹⁶⁸ Amidst the ensuing uproar, Seán Lemass alleged that a recent meeting with Mussolini had supplied the Minister, Richard Mulcahy, with ‘contempt for ordinary forms of democracy’.¹⁶⁹ The meeting that Lemass referred to took place in late September of 1929. Mulcahy met Mussolini in Rome whilst en-route to an international housing conference in Naples. For Mussolini, the interview was a routine affair. An incorrigible egotist, the *Duce* customarily invited any foreign dignitaries who entered his domain to a brief meeting.¹⁷⁰ These interviews involved a humbling visit to the Quirinal, where an invariably busy Mussolini, strategically placed on a dais some ninety feet removed from his office entrance, would receive his guests.¹⁷¹ Mulcahy was not

¹⁶⁵ ‘P.A.P.’ (pseudo.), ‘Democratic Government’ in *The Star*, 5 Apr. 1930, p. 1.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *The Irishman*, 12 Apr. 1930.

¹⁶⁸ Meeting of the General Committee of Fianna Fáil, 28 Feb. 1930 (U.C.D.A., Archives of the Fianna Fáil party, P176/453).

¹⁶⁹ *Irish Independent*, 1 Mar. 1930.

¹⁷⁰ Bosworth, *Mussolini*, p. 243.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, cf. Mack Smith, *Mussolini*, p. 145.

the first Irish official to meet Mussolini in these circumstances.¹⁷² In previous months, a trio of External Affairs personnel—Minister Patrick McGilligan, Chief-Secretary Joseph Walshe and the senior Irish diplomat at Geneva, Michael MacWhite—all of whom were suitably struck by the solemnity of the occasion (Mrs McGilligan going so far as to request an autographed picture of the great man) participated in similar farces.¹⁷³ So too had the Irish police chief, General Eoin O’Duffy, who met Mussolini whilst on pilgrimage with the Guards in 1928.¹⁷⁴ However, disproving the idiom that first impressions last the longest, the superior behaviour of the Italian original repelled the future “Green Duce”. After a brief exchange of pleasantries, O’Duffy was abruptly shuttled towards the exit, during which journey he apparently found himself unconsciously imitating his goose-stepping escort. Thoroughly humiliated, he confided to a companion, the Passionist priest Fr Austin Tierney, ‘Did you ever see such a blithering idiot?’¹⁷⁵

Mulcahy, on the other hand, was greatly ‘impressed by the genial character of the Duce’, who reminisced at length about the Anglo–Irish War and Fascist contributions in this regard.¹⁷⁶ Whether or not Mussolini was interested enough to inquire into his guest’s policy with regard to local government is unknown, but it suited Mulcahy’s opponents to speculate that this topic was also on the agenda. Anticipating Lemass’ attack in the Dáil, a teasing *Irishman*, for instance, opined that:

What the explanation of the cordiality and the friendliness is we do not know except that perhaps the Duce knew beforehand of the policy—dear to his own heart—of the Local Government Department, of which General Mulcahy is head, in suppressing democratically elected Local Authorities. Visitors to the Duce with anti-democratic records of this kind are, we suppose, always welcome in Italy, the land of muzzled democracy. General

¹⁷² For a first-hand account of Mussolini as host to his Irish visitors, see Francis Hackett, ‘Mussolini, Red and Black’ (II parts) in the *Irish Statesman*, 12 & 19 Mar. 1928.

¹⁷³ *Southern Star*, 16 June 1928; Joseph P. Walshe to Seán Murphy, 20 Apr. 1929 (N.A.I., DT, S5857B).

¹⁷⁴ For a complete account of same, see ‘The Garda Pilgrimage’ in the *Garda Review*, iii, no. 12 (Dec. 1928), pp 14–26.

¹⁷⁵ Allen, *The Garda Síochána*, p. 101.

¹⁷⁶ *Irish Independent*, 21 Sept. 1928; *The Star*, 19 Oct. 1929.

Mulcahy was indeed an appropriate visitor.¹⁷⁷

Yet the suggestion that this innocuous encounter somehow imbibed Mulcahy with a flair for dictatorship was a spurious one. More so than his predecessors, Burke and Blythe, this particular Minister for Local Government was in fact a doctrinaire democrat who, to quote Tom Garvin, ‘throughout his life ... consistently held the view that the ordinary people of Ireland would always get their politics right in the long run’.¹⁷⁸ Proofs of Mulcahy’s democratic instincts included his recommendation of the controversial reprisal policy enacted during the Civil War; his willingness to accept personal humiliation in the wake of the Army Mutiny of 1924, thereby averting a more serious crisis and securing the primacy of the civilian government over a restless military; and his impartial administration of the much criticised Local Appointments Commission, which, in the hands of another, might easily have become a vehicle for Cumann na nGaedheal patronage.¹⁷⁹ In short, Mulcahy did not make a likely tyrant, nor was he entirely inflexible when it came to the Dublin Bill. Distancing himself from the editorial policy of *The Star*, he preferred to use cautious, defensive and conciliatory language when debating the issues. In the interest of consensus, Mulcahy also accepted a number of amendments from the opposition, none of which, however, made any substantial changes to the original Bill.¹⁸⁰

The opposition, therefore, could do little more than make the most of what they regarded as a bad situation. Still mumbling about Fascist influence upon the Minister, Fianna Fáil, for instance, transformed the minor triumph of disbarring non-native entrepreneurs from the commercial franchise into a great event.¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, the Government’s success in imposing the

¹⁷⁷ *The Irishman*, 28 Sept. 1929.

¹⁷⁸ Tom Garvin, 1922: *The Birth of Irish Democracy* (Dublin, 1996), p. 60, quoted in Ronan Fanning, ‘Mulcahy, Richard’ in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

¹⁷⁹ Fanning, ‘Mulcahy, Richard’.

¹⁸⁰ Sheehy, ‘City and County Management’, p. 128.

¹⁸¹ *Irish Independent*, 11 Apr. 1930.

commercial franchise was itself something of a pyrrhic victory. For impartial observers, the ostensible purpose of this measure—i.e. that it was intended to provide a hitherto reluctant section of the community with an extra incentive towards civic activism—rang somewhat hollow.¹⁸² Try as they might, the Cumann na nGaedheal leadership could not camouflage the link between this clause and the vital support bases of their party. Having failed to embrace mass politics, by the end of the 1920s Cumann na nGaedheal was financially and electorally dependent upon a coalition of not very popular sectional groups, many of whom shared pre-1916 roots and a conservative political and social outlook.¹⁸³ The Dublin commercial elite fell into this category, and the cost of their continued support was a reactionary local franchise. This in turn added to the electoral appeal of Fianna Fáil, by then increasingly dominant over Labour in the battle for Dublin's disaffected lower classes. Adopting a populist position in relation to the Act, de Valera's party thus positioned itself as the inveterate enemy of 'the little Mussolini's on Merrion Street',¹⁸⁴ and intimated that once in power, not alone would the commercial register swiftly disappear, but that all property qualifications would be discontinued.¹⁸⁵ These promises, however, only partly translated into government policy post-1932. Once in power, Fianna Fáil did repeal the commercial franchise and replace the Local Government Register with the Dáil equivalent.¹⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the new regime also perpetuated (indeed, accelerated) the centralising tendencies begun under Cumann na nGaedheal.¹⁸⁷ From the mid 1930s, Fianna Fáil gradually extended the Management System to the remaining cities and counties alike. Moreover, demonstrating the same intolerance of inefficiency and dissent as its predecessor, the new regime introduced further powers to deal with rebellious Councils, thereby earning the same chastisements as had

¹⁸² *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xxxiv, 851 (10 Apr. 1930).

¹⁸³ Tom Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics* (Dublin, 2005), pp 147–8.

¹⁸⁴ *The Nation*, 9 May 1931.

¹⁸⁵ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xxxiv, 2432–4 (22 May 1930).

¹⁸⁶ Local Government (Extension of Franchise) Act, 1935; Local Government (Dublin) Act, 1935.

¹⁸⁷ Sheehy, 'City and County Management', pp 129–130.

been previously applied with great zest to the supposed despots of Cumann na nGaedheal.¹⁸⁸

4.7. Proportional Representation: Ireland

As an opponent of proposed changes to the national electoral system, de Valera likewise adopted a position he would subsequently disavow in another era. Intent on perpetuating Fianna Fáil dominance, as one of his final acts as Taoiseach in 1959 he tried unsuccessfully to rid the Constitution of proportional representation.¹⁸⁹ In the 1920s, however, de Valera and his followers were keenly aware that their political survival owed much to the existence of a voting arrangement intended to safeguard minor parties in Ireland.¹⁹⁰ Embodied in the ill-fated Home Rule scheme, P.R. had replaced the Westminster system (i.e. “spot-voting” for election to single-member constituencies) with a more complicated format that prescribed the single transferable vote, quota counting and multi-member constituencies.¹⁹¹ At the time, nationalist opinion in Ireland reacted positively to this development. Hoping to undermine the ascendancy of the Irish Parliamentary Party, the “Irish-Irelanders” of Labour and Griffith’s Sinn Féin were early converts to proportional representation. For their part, the leading lights of the Home Rule movement hoped that unionists, particularly those sizeable minorities in Leinster and Munster, would feel reassured by a system that held out the prospect of strong representation in a future devolved parliament.¹⁹² Yet even with the collapse of Home Rule, a certain mystique of P.R. continued to prosper. Despite the landslide victory obtained by Sinn Féin in the last election

¹⁸⁸ See, Seán MacEntee, ‘A Century of Local Government’ (conference address) held under the auspices of the National Executive of Fianna Fáil, Mansion House Dublin, 26 Jan. 1946 (U.C.D.A., MacEntee papers, P67/571).

¹⁸⁹ Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth-Century Ireland: Nation and State* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1994), p. 241.

¹⁹⁰ Lee, *Ireland*, pp 83–4.

¹⁹¹ Online edition (http://proinsias.net/publications/pr_in_ireland/2006/08/how-it-all-began.html; accessed on 18 Dec. 2010) of Proinsias Mac Aonghusa, *Proportional Representation in Ireland: a series of six articles reprinted from the Irish Times* (pamphlet, Dublin, 1959).

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

conducted under the old system (1918), P.R. increasingly appealed to a younger generation that noted the seemingly unstoppable progress of the format in post-war Europe. In addition to each of the successor states, where the question of minorities was seldom less acute than in Ireland, the Great Powers of France, Germany and Italy introduced various versions of P.R. at this time.¹⁹³ The new system chimed well, therefore, with Irish Europhile sentiment, an outlook massively accentuated by the revolutionary circumstances of 1919–1921. As such, later complaints that the British, who rejected P.R. for themselves, promoted it in Ireland as a ruse to “divide and rule”, were not nearly as prominent during this period as they later became.¹⁹⁴ On the contrary, rather than oppose P.R. because it was prescribed by the Government of Ireland Act 1920 (which prescription, in any event, did not bind the Irish Constitutional Committee of 1922), a majority of nationalists, in the hope that such a gesture would encourage unionists to respect minority rights in Ulster and thereby further the cause of reunification, unionists to respect minority rights in Ulster, readily adopted a system subsequently rejected by a far more reluctant Stormont regime.¹⁹⁵

4.8. Proportional Representation: Italy

Yet Sir James Craig was not the only incumbent Premier of 1922 worried by the prospect of governing in accordance with the principles of proportional representation. Benito Mussolini also balked at the idea of well-represented minorities. As noted, Italian P.R. was a recent phenomenon. In the previous century, when only the select few had access to the suffrage, the British electoral model sufficed for Italian purposes. The rise of socialism and political Catholicism, however, forced major changes. Briefly forestalled by the First

¹⁹³ John Mackie, ‘Proportional Representation and the Irish Free State’ in the *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry of Ireland*, xiv, no. 4 (1925–27), p. 315. As introduced, the French Electoral Act of 1919 provided for P.R. in its title. As passed, however, the legislation contained practically no trace of the system. Consequently, French “P.R.” caused much confusion amongst political scientists in Ireland and elsewhere.

¹⁹⁴ Cornelius O’Leary, *The Irish Republic and its experiment with Proportional Representation* (Notre Dame, Indiana USA, 1961), pp 6–7.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 13–14.

World War, universal male suffrage appeared in December 1918.¹⁹⁶ Largely because of their previous opposition to Italian intervention, this development strengthened the already formidable support bases of the Socialist P.S.I. and the Catholic P.P.I., which were in fact the only genuinely national parties in Italy. Although the narrow-based pre-war parties of power fought hard to retain the existing electoral system, the combined efforts of the P.S.I. and the P.P.I. soon forced further changes.¹⁹⁷ The advent of P.R. in turn provided the platform for the spectacular gains made by both parties in the elections of August 1919. However, although more than half of the available seats went to the P.S.I. and the P.P.I., co-operation between these groups proved impossible. Moreover, swept along by the revolutionary atmosphere of the day, the Socialists obstructed parliament at every turn.¹⁹⁸ The Catholics, on the other hand, attempted to perform the awkward role of parliamentary kingmakers. Yet by providing only intermittent and unreliable support to the series of governments that failed to overcome the extra-parliamentary crisis, they too earned a reputation for making government impossible.¹⁹⁹

The inept performance of the principal beneficiaries from P.R. was an important contributing factor to the Fascist takeover. Moreover, the parliamentary feuding and the unstable coalitions of 1919–1921 provided Mussolini with a convenient pretext to undertake further electoral reforms. Intended to guarantee a Fascist victory in the next elections, the notorious Acerbo Law of 1923 made radical “corrections” to the proportional system.²⁰⁰ Thenceforth Italy became a single constituency, whilst the party or group of parties that obtained the largest number of votes, provided this amounted to more than one-quarter of the total poll, automatically received two-thirds of

¹⁹⁶ Joseph G. La Palombara, ‘The Italian Elections and the Problem of Representation’ in the *American Political Science Review*, xlvii, no. 3 (Sept. 1953), p. 677.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 678.

¹⁹⁸ Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, p. 512.

¹⁹⁹ Lyttelton, *Seizure of Power*, p. 130

²⁰⁰ Clark, *Modern Italy*, p. 223.

the seats in parliament.²⁰¹ Although clearly sounding the death-knell of an independent chamber, the Acerbo Law passed with relative ease. An incompetent, divided and intimidated opposition was unable to resist Mussolini's ability to play upon hopes and fears. Pursuing the joint objective of absorbing individuals of talent to his movement whilst destroying the autonomy of organised parties, he included sympathetic Liberals on the Fascist-led list of government candidates. Sensing a sure way to hold their seats in this new era of mass politics, many non-Fascists therefore leapt aboard the Acerbo bandwagon.²⁰² Of those who refused to be bought, the *sangfroid* attitude of the Socialists proved a poor substitute for spirited resistance.²⁰³ So too the P.P.I. turned in a lacklustre performance. Delighted by recent Fascist concessions to the Church, Vatican intervention had recently put paid to the political career of the combative leader of the Catholic party, Don Luigi Sturzo.²⁰⁴ Now rudderless, the P.P.I. mimicked the Liberals by dissolving into pro and anti-Fascist factions, with the latter group mutedly expressing their misgivings about the Acerbo Law by abstaining during the parliamentary division.²⁰⁵

4.9. Conflicting responses to the Acerbo Law

The incompetence of the pre-Fascist governments notwithstanding, these developments were not favourably received in Ireland. The fact that the Acerbo experiment appeared simultaneously to anti-minority initiatives in Northern Ireland ensured a hostile response from commentators in the Free State. Importantly, the treatment of Catholic voters in Ulster drew fulsome praise for P.R. from the hierarchy. A joint pastoral issued by Cardinal Logue and the northern bishops described how the combined effects of gerrymandering and the recent return of the majority system for local

²⁰¹ Neville, *Mussolini*, p. 57.

²⁰² Clark, *Modern Italy*, p. 223; Morgan, *Italian Fascism*, p. 69.

²⁰³ Lyttelton, *Seizure of Power*, p. 129.

²⁰⁴ John N. Molony, *The Emergence of Political Catholicism in Italy: Partito Popolare 1919–1926* (Guildford, 1977), p. 167.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 169–171.

elections had reduced Catholics to “Degrading Thralldom”.²⁰⁶ At government level, communications were no less emphatic, with Dublin denouncing the Stormont policy as a nefarious manoeuvre ‘to anticipate in the most deliberate way’ the promised Boundary Commission.²⁰⁷ Not surprisingly, therefore, the journalistic mainstays of Catholic nationalism in the south, the *Irish Independent* and the *Freeman’s Journal*, voiced similar concerns and tailored their comments upon the Fascist measures accordingly. In criticising the Acerbo Law, however, the latter journal departed from normal practice. Impressed by the deference shown by Mussolini to the Italian Church, the editor of the *Freeman’s Journal*, P. J. Hooper, generally endorsed the regime. Nonetheless, for more than a decade, this organ was also the foremost exponent of P.R. in Ireland,²⁰⁸ and so Hooper now found it worthwhile to emphasise the shared autocratic tendencies of Mussolini and Craig. Describing the Acerbo Law as ‘ingenious to a fault’ and ‘directed to making representation in any sense of the word an empty farce’, Hooper held that Fascist guile was only surpassed by a Belfast government that had ‘arrived at much the same end in a different way in its ingenious system of remodelling areas to neutralise nationalist votes’.²⁰⁹ The *Irish Independent* echoed these sentiments. At first, however, Timothy Harrington was somewhat perplexed by the logic that underlay the Acerbo Law. Glibly remarking that ‘nearly everyone in Italy who is not a Socialist is a Fascist’, the *Independent* chief initially admitted that he could not understand the necessity for the electoral reforms.²¹⁰ This lax analysis owed much to information provided by James Vincent Murphy. Another native of Bandon, County Cork, this former priest subsequently earned a certain notoriety whilst working for Joseph Goebbels

²⁰⁶ *Irish Times*, 13 Oct. 1923.

²⁰⁷ Sir Alfred Cope to Winston Churchill, 10 Aug. 1922 (N.A.I., DT, S2925).

²⁰⁸ Mackie, ‘Proportional Representation and the Irish Free State’, p. 318; John H. Humphreys, ‘P.R. in the Irish Free State—The Election of 1927’ in *Representation: The Journal of the Proportional Representation Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 44 (Aug. 1927), p. 13.

²⁰⁹ *Freeman’s Journal*, 20 Mar. 1924; *ibid.*, 7 Apr. 1924.

²¹⁰ *Irish Independent*, 21 Aug. 1923.

and the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda in Berlin.²¹¹ Prior to his German adventures, however, Murphy was a Rome-based journalist who wrote for several important Anglo–American publications.²¹² As such, he was an important bridge between Fascist Italy and the English-speaking world. One of these publications was the London-based *Fortnightly Review*, a periodical frequently quoted by Harrington and the editorial team at the *Irish Independent*. In August 1923, Murphy led his readers to believe that the vast majority of Italians adored their new leader. Preceding the likes of ‘A.W.’ and Patrick J. Fogarty, he also indulged in superior stereotyping about the supposed aversion of most Italians to democracy.²¹³ In the aftermath of Corfu and the bishops’ strong support for P.R., however, the *Irish Independent* grew less inclined to take this type of reporting at face value. Instead, Harrington now lamented that ‘Signor Mussolini might have studied electioneering tactics and gerrymandering under Sir James Craig, so thoroughly has he succeeded in depriving his opponents of even a sporting chance of obtaining representation’.²¹⁴

Another voice influencing Irish attitudes to electoral reform in Italy was that of John H. Humphreys. An Englishman, Humphreys was the long-standing Secretary of the Proportional Representation Society. Although unable to bring about change in Britain itself, this influential policy institute was seminal to the advancement of P.R. in Ireland and the other Dominions.²¹⁵

²¹¹ In this capacity, he wrote and published the sycophantic *Adolf Hitler: the drama of his career* (1934). Murphy also translated and circulated Hitler’s speeches for a British audience and received a commission to write the official English language translation of *Mein Kampf*. See, Patrick Maume, ‘Murphy, James Vincent’ in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

²¹² Listed in James J. Barnes and Patience P. Barnes, *James Vincent Murphy: Translator and Interpreter of Fascist Europe, 1880–1946* (London, 1987), p. xi.

²¹³ James Murphy, ‘Six Months of Fascist Government’ in the *Fortnightly Review*, no. 680 (Aug. 1923), pp 205–15. It should be noted, however, that over time, Murphy grew increasingly critical of the Mussolini regime. Indeed, after one article that condemned the Italian dictator as the vainglorious tool of a financial oligarchy, he was expelled from Italy under the terms of the draconian press laws that so appealed Fr Edward Cahill (Maume, ‘Murphy, James Vincent’).

²¹⁴ *Irish Independent*, 5 Apr. 1924.

²¹⁵ O’Leary, *The Irish Republic and its experiment with Proportional Representation*, pp 2–3.

Acquiring premises on Molesworth Street and Middle Abbey Street, an Irish branch of the P.R.S. appeared as early as 1911. In addition to Arthur Griffith, it attracted an eclectic range of public figures such as Lord MacDonnell (a former Under Secretary for Ireland), Thomas Sexton (Chairman of the Board at the *Freeman's Journal*), James Meredith, K.C. (a future Senator and Supreme Court Judge) and leading trade unionists, the foremost of whom was James Connolly.²¹⁶ In the Free State era, chief patrons included the leader of the Labour Party, Thomas Johnson, the Deputy Vice-President of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce, John Mackie, and Ernest A. Aston, a town-planning pioneer and sub-editor of the *Irish Times* who worked tirelessly to monitor and report the working of P.R. in Ireland.²¹⁷ Aston also laboured to disseminate the constant stream of pamphlets, books and articles emanating from Humphreys in London. Classified as recommended reading by Harrington and the *Irish Independent*, one such article concerned the Acerbo Law. Easily the most comprehensive English-language review of Mussolini's electoral policy, this article appeared in the Society's widely read journal, *Representation*. Therein Humphreys described Mussolini's logic as an affront to those 'who believe that a real relation should exist between a parliament and its people', and dismissed the Fascist "reforms" as nothing more than a revolutionary epilogue to the March on Rome.²¹⁸ Nevertheless, if the spirit and the mechanics of the Acerbo Law served no edifying purpose, Humphreys sensed that the Dominion investment in P.R. was far from secure, and that the Society's supporters should therefore familiarise themselves with the Fascist arguments.

As an exercise in confutation, Humphreys' survey was a *tour de force*. For

In addition to Ireland, P.R. was used to elect regional and upper parliaments in South Africa, Australia and Canada.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²¹⁷ *Irish Independent*, 18 May 1928; Helen Andrews, 'Aston, Ernest' in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

²¹⁸ John H. Humphreys, 'Italy: Important Changes to the Electoral Law and Their Bearing on electoral Government' in *Representation: The Journal of the Proportional Representation Society*, no. 41 (Aug. 1923), p. 1.

instance, in answer to the charge that P.R. gave rise to new parties that might not otherwise have emerged, he simply pointed out that as both the Catholics and the Socialists had been expanding their organisations for many years before the advent of P.R., they were both bound to return large numbers with or without its introduction.²¹⁹ Moreover, the progress made by the British Labour Party proved particularly useful toward explaining the success of the P.S.I., which Humphreys argued had less to do with P.R. than ‘the successive widening of the franchise, and the acceptance of Socialist teaching by wide numbers of the younger generation’.²²⁰ Humphreys also appreciated the fact that coalition governments were an Italian norm long before the advent of proportional representation. The vast majority of pre-war parliamentarians may have fallen into the “liberal-monarchist” category, but there always existed sub-groups centred upon individual leaders such as Depretis, Crispi, or Giolitti.²²¹ Previous parliaments were, therefore, subject to infighting and frequent changes of government that had nothing to do with the accurate representation of minority groups. Indeed, for the period of 1860–1919, the average lifetime of Italian administrations was little more than one year, with only the unseemly art of *Trasformismo* camouflaging the chaotic business of government.²²² According to Humphreys, Mussolini, holding ‘too thorough a contempt for parliament to pursue a humdrum constitutional course’ had resurrected this disreputable practice in the guise of the Acerbo Law, the mechanics of which, however, would grant him powers never imagined by even the most demagogic of liberal premiers.²²³

Yet neither the pastoral preference for P.R. nor the complexities of Humphreys’ argument affected the foremost Mussoliniphile journal of the

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 11.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid., p. 3.

²²² *Trasformismo* was a political craft practiced by Liberal Premiers, who employed nepotism and bribery in order to defeat their rivals and form the latest short-lived cabinet. It is a term most famously associated with Giovanni Giolitti, the second longest-serving Premier (after Mussolini) in Italian history.

²²³ Humphreys, ‘Italy’, pp 13, 18.

day, the *Roscommon Herald*. At the time, Jasper J. Tully managed and edited this paper. A larger-than-life figure who was known as “The Chief” in his native town of Boyle, Tully was an ex-Home Rule M.P. and serving Secretary of the Connacht Council of the G.A.A.²²⁴ Under his direction, the *Herald* outgrew its liberal origins, becoming something of an ultra-nationalist sounding board that boasted an impressive readership stretching into the neighbouring counties of Mayo, Sligo, Longford and Leitrim.²²⁵ Almost uniquely amongst the regional press, it also devoted considerable time and space to the European situation. This allowed Tully to speculate at length about the growing strength of the Fascist dictatorship, which, as a counterbalance to Great Britain, he commended at every opportunity. Striking cartoons best demonstrated this tendency. For instance, at the time of the Corfu Crisis, a front-page illustration entitled ‘Got Him By the Throat’ involved a virile Mussolini strangling “John Bull” whilst proclaiming ‘Your ancient hypocrisy about the League of Nations won’t stop me!’ Meanwhile, representing the hopeful Irish investment in pan-Latinism, an on-looking Primo de Rivera remarked ‘Good old Mussolini! Now that you have him by the throat, shake Malta out of him. I mean to shake him out of Gibraltar!’²²⁶

Like so many of Mussolini’s Irish admirers, the shallow piety of Italian Fascism fascinated Tully. As someone who fretted about the designs of republicans and socialists upon the Irish clergy—invoking scenarios redolent of violence against priests and nuns, he famously denounced the 1916 rebels as

²²⁴ Brian Nerney, *Roscommon Herald ... its people and events* (Boyle, 2007), pp 9, 15; Marie-Louise Legg, ‘Tully, Jasper Joseph’ in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

²²⁵ Legg, ‘Tully, Jasper Joseph’.

²²⁶ *Roscommon Herald*, 22 Sept. 1923. Miguel Primo de Rivero was the military dictator of Spain. Over the seven years of his dictatorship (1923–30), he was much celebrated in Ireland. Unlike Mussolini, whose infrequent clashes with the Church and bellicose foreign policy caused a certain amount of apprehension and debate, the Spanish autocrat was commonly admired as a devout Catholic, economic nationalist, effective crusader for public sector reforms, and the restorer of Spain’s flagging international reputation. Of the many laudatory examples available, see John Ryan, ‘The New Era in Spain’ in *Studies*, xiii, no. 51 (Sept. 1924), pp 467–75; cf. Timothy O’Herlihy, ‘Spain’ in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* (5th series) xxxviii (July–Dec. 1931), pp 5–7.

the 'Portuguese Sinn Féiners' and the dregs of 'the Paris Commune'—it was natural that Tully should celebrate the *Duce* as a friend of the Church in a "hostile" age.²²⁷ As such, Tully seldom asked probing questions about the regime, preferring instead to pedal the jaundiced and deceptive view that Mussolini was an exemplar of Catholic statecraft.²²⁸ This tendency to overlook the finer details of Fascist policy was nowhere more obvious than in the *Herald's* outspoken support for the Acerbo Law. Overly affected by Catholic scepticism about "absolute" popular sovereignty, Tully despised P.R. as the more ultra-democratic of the electoral systems practiced in the British Isles. From his perspective, if the Irish must pander to 'the wooden idol of Universal Suffrage', they could at least abandon 'the brainchild of cranks and "Professors"' and return to the commendably straightforward Westminster model.²²⁹ This latent longing for the good old days of the Irish Parliamentary Party was evident in his inaccurate and misleading analysis of the Fascist reforms:

Mussolini's latest proposal is to abolish the rotten system of Proportional Representation and let every district elect one member. The public of the Twenty Six Counties who have suffered under the evils of the ridiculous Proportional Representation forced upon them by dreamers and intriguers, will gladly welcome Mussolini's move as a step in the right direction. Proportional Representation by the absurd results it has produced is one of the things responsible for the present plight of the Free State ... If every area elected its own member, there would be a stable government, and none of the upheavals that brought the Free State to its present position. P.R. is of great utility to cliques and narrow parties, but it gives no representation to the ordinary public. It is one of the things that will have to go!²³⁰

During and after the embittered electoral campaigns of 1927, it became apparent that elements within the Cumann na nGaedheal elite shared Tully's views. Prior to the June election, the party's manifesto contained vague allusions to 'improve upon the present system of proportional representation'.²³¹ Less subtle statements flowed from the hustings, as

²²⁷ Lee, *Ireland*, p. 33.

²²⁸ See, for example, 'How Mussolini Saved Italy' in the *Roscommon Herald*, 2 Aug. 1924, p. 1.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 28 June 1924; *ibid.*, 19 Sept. 1925.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 27 Dec. 1924.

²³¹ Pamphlet, *Policy of the Cumann na nGaedheal Party*, c. June 1927 (N.L.I., Thomas

campaigning Ministers claimed that untold disasters would descend upon the Free State if Cumann na nGaedheal was not returned in sufficient numbers to outvote any combination of other parties in the Dáil. Amongst the doomsayers was Kevin O'Higgins, who, as interlocutor to worried unionists in 1923, had previously stated that Cumann na nGaedheal was fully committed to a minority-friendly electoral system.²³² In the aftermath of the Boundary Commission debacle, however, and with the advent of new political rivals in the form of Fianna Fáil, Clann Éireann and the National League, O'Higgins now dismissed the system as a dangerous folly that might yet subject parliament to the whims of 'a motley crew of cranks from Donegal to Cork'.²³³ Ernest Blythe made a similar complaint; addressing a rally in Castleblayney, he claimed that 'proportional representation tended to bring out all sorts of freak candidates, and might result in the defeat of candidates who in a straight fight would be absolutely certain of victory'.²³⁴ Yet the anti-P.R. pronouncements of O'Higgins and Blythe paled in comparison to those of Desmond Fitzgerald, who dominated this aspect of Cumann na nGaedheal electioneering.²³⁵ Another high-profile member of the Cumann na nGaedheal party who later succumbed to quasi-fascist behaviour during the Blueshirt era (he also harboured a private admiration for the Axis prior to the outbreak of the Second World War), Fitzgerald despised P.R. because it perpetuated "political dishonesty".²³⁶ Dismissing the pre-Fianna Fáil opposition, Fitzgerald insisted that the Irish system merely shielded 'rogue' parties 'who did not even put up enough candidates to form a government if they are all elected', and who therefore 'had no right to promise anything to the electors'.²³⁷ Like Jasper

Johnson papers, Ms. 17,160).

²³² *Irish Times*, 8 Nov. 1923.

²³³ *Southern Star*, 5 Mar. 1927.

²³⁴ *Irish Independent*, 28 May 1927.

²³⁵ Desmond Fitzgerald's antipathy to P.R. was not shared by his son Garret, who, while Taoiseach in the 1980s, was President of the P.R.S.G.B.&I.

²³⁶ *The Freeman*, 3 Sept. 1927; William Murphy, 'Fitzgerald, (Thomas Joseph) Desmond' in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009); cf. Manning, *Blueshirts*, p. 102; Mabel Fitzgerald to Desmond Fitzgerald on the Munich Crisis, Sept. 1938 (U.C.D.A., Fitzgerald papers, P80/1416).

²³⁷ *Anglo-Celt*, 11 June 1927; cf. *Irish Independent*, 23 Feb., 18 Mar. 1927.

J. Tully, a rigid personal Catholicism influenced Fitzgerald's outlook. On friendly terms with devout intellectuals like Jacques Maritain and an accomplished scholastic in his own right, he too had little time for the Jacobin concept of democracy.²³⁸ Indeed, Eoin O'Duffy noted that Fitzgerald, like Blythe, was something of a pessimist who tended to think 'there was a lot of the "mob" about the people of Ireland'.²³⁹ To his mind, therefore, the object of an election was not to establish a parliament wherein all interests might have representation in proportion to their voting strength, but simply to create an 'an agent to govern, to control, to order, to regulate the affairs of the State'.²⁴⁰ However, by asking no sacrifice from the conflicting groups, P.R. created 'confusion and all the disorder that is associated with anarchy'.²⁴¹ Thus, because the purpose of government was 'to overcome—to blot out—the divergent interest', P.R. was to be treated as 'a weapon against the State ... that should be got rid of with as little delay as possible'.²⁴²

Fitzgerald's grumblings about P.R. and coalition government encouraged at least one Cumann na nGaedheal figurehead to dream of an Italian solution to an Irish problem. A senior party *apparatchik* named John Homan publicly announced that any future changes to the Irish electoral format should be in line with the Acerbo Law. A retired schoolteacher from Clontarf, ex-Irish Volunteer and well-known patron/performer of the dramatic arts, Homan was also an important organiser who simultaneously presided over of the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation in North Dublin and was Secretary of the party's Central Branch.²⁴³ From the perspective of wary Ministers like Kevin O'Higgins, the primary purpose of this latter organisation was to act as a

²³⁸ See, correspondence and newspaper cuttings relating to lectures delivered in Ireland by Maritain, Mar. 1930 (U.C.D.A., Fitzgerald papers, P80/1277); for the influence of scholastic theory on Fitzgerald's politics, see Fitzgerald, *A Preface to Statecraft* (New York, 1939).

²³⁹ McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 46, quoted in Murphy, 'Fitzgerald, (Thomas Joseph) Desmond'.

²⁴⁰ 'Proportional Representation Dissected by Dialogue' in *The Freeman*, 3 Dec. 1927; cf. drafts of same (U.C.D.A., Fitzgerald papers, P80/1357).

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² *Ibid.*

potentially lucrative focal point for Dublin's professional and commercial elites.²⁴⁴ Yet party literature also described the Branch as a forum whereat 'the most intelligent and active leaders of the Nation's thought can meet once a month to take stock of the political situation.'²⁴⁵ Predictably, therefore, this elitist group imagined themselves as something of an advisory body to the Government.²⁴⁶ As they saw it, their value lay less in propping up the party finances, than in labouring 'to constantly keep the leaders of the State in touch with the people'.²⁴⁷

The fact that the Central Branch exercised no institutional control over the Government did not discourage this pretension, for Homan and his colleagues had frequent informal access to Ministers through luncheons, lectures and other social functions, whilst at least one member of the Executive Council invariably attended the Branch's monthly gatherings.²⁴⁸ In a speech that bore striking similarities to controversial remarks made by de Valera more than two years later,²⁴⁹ at one such gathering Desmond Fitzgerald lectured Homan and his colleagues on the advances made by Italy under the guidance of Fascism. Contrasting the "atomisation" of Irish politics with 'the spirit of Italy today', Fitzgerald intimated that Mussolini's attitude to P.R. had influenced his own.²⁵⁰ Suitably impressed, Homan developed Fitzgerald's analogy in the *Irish Independent*. Suggesting that 'the controversy re Proportional Representation has taken a wrong turn', Homan dismissed as academic debates that focused upon 'the mathematical representation of polling booth eccentricities'. Instead, he argued that 'the great need of the Irish people [was] unity and cohesion', which in turn demanded 'the existence of a strong and

²⁴³ *Irish Times*, 13 Jan. 1927; *ibid.*, 1 Aug. 1927; *Irish Independent*, 1 Feb. 1927.

²⁴⁴ Regan, *Irish Counter-Revolution*, p. 263.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *Irish Independent*, 10 Oct. 1929.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*; Regan, *Irish Counter-Revolution*, p. 263.

²⁴⁹ See below, pp 222–3.

²⁵⁰ 'The Free State's Danger: "National Atomisation" — Mr Fitzgerald and Treaty Freedom' in the *Irish Times*, 23 Mar. 1927, p. 4.

firm government in the Free State'.²⁵¹ Towards achieving this end, Homan reminded the public that 'Mussolini—incomparably the greatest of living Statesmen—got a law passed by which the largest party resulting from the election would get at least two-thirds of the seat in the Chamber'.²⁵² Falsely suggesting that the Catholic party in Italy had supported this decree, Homan argued that a similar subdivision of the Dáil was 'the only branch of the subject on which discussion would be really useful'.²⁵³ Unsurprisingly, Homan's proposal earned a stinging rebuke from the ever-vigilant John H. Humphreys. Responding from London, he warned Irishmen to pay less attention to Mussolini's electoral experiment than to the successful operation of P.R. in the Benelux countries, Scandinavia and Germany, before acerbically advising Homan to cite the works of Don Sturzo (by now a celebrated exile in the British capital) when commenting upon Catholic support for the Acerbo Law.²⁵⁴

4.10. The labour movement defends P.R.

As with the later Volunteer Reserve controversy, the growing clamour against P.R. provoked fears, once again loudly voiced by Roddy Connolly in particular, about an undisclosed plot by Cumann na nGaedheal to establish a treatyite dictatorship.²⁵⁵ For the Labour Party, the Ministers' comments and the Fascist overtones of John Homan were a worrying prelude to the fast-moving events of late summer 1927. Briefly, on 10 July republican gunmen assassinated Kevin O'Higgins, the misnamed "Irish Mussolini" and second most senior member of the Government. Immediately thereafter, the Labour leadership called upon President Cosgrave to sympathise and offer their support. Indeed, in the interest of national security, Thomas Johnson and his deputy, T. J. O'Connell, indicated that Labour would be willing participants in a Cumann

²⁵¹ *Irish Independent*, 8 July 1927.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ *Irish Independent*, 14 July 1927.

²⁵⁵ See, for example, *Worker's Republic*, 18 June 1927.

na nGaedheal-led national government.²⁵⁶ Preferring to pursue an independent path, Cosgrave declined this offer. Instead, the Government introduced interlinked legislation intended to break the I.R.A. and force Fianna Fáil to choose between the Oath and political obscurity. The haste and severity of this response alarmed the already piqued Labour deputies. Fearing a resumption of the Civil War and extremely sensitive to the possible future application of security legislation against the unions, they mounted an indignant opposition to the Government's strategy.²⁵⁷ Moreover, when Fianna Fáil did subsequently enter the Dáil, Labour joined forces with both de Valera and the National League in an attempt to form the first inter-party administration. A dramatic vote of no confidence on 16 August almost toppled the Government, which only survived by virtue of National League defections, the infamous drink-induced absence of Alderman John Jinks, and the casting vote of the Ceann Comhairle.²⁵⁸

Nevertheless, the precarious circumstances of the Fifth Dáil hardly made for long-term stability. More intent than ever upon achieving a strong working majority, the Government therefore made a second appeal to the electors. Unlike the relatively pallid June election, however, the September campaign was an exceptionally bitter affair. As noted by Niamh Puirseil, Labour was subject 'to a particularly personalised vindictive campaign'.²⁵⁹ Singled out for its role in the recent attempt to bring down the Government, Cosgrave accused the party of practicing revolutionary socialism, an accusation given added weight by similar pronouncements made by prominent clergymen.²⁶⁰ Its resources all but spent on the previous contest, Labour also found itself subject to sustained attack from the radical left. Having ignored the June

²⁵⁶ Report by Thomas Johnson on his meeting with President Cosgrave after the assassination of Kevin O'Higgins, July 1927 (N.L.I., Thomas Johnson papers, Ms. 17,162), cit. in Niamh Puirseil, *The Irish Labour Party*, p. 22.

²⁵⁷ Puirseil, *The Irish Labour Party*, pp 22–3.

²⁵⁸ Coogan, *De Valera*, p. 406.

²⁵⁹ Puirseil, *The Irish Labour Party*, p. 25.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

election, Jim Larkin and the Irish Worker League, spurred into action by the spectre of the Public Safety Bill, threatened to siphon off Labour support in the capital.²⁶¹ Facing disaster, Labour thus tried desperately to portray itself as a responsible party that, in accordance with Catholic principles, had simply tried to prevent the Government from transgressing into tyranny. Party propaganda thus invoked the spirit of papal encyclicals like *Rerum Novarum* when asserting that minority representation and power sharing was both ‘healthy and natural’.²⁶² The aim of this exercise was to impress a growing vocationalist movement that fretted about any further extension of the Irish executive power. As opposed to the myopic interpretation of Church teaching displayed by the likes of Jasper Tully, Desmond Fitzgerald, John Homan *et al*, this substantial constituency took great pride in the “ultra-democratic” devices of the 1922 Constitution, and preferred P.R. and coalition rule in the Dáil to untrammelled majoritarianism, no matter how devout a given President and his ministers might be.²⁶³ As such, Labour (far more so than Fianna Fáil, which, concentrating almost the entirety of its firepower on the Public Safety Act, only gave a calculated endorsement of P.R. after the election)²⁶⁴ made the issue a centrepiece of its campaign strategy. For example, on posters with alarmist titles like ‘Defend Democracy, Abolish Autocracy, Vote Labour!’ or ‘Do You Stand for the Dictatorship of Cumann na nGaedheal?’, the Government’s fascination with electoral reform invariably topped the list of accomplished and intended transgressions against the Constitution.²⁶⁵ Meanwhile, Thomas Johnson maintained that the sole purpose of electoral reform was to unite ‘the reactionary and anti-national elements in the country’ (listed as ‘the Unionists, business men and farmers’) under the banner of a

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*; cf. Barry Desmond, *No Worker’s Republic! Reflections on Labour and Ireland, 1913–1967* (Dublin, 2009), p. 94.

²⁶² Election speeches by Thomas Johnson re P.R. and coalition government, July–Sept. 1927 (N.L.I., Thomas Johnson papers, Ms. 17,167); cf. *The Irishman*, 1 Oct. 1927.

²⁶³ O’Leary, *Vocationalism & Social Catholicism*, p. 29.

²⁶⁴ Fianna Fáil election pamphlets, c. June–Sept. 1927 (, MacEntee papers, P67/345); *The Nation*, 1 Oct. 1927.

²⁶⁵ *Irish Independent*, 1 Sept. 1927; *The Irishman*, 3 Sept. 1927.

single party.²⁶⁶ According to Johnson, this plot and the timing of the new elections was ‘a gambler’s throw in keeping with the Government’s contempt of parliament’.²⁶⁷ Elsewhere, the editor of *The Irishman*, R. J. P. Mortished, alleged that in pursuit of an artificial majority Cumann na nGaedheal would line the Free State up alongside Fascist Italy and Tory Britain against ‘the most progressive and stable countries of Europe’.²⁶⁸ Proclaiming that ‘we want no Mussolini in this country’, he warned his readers to ‘Make no mistake about it: The Cumann na nGaedheal government is out to establish a dictatorship, open or disguised’.²⁶⁹ According to Mortished, in tandem with the refusal to form a national government the previous July and the subsequent decision to stage an electoral ‘ambush’, such was:

... the meaning of the long-continued criticism of P.R. The present Government has always tried to treat the Dáil not as a deliberative assembly, but as a mere machine for registering its decrees. If the attempt to perpetuate oligarchy by these means fails, there is still the Public Safety Act, which gives absolute discretion to the Executive, uncontrolled by the Dáil, to be used as a means of establishing a militarist dictatorship. This is not a far-fetched flight of imagination. It is the logical working out of the Government’s policy.²⁷⁰

Yet the evidence suggests that on this occasion, Labour, notwithstanding the oblique remarks of Desmond Fitzgerald, overstated the significance of Fascist influence upon the Government. Many months prior to the June campaign, the Executive Council had discussed, and by a majority vote rejected, concrete proposals to reform the electoral system. In 1926, separate anti-P.R. memos penned by James A. Burke and Ernest Blythe came before both the Dáil Constitution Committee and the Cabinet.²⁷¹ Lengthy and complex, in neither memo was any reference, direct or indirect, made to the Italian reforms.²⁷² In this crucial sense, therefore, Cumann na nGaedheal deliberations differed from those later undertaken by Fianna Fáil, when a curious de Valera sought

²⁶⁶ *Meath Chronicle*, 1 Sept. 1927.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ *The Irishman*, 3 Sept. 1927.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ See, file entitled ‘Proportional Representation’ (N.A.I., DT, S3766A).

detailed information as to the reasoning behind the Acerbo Law and its subsequent application.²⁷³ Instead, heavily influenced by an earlier study undertaken by Mgr Michael Cronin of U.C.D., Burke and Blythe prescribed similar formats that sought to combine the British system of single-member constituencies with certain features taken from the unique system of P.R. then existing in Weimar Germany.²⁷⁴ Apparently, these proposals split the cabinet. According to the *Waterford News*, whose anonymous informant caused a certain amount of friction for revealing what took place behind closed doors, ‘At least three members of the Executive were in favour of making the change, and it looked for a while as if the Cabinet were about to be stampeded into action of some kind’.²⁷⁵ However, ‘strenuous opposition from the Unionists’; the realisation that ‘the old knock-out system of election would have given the Government’s opponents complete control of whole counties in the South and West’, and ‘the added consideration that a Bill authorising the change would have had a very rough passage in the Dáil, for the average T.D. strongly favours the present system, since it does not make a heavy demand either on his time or his ability during the election period’, soon put paid to the proposals.²⁷⁶ Nevertheless, as this victory for *realpolitik* did not prevent the disaffected Ministers from venting their frustration during the elections of 1927, the continued imprecations against P.R. convinced both party subordinates and the opposition that an Acerbo-like reform of the Dáil was in the offing.

For the remainder of the Cumann na nGaedheal era, however, little more was heard in the way of electoral reform. Apart from the factors so sagaciously

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Memo. by Con Cremin entitled ‘Advent of Fascism in Italy’, 9 Dec. 1938 (U.C.D.A., Aiken papers, P104/9580) cf. Joseph Walshe to Maurice Moynihan, 21 May 1943 (N.A.I., DT, S3766A).

²⁷⁴ Michael Cronin, ‘The German System of Proportional Representation’ in *Studies*, xi, no. 43 (Sept. 1922), pp 417–23; Cabinet memoranda on P.R. (N.A.I., DT, S3766A); *The Star*, 7 June 1927.

²⁷⁵ Excerpt from the *Waterford News*, 1 Apr. 1927, with annotations by P. S. O’Hegarty (N.A.I., DT, S3766A).

outlined by the *Waterford News*, which lost none of their relevance with the passage of time, two new developments contributed to the certain survival of the status-quo. In the first instance, analyses of voting patterns revealed that, had the 1927 elections been fought along Westminster lines, Fianna Fáil would most likely have assumed the reins of power five years prematurely.²⁷⁷ Secondly, in 1928 northern unionists launched another attack upon P.R., with the majority system now obtaining for elections to the parliament at Stormont itself. This latest controversy in Ulster led to a fresh upsurge of support for P.R. in the Free State, and encouraged the Government (the occasional outburst by Ernest Blythe excepted) to put some distance between itself and the majoritarian rhetoric preached during the election seasons.²⁷⁸ Nevertheless, treatyite opposition to P.R. did make a brief comeback during the Blueshirt era. In 1933, Fine Gael adopted the abolition of P.R. as part of its programme for government.²⁷⁹ This development marked a subtle, albeit ultimately fruitless, victory for the would-be architects of an Irish Corporate State over the more cautious elements in the new party.²⁸⁰ Completely overestimating O'Duffy's prospects in the next election, corporatists like Michael Tierney, who, in between tracing negative analogies between Fianna Fáil and the Nazis, expressly admired the 'genuine Fascism' of Mussolini, Dollfuss and Gil Robles, imagined that single member constituencies would provide a stepping stone from which to embark upon a much more drastic programme of parliamentary reform.²⁸¹ Yet the statist corporatism of Fine Gael, discredited in Ireland by its association with Mussolini's Italy—an association not denied by the likes of Tierney, who wrongly claimed that the Holy See approved of the Fascist model—did not outlast the farcical leadership

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ See, file on the Sept. 1927 election (U.C.D.A., archives of the Fianna Fáil party, P176/828).

²⁷⁸ *Irish Independent*, 25 May 1929; *The Star*, 10 May 1930; *ibid.*, 7 June 1930.

²⁷⁹ Manning, *Blueshirts*, p. 100.

²⁸⁰ John J. Horgan to Michael Tierney, 18 Dec. 1933 (U.C.D.A., Tierney papers, LA30/365); cf. Horgan, 'The Problem of Government' in *Studies*, xxii, no. 88 (Dec. 1933), pp 543–4, 558.

²⁸¹ Michael Tierney, 'The Corporate State', speech to the Young Ireland Branch of Fine Gael, 13 Mar. 1934 (U.C.D.A., Tierney papers, LA30/349); James Hogan to Michael Tierney, 18 Oct. 1933 (*ibid.*, LA30/363); cf. Tierney, 'Policy Proposals', c. 1933–4 (*ibid.*, LA30/381).

of O'Duffy.²⁸² Nor did treatyite opposition to P.R., which dissolved with the return of the “Cosgrave liberals”. Indeed, by 1938, when de Valera himself began to ponder the advantages of single-member constituencies as a means to perpetuating his own power, previous critics like Dr Thomas F. O'Higgins (former Blueshirt president and brother of Kevin O'Higgins), could be observed demanding that the long-standing Free State commitment to minority representation ‘must not now be dishonoured by any political trickster’.²⁸³

4.11. Chapter summary

In the early Free State period, senior members of Cumann na nGaedheal advocated political paramilitarism. Considered in the context of the times, this was a predictable development. Taking a lead from the Fascists and other nationalist avengers in Europe, concerned treatyites wanted to establish a party militia to help suppress a republican insurgency with bolshevik overtones. Opposed by dominant figures like Michael Collins and Kevin O'Higgins, such plans were stillborn. Nevertheless, thanks largely to the curious input of Ernest Blythe, the issue of political paramilitarism resurfaced during the twilight years of Cumann na nGaedheal. Ostensibly a cost-cutting measure aimed at replacing the standing Army with a territorial force, the short-lived Volunteer Reserve (1929–32) caused bitter controversy. For the opposition parties, the Volunteer Reserve represented a Fascist-style partisan force intended to protect a faltering Cumann na nGaedheal. Subsequent contributions from Blythe, both as minister-journalist and Blueshirt ideologue, suggest that these fears were not groundless.

We have also seen that Cumann na nGaedheal had little faith in the municipalities. As with the original discussions surrounding an Irish militia, negative attitudes to local government were forged in the context of the Irish

²⁸² Tierney, ‘The Corporate State’; cf. Eugene Broderick, ‘The Corporate Labour Party of Fine Gael, 1934’ in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxix, no. 113 (May 1994), pp 91–2, 96.

Civil War. In a chaotic political climate, the Government obtained and used discretionary powers to suppress troublesome authorities. Initially, these measures enjoyed the support of influential commentators. Calling for the introduction of a new system of local administration based on American and German models, critics agreed that corruption, inefficiency and a lack of accountability had undermined municipal government. However, much to the frustration of these lobbyists, the responsible minister, James A. Burke, was slow to introduce meaningful reforms. Coincidentally, Mussolini was then busy appointing his *Podestàs*. This move was widely celebrated by Irish journalists, who, indulging in stereotypes about Latin officialdom, considered Italian councilmen no less irresponsible and venal than their Irish counterparts. Once again sensing dangerous parallels, sincere champions of representative local government voiced misgivings that were amplified by the somewhat cynical remonstrations of Fianna Fáil.

Finally, it has been demonstrated that Cumann na nGaedheal fulminations against P.R. occurred against the backdrop of Fascist electoral reforms. Introduced in anticipation of Home Rule and upheld in the 1922 Constitution, Irish P.R. was originally a popular measure synonymous with national unity, progress and reform. At the same time, different variations of the format swept across the continent, which further appealed to Europhile nationalists. In Italy, however, P.R. proved a contributing factor to the post-war chaos. Ignoring his own unique contribution to the strife, Mussolini thus had a pretext to introduce the Acerbo Law. Because this piece of electoral chicanery occurred alongside gerrymandering in Northern Ireland, it was treated with disdain by some observers in the Free State. Even so, other commentators, whether steeped in the hegemonic traditions of the Irish Parliamentary Party or fortified by the discreet urgings of government ministers, hoped to see Mussolini's system introduced in Ireland. In consequence, the opposition, and Labour in particular, once more espied the spectre of Irish fascism. The

²⁸³ *Irish Independent*, 2 June 1938.

evidence, however, does not support these accusations. Desmond Fitzgerald might have envied the unassailable position held by Mussolini, and John Homan and others might have broached the idea in public, but there was never any real prospect that a divided Cumann na nGaedheal would attempt an Acerbo-like coup. As the records make clear (and regardless of what the Blueshirts may have aspired to in the 1930s) Weimar Germany rather than Fascist Italy informed whatever blueprint for electoral reform existed.

Chapter 5:

FASCIST ITALY AND FIANNA FáIL

If Cumann na nGaedheal demonstrated a somewhat ambiguous attitude to Mussolini's Italy, so too did early Fianna Fáil. Deftly applying Italian propaganda to their own purposes, de Valera and his followers were wont to contrast Fascist "vigour" with the supposed supineness of the Cosgrave ministry. Accordingly, Fianna Fáil proclaimed the virtues of Fascism in such arenas as rural development, demographic growth and public sector economy. On the other hand, the party protested its objections to dictatorship, railed against British fascists and criticised Italian foreign policy. In short, Fianna Fáil used Fascist propaganda for its own political ends (a point graphically illustrated in section 5.1), whilst simultaneously upholding the "democratic traditions" of the Irish nation.

5.1. Security legislation

Contrary to party policy once in power, Fianna Fáil frequently challenged the security strategies devised by Cumann na nGaedheal. Emergency powers, necessitated by the Civil War and frequently invoked thereafter, underpinned these strategies. In the context of the times, the use of emergency powers was hardly surprising. As opposed to the cost of maintaining bloated security services, it provided a cheap yet effective precaution against future disorder. Reflecting a pre-Civil War authorship, however, the Free State Constitution emphasised fundamental rights and civil liberties.¹ Yet unlike Bunreacht na h-Éireann, this Constitution was amendable by legislation alone. Hence the Treasonable and Seditious Offences Act of 1925; the Emergency Powers Act of 1926; the Public Safety Acts of 1926 & 1927; and, in response to the notorious

“Red Scare” of 1931, Article 2A, a constitutional amendment that later formed the basis of the Offences Against the State Act (1940).² Hindsight suggests that these Acts were wise and effective.³ At the time, however, the routine suspension of civil liberties undermined popular support for the treatyite regime.⁴ Accordingly, libertarian instincts appealed to Fianna Fáil, which, not yet faced with the insurrectionary campaigns that marked the mid 1930s, took a relaxed attitude to the idea that some people in Ireland might exploit democratic freedoms to subvert the democratic state.

Ironically, the emergency powers enacted by Cumann na nGaedheal were also criticised in Italy. Much to the delight of Fianna Fáil, a leading Fascist commentator was particularly sensitive about the Public Safety Act of 1927. Introduced following the murder of Kevin O’Higgins, this Act prescribed internment, the suppression of seditious papers, deportation, and military courts as legitimate weapons in the fight against subversion.⁵ Without question, the Act was a severe infringement on personal liberty. However, for the Italian reviewer, whose musings appeared in the Roman newspaper, *Il Tevere*, these infringements simply provided propaganda missiles to launch at hostile journalists in London, where Fascist “totalitarianism” had long been a pet hate of the liberal press. It is worth noting that *Il Tevere* was Mussolini’s personal mouthpiece. Writing anonymously therein, the dictator used this paper to air his grievances against domestic and foreign opponents. Mussolini was obsessed about negative depictions of his regime by foreign journalists, and often intervened to counter these depictions. Not only did the article in question appear in boldface, a tactic used to indicate Mussolini’s authorship, it

¹ Kissane, ‘Defending Democracy?’, p. 157.

² *Ibid.*, pp 157–8, 61.

³ *Ibid.*, pp 173–4. Usefully, Kissane places the legislation in an international context. He suggests that analogous powers in Finland and Czechoslovakia safeguarded democracy in these countries. Conversely, the absence of emergency law contributed to the precipitate demise of Weimar Germany. Furthermore, Kissane notes that Irish counter-subversion did not rely on oppression alone. Rather, constructive measures—namely, an unarmed police force, judicial reform, the remarkably lax application of emergency powers, ameliorative land reform, etc.—were also used to promote respect for the Free State.

⁴ *Irish Times*, 23 July 1927; *Nenagh Guardian*, 30 July 1927; *Leitrim Observer*, 3 Sept. 1927.

⁵ *Irish Times*, 23 July 1927.

bears all the hallmarks of his inimitable style.⁶ Regardless, a translation of the article wound its way (most likely through the efforts of Mgr John Hagan),⁷ to Seán T. O’Kelly in Dublin, who had it reprinted in full by *The Nation*. Mocking the anti-Fascist discourse of the London press, *Il Tevere* concluded that:

Under the serene and most liberal sky of Europe there has recently been added a new dictatorship to those disgraceful ones in Rome, Moscow and Madrid—a dictatorship more thorough than these, more cunningly devised in every detail; a dictatorship which is neither Fascist nor Bolshevik nor Spanish, but new in type and promulgated in the name of liberty; a dictatorship with an English trademark and carried on to the tune of Liberalism. We refer to the dictatorship in Ireland ... It is time to be up and doing ye good confreres of the British press—you could well spare a little ink for Irishmen oppressed by a regime of unheard of tyranny.⁸

For Fianna Fáil, which, with a certain lack of sensitivity, had already passed the laurel of would-be dictator from O’Higgins to ‘Signor Mussolini Cosgrovi’,⁹ Fascist self-identification with Cumann na nGaedheal was an opportunity not to be missed. Seán Lemass thus made further use of *Il Tevere* in Dáil Éireann. Following up on an earlier contribution from de Valera, who cited such critics of the Public Safety Act as the *Irish Independent*, *Manchester Guardian* and *London Times*,¹⁰ Lemass read the passage already quoted. Not without humour, the Government’s response was clearly one of surprise. One backbencher speculated that if *Il Tevere* appealed to Fianna Fáil, then it was obviously a communist publication. For his part, President Cosgrave accepted that the journal was Fascist. Alert to the political sympathies and possible

⁶ Meir Michaelis, ‘Mussolini’s unofficial mouthpiece: Telesio Interlandi – *Il Tevere* and the evolution of Mussolini’s anti-Semitism’ in the *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, p. 221; cf. Lyttelton, *Seizure of Power*, p. 400; cf. Mack Smith, *Mussolini*, p. 106.

⁷ Mgr Hagan was an important, albeit discreet, founding member and supporter of Fianna Fáil (see, Keogh, *Twentieth-Century Ireland*, pp 40, 42). In July 1927, he agreed to provide *The Nation* with articles and news from Italy. At this time, he also made a donation of £100 to the party election funds, and a £1000 loan toward the foundation of what became the *Irish Press*. Apparently known only to de Valera and O’Kelly, this latter contribution invites speculation as to where the money came from. One possibility is that not all of the funds raised (approx. \$50,000) towards completing the present day college building (opened Oct. 1927), was spent on bricks and mortar. See, O’Kelly to Hagan, 8 July 1927 (P.I.C.R.A., Hagan papers, HAG 1/1927/391); printed receipt from Fianna Fáil, 30 Aug. 1927 (ibid., HAG 1/1927/445); O’Kelly to Hagan, 17 Nov. 1927 (ibid., HAG 1/1927/614); Curran to Hagan, 27 July 1927 (ibid., HAG 1/1927/412).

⁸ *The Nation*, 20 Aug. 1927.

⁹ Ibid., 23 July 1927.

¹⁰ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xxi, 1197(10 Nov. 1927).

input of Mgr Hagan, however, he provoked a good-humoured response from a knowing Lemass when he claimed that ‘then it was a Fianna Fáil Fascist who wrote the article’.¹¹

5.2. *The British Fascisti*

Less mirthful when it came to actual Irish fascists, Fianna Fáil did envisage a possible use for the Public Safety Act. If the Government now held wide-ranging powers of proscription, Fianna Fáil wanted to see these powers applied against “anti-national” groups like the Irish branch of the British Fascisti. Founded against the backdrop of the post-war Labour victory, the British Fascisti were empire spanning, violently anti-communist, patronised by the Tory party and vigorously supported by the media mogul Lord Rothermere.¹² The forty odd Irish members of this establishment—grandiloquently titled the ‘British Fascists, Irish Free State Command’—were all ex-servicemen and veterans of the World War. Sometimes misidentified by the press as the “Irish Fascisti”, they operated from premises on Molesworth Street, where they set themselves up as a disciplined and non-sectarian scourge of the supposedly communist I.R.A.¹³ Despite their negligible numbers, the Fascisti were relatively conspicuous. Occasionally acting as uniformed stewards at British Legion social functions, they also featured prominently at Armistice Day and other Great War commemorations.¹⁴ Indeed, dressed in black shirt, tie and beret, and not allowed to smoke, talk or carry Union Jacks, they brought an element of sombreness to ceremonies increasingly marked by invective and violence.¹⁵ Even so, a certain irreverence attended their annual appearance at the Phoenix Park. Typified by the republican journalist Hester Sigerson Piatt (daughter of Senator George

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1217 (10 Nov. 1927); *Irish Independent*, 11 Nov. 1927.

¹² See, Thomas P. Linehan, ‘The arrival of Fascism: the British Fascisti and the Imperial Fascist League’ in *idem*, *British Fascism, 1918–1939: Politics, ideology and culture* (Manchester, 2000), pp 61–84.

¹³ *The Nation*, 15 Sept. 1928.

¹⁴ See, for example, the funeral commemoration for Marshal Foch as reported in the *Irish Times*, 8 Apr. 1929.

¹⁵ Brian Hanley, ‘Poppy Day in Dublin in the ’20s and ’30s’ in *History Ireland*, vii, no. 1 (Spring, 1999), pp 5–6.

Sigerson), many observers dismissed these Black Shirts as eccentrics who contradicted the genus of Fascism. Addressing herself to the editor of the *Irish Independent*, Piatt felt that they misunderstood ‘the objects of the Italian parent society set up by Mussolini, as he himself explained, on the lines and from the example of the original Sinn Féin movement here’.¹⁶ Accordingly, ‘An Irish Fascisti would mean an intensified Irish Ireland and anti-foreign movement’ and not, as Piatt speculated, a childish fancy for costumes that suggested a level of political sophistication akin to that of the Ku Klux Klan.¹⁷

Such comments help to explain the underlying respect many in Fianna Fáil held for the Italian originals, but they hardly reflected the level of animosity felt by republicans toward the British Fascisti. Following a ferocious denunciation by Peadar O’Donnell in *An Phoblacht* (a journal that had little to say about the Italian originals), a spate of violent attacks by the I.R.A. provoked threats and counter threats.¹⁸ By 1928, the Liverpool-based Commander of the Fascisti in Ireland, one J. H. Rowlanson, felt it necessary to report these clashes to the *Irish Independent*. Therein he warned that if ‘the rebel Communists Party’ continued to flout the law of the land, then punishment would be ‘meted out through Fascism, and the application will be in such a manner that those who provoke us will best understand.’¹⁹ Not surprisingly, this drew a shrill response from Fianna Fáil, which had yet to make a clean break with the I.R.A. Describing the Fascisti as former Black-and-Tans whose ‘counter-revolutionary activities have thus far been confined to the counter of a Shebeen’, *The Nation* returned the threat, ominously warning that ‘the Fascist, and similar British Imperial groups, have been treated with all too much tolerance in Ireland.’²⁰ On the hustings, meanwhile, Fianna Fáil speakers grossly exaggerated the size and influence of the Fascisti’s ‘Free State Command’. For example, speaking in Westmeath some

¹⁶ *Irish Independent*, 16 No. 1927.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *An Phoblacht*, 3 March 1928; *The Nation*, 15 Sept. 1928.

¹⁹ *Irish Independent*, 6 Sept. 1928.

²⁰ *The Nation*, 15 Sept. 1928.

days prior to Armistice Day 1931, M. J. Kennedy T.D. derided Cumann na nGaedheal as a ‘party held in power by Molesworth Street’, and which had replaced ‘decent’ treatyites ‘with the British Fascisti and their allies, who, on next Wednesday will flaunt the Union Jack in the faces of Dublin citizens to the tune of “God Save the King”’.²¹ Likewise, the Dáil heard Fianna Fáil heavyweights like Lemass, Gerald Boland, P. J. Ruttledge and the outspoken voice of the party left, Tommy Mullins,²² complain about the apparent lassitude of the Garda in their dealings with the British Fascisti. For these speakers, whose remarks a host of party backbenchers and Labour deputies echoed, this stood in stark contrast to the vigorous surveillance of republican and labour organisations.²³ According to Ruttledge and Mullins in particular, later fierce opponents of the Blueshirts in their respective posts of Minister for Justice and director of Fianna Fáil publicity,²⁴ the Gardaí had no interest in the Fascisti because the latter stood foursquare behind imperialism. Addressing the House in May 1929, Ruttledge described how:

There are certain organisations in this country which the Department is very careful to keep their eyes shut on. There was an organisation in this State mentioned in whispers twelve months ago. I refer to the British Fascisti. They are a very definite and strong organisation to-day. The streets of Dublin are littered with their propaganda appealing to the people about their king. Their meetings are held in private. Their organisation is being strengthened and worked up, but there is no danger that their offices will be raided or any inquiry made as to the particular persons who constitute it.²⁵

Whatever about the imperialist bent of the Fascisti, it was misleading to suggest that the police had no interest in their activities.²⁶ On the contrary, they clearly annoyed the Garda Commissioner, Eoin O’Duffy. Indeed, just

²¹ *Westmeath Examiner*, 14 Nov. 1931.

²² Michael McInerney, ‘The Making of a National Party—Profile of Tommy Mullins’ in the *Irish Times*, 16 Feb. 1974, cit. in Tom Garvin, *Judging Lemass: The measure of the man* (R.I.A., Dublin, 2009), p. 92.

²³ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xxi, 1259, (10 Nov. 1927); *ibid.*, xxii, 1822 (23 Mar. 1928); *ibid.*, xxvii, 285 (15 Nov. 1928).

²⁴ Marie Coleman, ‘Mullins, Thomas Lincoln Joseph’ in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009); *idem*, ‘Ruttledge, Patrick Joseph’, *ibid.*

²⁵ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xxix, 2203 (16 May 1929).

²⁶ Even if, as James Loughlin points out, the only file on the British Fascisti in the NAI (Dept. of Justice (D/J), H 306/28) is empty. See, Loughlin, ‘Northern Ireland and British Fascism in

prior to Armistice Day 1928, and despite his officers finding no evidence of subversive intent on behalf of the Fascisti, he wrote a memorandum recommending their immediate proscription on the grounds that uniformed parading served no purpose other than to threaten peace and public order.²⁷ This logic might have influenced O’Duffy the Blueshirt when he curtly blocked the British Fascisti from enrolling in that organisation.²⁸ However, given his own predilection for spreading disorder at this time, this seems unlikely. Regardless, the anti-Fascisti memorandum redounded upon the Blueshirts. Unearthed in 1934, Minister Rutledge made it a centrepiece of his speeches in favour of the notorious Wearing of Uniforms (restriction) Bill.²⁹

5.3. Fascist frugality

Resentment towards the security services also fed into Fianna Fáil resentment at the cost of government. As noted by Richard Dunphy, this was the first populist issue embraced by the party.³⁰ Initially focused on the police and army, this campaign also tapped into pre-existing hostility toward the civil service. Staffed by veterans of the imperial administration, this part of the state bureaucracy was widely perceived as a Mason-dominated “old boy’s club”. Consequently, some treatyites expected the Government to purge the administrative elite, and promote “reliable” nationalists in their stead. In need of experienced and capable administrators, however, a pragmatic Executive balked at drastic change. Preceding the fallout from the Army Mutiny Crisis of 1924, this defeat for the Irish-Irelanders in Cumann na nGaedheal was a major contributing factor to the rupturing of that party.³¹ Thereafter the ‘National Group’, which later morphed into Clann Éireann, continued to appeal for ‘purer administration and greater economy with greater

the Inter-War Years’ in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxix, no. 116 (Nov. 1995), p. 540.

²⁷ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, 1, 220–3 (28 Feb. 1934).

²⁸ Hanley, ‘Poppy Day in Ireland’, p. 6.

²⁹ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, 1, 220–3 (28 Feb. 1934); *Seanad Éireann deb.*, xviii, 754–6 (21 Mar. 1934).

³⁰ Dunphy, *Making of Fianna Fáil Power*, p. 85.

³¹ J. M. Regan, ‘The Politics of Utopia: Party Organisation, Executive Autonomy and the New Administration’ in J. M. Regan and Mike Cronin (eds), *Ireland: The Politics of Independence, 1922–1949* (Dublin, 2007), p. 50.

efficiency.’³² Apart from job-seeking treatyites, the civil service also had to suffer the deprecations of the *Irish Independent*, the *Cork Examiner*, and a host of regional papers, all of which campaigned against the supposedly wasteful practices of government departments.³³

Capitalising on this festering resentment against the cost of government, Fianna Fáil made “thrift” a core principle of party propaganda.³⁴ Reviving a catch-cry of Griffith’s Sinn Féin, speakers maintained that the governance of Ireland was ‘conducted on a scale of extravagance that has no parallel in Europe’.³⁵ Accordingly, Fianna Fáil promised to slash the salaries of T.D.s, Senators and top civil servants. Meanwhile, a sense of outrage permeated party rallies. For example, Fr Eugene Coyle, the scourge of Freemasonry and rabble-rouser *par excellence*, informed the party faithful in Manorhamilton that:

In Dublin, where your Sovereign Parliament assembles, your Governor-General, or rather Governor-Receiver, has £30,000 per annum; Mr Cosgrave, £3,500, and under them a regular horde of officials with salaries ranging from £2,500 to £800, all living on the fat and cream of the land, and attending—while the children, men and women of Leitrim, and small farmers and labourers of the 26 counties go hungry and shoeless—fetes, champagne suppers, swell dances, balls and Imperial Conferences.³⁶

Highly effective electioneering, Fianna Fáil pursued this theme across the country.³⁷ To hammer the point home, speakers emphasised the frugality of comparable regimes. The foremost of these was Fascist Italy. In order to win conservative support, the parsimonious message cultivated by early Fascism included austere budgets, a truncated civil service, a stable lira and reduced inflation.³⁸ In general, foreign observers accepted these accomplishments without question. As celebrated by the *Irish Times*, ‘efficiency’ was ‘the watchword of the new Government ... Worthless officials have been banished

³² *Irish Times*, 26 Jan. 1926.

³³ Dunphy, *Making of Fianna Fáil Power*, p. 85; cf. *Cork Examiner*, 22 Apr. 1926.

³⁴ Various election handbills, c. June 1927 (U.C.D.A., MacEntee papers, P67/344).

³⁵ *Leitrim Observer*, 26 Nov. 1926.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ See, file marked ‘The Economy Stunt’, c. Aug. 1926 (U.C.D.A., Blythe papers, P24/378).

without mercy. Sentiment has been thrown completely to the winds, and competence is now the only qualification for a job in the public service'.³⁹ The reality was somewhat different. As part of the logic of corporatism and totalitarianism, the number of Italian bureaucrats soon reached an all-time high.⁴⁰ Yet the chimera of Fascist austerity persisted. Throughout 1927, therefore, highlighting the comparable salaries of Mussolini, the Governor General (Timothy Healy) and President Cosgrave was stock in trade for Fianna Fáil speakers.⁴¹ One example will suffice. Speaking in Nenagh, Lemass told a rally that 'the cost of the machinery of the Irish government would have to be drastically reduced'.⁴² Less cavalier with numbers than Fr Coyle, he claimed that Mussolini earned a paltry £400 against Cosgrave's supposed salary of £2,500. Provoking an uproarious response, Lemass suggested that a republican ministry would therefore 'have to reduce the latter figure unless the people decided they were getting good value, and consequently President Cosgrave would be worth six-and-a half Mussolinis'.⁴³

Apart from salaries, party activists also focused upon Fascist measures against "profiteering". Real or imagined, Irish profiteers were a serious concern for those who believed in the Messianic mission of Fianna Fáil. Towards the end of fulfilling 'the august destiny of Ireland', disciples like Senator Joseph Connolly aimed at creating 'a new civilisation in life, industry and the control of human beings'.⁴⁴ If such language smacked of "totalitarianism", in reality it merely announced a pious commitment to imposing the social principles of Catholicism.⁴⁵ In this context, Fianna Fáil railed against 'usury', which was denounced as 'a crime against industry,

³⁸ Mack Smith, *Mussolini*, p. 61.

³⁹ Ed., 'The Fascist Axe' in the *Irish Times*, 31 July 1923.

⁴⁰ Mack Smith, *Mussolini*, p. 116.

⁴¹ *Connacht Tribune*, 12 Feb. 1927; cf. *Leitrim Observer*, 28 May 1927.

⁴² *Nenagh Guardian*, 12 Mar. 1927.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Meath Chronicle*, 10 Jan. 1931; cf. J. Anthony Gaughan, *Memoirs of Senator Joseph Connolly* (Dublin, 1996).

⁴⁵ Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, p. 24.

agriculture and the citizens'.⁴⁶ This was shrewd politics. In an era of falling incomes and rising prices (the consequences of austerity, a shortage of essential goods following the British General Strike of 1926, and a worldwide agricultural depression), commercial malpractice, fuelled by memories of avarice during the world war, loomed large in Irish politics.⁴⁷ Indeed, the idea that unscrupulous middlemen stood between the producer and the consumer was one of the few issues on which Labour and the Farmer's Party saw eye to eye.⁴⁸ Cumann na nGaedheal, meanwhile, fulminated quietly about the questionable practices of the Irish banks.⁴⁹ However, the state's response to the clamour amounted to little more than gesture. Unwilling or unable to tackle the princes of finance, the Government sought to assuage public anger by convening a Food Prices Tribunal. Reporting in late 1927, it found that some price-fixing rings, particularly in relation to basic foodstuffs, did exist. Nevertheless, the Tribunal also found that this problem was not widespread, and that the best remedy was adverse publicity for the merchants concerned.⁵⁰

Quickly shelving the report, the Government agreed. Yet Fianna Fáil remained sceptical. Exaggerating the facts disclosed to the Tribunal,⁵¹ the party continued to describe 'profiteering in the necessities of life [as] probably the greatest of social crimes'.⁵² Speakers also railed against the commercial profits made by brewers, builders, property owners and bankers.⁵³ Searching for countermeasures, Fianna Fáil once again attested to methods adopted by Fascist Italy. In 1927, the famous 'Battle for the Lira', a prestige campaign to stave off devaluation, was at its height. The first casualty of this "Battle" was the working wage, and so the Fascist government, supposedly in collaboration

⁴⁶ *Meath Chronicle*, 10 Jan. 1931.

⁴⁷ *Irish Independent*, 17 Dec. 1925.

⁴⁸ *Freeman's Journal*, 11 Oct. 1923

⁴⁹ Coogan, *De Valera*, p. 428.

⁵⁰ *Connacht Tribune*, 25 Dec. 1927.

⁵¹ See, for example, 'The Crime of Profiteering – Consumers abandoned to Combines Greed' in *The Nation*, 9 Aug. 1930, p. 5.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 30 May 1931.

⁵³ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xxiii, 2415 (31 May 1928); *ibid.*, xxvi, 1150 (31 Oct. 1928); *ibid.*, xxvii, 841 (28 Nov. 1928).

with the unions, intervened to reduce and regulate the price of basic commodities.⁵⁴ Again, these measures were more propaganda than substance. Nevertheless, they resonated with an Irish audience that quickly learned of offshore penal colonies reserved for grasping butchers, chemists and grocers.⁵⁵ They also resonated with Fianna Fáil activists like the Wexford born novelist, hagiographer and sub-editor of *The Nation*, Francis Carty. Insisting that to denounce Fascism as ‘all evil is as mistaken an idea as that it is all bad’ [sic], he believed that ‘the cutting of retail prices, including rents’ was ‘an important fruit of the Mussolini regime’, and one that demonstrated a ‘spirit ... that was certainly better than the profiteering monopolist democracies which are busy denouncing *Il Duce* as a tyrant.’⁵⁶ Frank Aiken, described by Richard Dunphy as someone with ‘almost an eccentric interest when it came to monetary matters’, was another Fianna Fáil figurehead smitten by Fascist anti-profiteering.⁵⁷ Gleaning information from original articles in *Labour and Industrial Information* (a weekly publication issued by the International Labour Organisation in Geneva), he penned an arcane memorandum entitled ‘The Regulation of Prices in Italy’.⁵⁸ Subsequently reprinted in *The Nation*, therein readers learned of the bewildering array of councils, federations and other agencies tasked with defending the consumer interest in Italy. In this instance, however, the usual Fianna Fáil reservations about lavish bureaucracy were notably absent.⁵⁹

5.4. Agronomics & demographics

Applauding Fascist vigour was intended to demonstrate the supineness of Cumann na nGaedheal. Clearly stung, the Government denounced this campaign as a ‘deliberate attempt to encourage despair and propagate

⁵⁴ Lyttelton, ‘The revaluation crisis and the defeat of the Fascist Unions’ in idem, *Seizure of Power*, pp 342–7.

⁵⁵ *Irish Times*, 28 May 1927; *Limerick Leader*, 4 June 1927; *Anglo-Celt*, 2 July 1927.

⁵⁶ *The Nation*, 3 Jan. 1931.

⁵⁷ Dunphy, *Making of Fianna Fáil power*, p. 255.

⁵⁸ Memo entitled ‘Regulation of Prices in Italy’, n.d. (U.C.D.A., Aiken papers, P104/2399); *The Nation*, 31 Dec. 1927.

⁵⁹ *The Nation*, 31 Dec. 1927.

hypochondria'.⁶⁰ For Fianna Fáil, however, bureaucratic thrift and price regulation were just minor aspects of a broader policy that sought to stimulate population growth and economic self-sufficiency. In line with the economic nationalism of Sinn Féin, Fianna Fáil called for tariffs and tillage-intensive farming towards the eventual ends of industrialisation. As such, de Valera's party thundered against the conservative economic blueprint followed by Cumann na nGaedheal. On the advice of a trio of commissions of experts—the Fiscal Enquiry Committee (1923), the Commission on Agriculture (1924), and the Banking Commission (1927)—the Government remained wedded to the established formula of monetary union with sterling, imperial free trade, and the production of foodstuffs for the British market.⁶¹ Devised and overseen by Patrick Hogan, the lynchpin of this economic programme was an agricultural policy of export-led pastoral specialism.⁶² Even without Fianna Fáil's contribution, Hogan's policy, which clearly favoured the affluent farmer, provoked widespread criticism.⁶³ According to detractors like the U.C.C. economists, John Busted and Alfred O'Rahilly, this policy was symptomatic of a 'Calvinist mindset' that supposedly valued profit and 'mere efficiency' over community values and wealth distribution.⁶⁴ Likewise, the *Leader*, which supported Fianna Fáil economics from the outset (it is worth noting that D. P. Moran was a close friend and a strong influence upon Seán Lemass), conducted a visceral campaign against "The Minister for Grass".⁶⁵ With the onset of the Great Depression, the regional press increasingly concurred.⁶⁶ As

⁶⁰ *The Star*, 7 Sept. 1929.

⁶¹ Mary E. Daly, *Industrial Development and Irish National Identity, 1922-1939* (Syracuse, U.S.A., 1992) p. 16.

⁶² Paper by Patrick Hogan, Minister for Agriculture, on agriculture and tariffs, with reply by Thomas Johnson, n.d., c. 1929 (N.L.I., Thomas Johnson papers, Ms. 17,175); cf. George O'Brien, 'Patrick Hogan: Minister for Agriculture 1922-1932' in *Studies*, xxv, no. 99 (Sept. 1936), pp 353-68.

⁶³ James Meenan, 'From Free Trade to Self-Sufficiency' in Francis MacManus (ed.), *The Years of the Great Test, 1926-39* (R.T.E., Dublin, 1967), p. 72.

⁶⁴ George O'Brien, 'Agriculture and Employment in the Free State' (with comments by John Busted, Henry Kennedy, James Ryan, Connell Boyle and Richard A. Butler) in *Studies*, xix, no. 74 (June 1930), p. 187; cf. Alfred O'Rahilly, *The Case for a Flour Tariff* (pamphlet, Dublin, 1928), pp 30-1.

⁶⁵ Patrick Maume, 'Moran, David Patrick (D.P.)' in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁶⁶ Brian Reynolds, 'The Formation and Development of Fianna Fáil, 1926-32' (Ph.D. thesis,

the self-professed champion of the plain people over the “imperial classes”, Fianna Fáil nurtured these apprehensions. Exploiting government statistics that suggested Irish soil was the most under-cultivated in Europe, an intense “back to the land” campaign, which emphasised the intrinsic values of rural life, increasingly dominated the party discourse.⁶⁷ Thoroughly nationalist, the message was simplicity itself: Cumann na nGaedheal agronomics rendered Ireland less a Free State than a chattel one. Instead of Hogan’s preference for large farms producing livestock and animal produce for the British larder, Fianna Fáil sought to curb urban migration and emigration by promoting small holdings that would produce cereal crops—in particular wheat—and more employment.⁶⁸

Yet populist nationalism was only one aspect of the Fianna Fáil argument. Catholic teaching re-enforced the logic of tillage farming. Inspired by the social encyclicals of Leo XIII and Pius XI, the socio-economic philosophy of “Distributism” was then very much in vogue.⁶⁹ Largely confined to the English-speaking world, Distributism was a reaction against plutocracy, socialism and the bureaucratic tendencies of the modern state. Holding that the best form of defence against these heresies was a mixed economy of autonomous farmers and small industries, the Distributists (hence the term) sought greater diffusion of productive property.⁷⁰ Moreover, without insisting that all citizens find employment in agriculture, they were broadly anti-urban in outlook.⁷¹ In Ireland, confessional organs like the *Irish Rosary*, *The*

Trinity College, Dublin, 1976), p. 283.

⁶⁷ O’Brien, ‘Agriculture and Employment in the Free State’, p. 195. To demonstrate the intrinsic ruralism of Fianna Fáil, it is only necessary to quote the party constitution. Article 5 committed Fianna Fáil ‘To establish as many families as practicable on the land’, whilst Article 6 made a commitment ‘to promote the ruralisation of industries essential to the lives of the people as opposed to their concentration in cities’ (*Coiriú Fianna Fáil*, March 1926).

⁶⁸ Éamon de Valera, ‘The Economic Policy of Fianna Fáil’, speech to mark the inaugural meeting of Craobh na Féinne (F.F. Central Branch), 11 Jan. 1929 (U.C.D.A., de Valera papers, P150/2140).

⁶⁹ See, Keogh and O’Driscoll, ‘Ireland’, pp 276–8.

⁷⁰ Corrin, *Catholic Intellectuals*, p. 155.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

Standard, *The Cross* and the *Catholic Bulletin* promoted Distributist ideas.⁷² Noteworthy lay preachers included the aforementioned Busted and O’Rahilly, whilst clerical advocates included the Jesuits, Edward J. Cahill of *An Ríoghacht* and Thomas J. Ryan, a journalist, author, educator and controversialist who is perhaps best known for his prolonged missionary work in China (1933–71).⁷³ Another noteworthy Distributist was Fr John M. Hayes, the founder of *Muintir na Tíre* (“People of the Land”).⁷⁴ Each of these clerics sympathised with Fianna Fáil, and it was through such channels that the party informed itself about Catholic teaching on the special status of agricultural property (viz, that when it comes to the productive soil upon which humankind depends, normally sacrosanct ownership rights are subject to the common good), an education put to effective use in the polemical battles with *Cumann na nGaedheal*.⁷⁵

Not surprisingly, Fianna Fáil and the Distributists shared a common curiosity about Fascist agrarianism. Also borne from population concerns, Mussolini took an avid interest in promoting the rural way of life. As a matter of expediency, Catholic metaphors attended this interest.⁷⁶ In reality, however, the militaristic and imperialistic ambitions of the regime underpinned Fascist

⁷² See, for example, G.C. Heseltine, ‘Why I am a Distributist’ in *The Irish Rosary*, xxxi, no. 4 (Apr. 1927), pp 241–4; cf. Austin Tierney (ed.), ‘Town or Country’ in *The Cross*, xix, no. 3 (July 1928), p. 218; cf. Dublinensis (pseudo.), ‘To President Cosgrave—an open letter re economics and politics’ in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xx, no. 10 (Oct. 1930), pp 934–46.

⁷³ *Irish Catholic*, 6 Apr. 1930; *Irish Independent*, 10 Feb. 1971. For an in depth account of the life and times of Fr Ryan, see Thomas Morrissey S.J., *Thomas Ryan S.J.: From Cork to China and Windsor Castle, 1889-1971* (Dublin, 2010).

⁷⁴ Stephen Rynne, *Father John Hayes: Founder of Muintir na Tíre, People of the Land* (Dublin, 1960), p. 74, 112.

⁷⁵ The de Valera-Cahill friendship extended back to the early days of *An Ríoghacht*. Anxious to brush up on his Catholic social theory, de Valera attended some of the early study sessions, and encouraged his colleagues to do likewise. Cahill was also involved, albeit to a very limited extent, in the shaping of the 1937 Constitution. Ryan was an outspoken supporter of Fianna Fáil economics, so much so that he was censured by the Jesuit authorities. For his part, Fr Hayes was close to both de Valera and Dr James Ryan, the party spokesperson on agriculture and champion of the small farmer. See, O’Driscoll, ‘The Irish Social Catholic Movement, 1919-39’, pp 138–40; Dermot Keogh, ‘The Jesuits and the 1937 Constitution’ in *Studies*, lxxviii, no. 309 (Spring 1989), pp 82–95; Morrissey, *Thomas F. Ryan*, pp 14–15; Diarmaid Ferriter, ‘Hayes, John Martin’ in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁷⁶ See, H. O’N. (pseudo.), ‘Notes from Rome’ in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xix, no. 2 (Feb. 1929), pp

ruralism.⁷⁷ As a veteran of the Great war, Mussolini understood that the Italian peasantry had borne the brunt of the fighting between 1915 and 1918, and that it was they who would fight the discreetly planned wars of imperial expansion still to come. Yet the remarkably low birth rate in Italy, which Mussolini attributed to industrial urbanisation, was hardly conducive to war and empire. If Italy was to become populous, and hence powerful, the regime would have to protect Italian agriculture and its fecund peasantry.⁷⁸ Beginning in 1925, Mussolini therefore announced a series of measures to restrain urban growth, increase the population and stimulate a rural social economy of peasant farmers and village artisans. The first of these measures, the so-called “Battle for Births”, favoured early marriage, large families and improved healthcare for mothers and infant children.⁷⁹ This entailed novelties such as a “Bachelor’s Tax”, “Fertility Medals” for dutiful mothers, and subsidised honeymoons.⁸⁰ Next came the “Battle for Grain”, which was intended to keep the peasantry tied to the land and to provide Italy with a plentiful supply of basic foodstuffs in time of war. An “Empty the Cities” campaign followed, which culminated in the notorious Laws against Urbanisation.⁸¹ Furthermore, in response to the severe immigrant quotas imposed by a depression-hit U.S.A., Mussolini, mortified by what he perceived to be an ethnic slur, introduced laws that actually curtailed foreign emigration.⁸² Finally, the Fascist regime provided generous funds toward vast programmes of land reclamation and improvement.⁸³

Impressed by these initiatives, Fianna Fáil and its clerical allies cared little for

129–30.

⁷⁷ Morgan, *Italian Fascism*, p. 101.

⁷⁸ Duggan, *Force of Destiny*, p. 470.

⁷⁹ Lauren E. Forcucci, ‘Battle for Births: The Fascist Pronatalist Campaign in Italy 1925 to 1938’ in *Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Europe*, x, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2010), pp 4–13.

⁸⁰ *Irish Times*, 18 Jan. 1928.

⁸¹ Carl Ipsen, *Dictating Demography: The problem of population in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, 1996), pp 117–9.

⁸² R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini’s Italy, Life under the Dictatorship* (London, 2006), p. 390. Courtesy of the British Embassy in Rome, the evolving anti-emigration laws of Fascist Italy were recorded by the Free State Dept. of External Affairs (N.A.I., DT, S4229).

the adumbrative link between Fascist ruralism and military expansion. Instead, they applied Italian propaganda to their own purposes. For example, the anti-grazing authorities of the Salesian Agricultural College in Warrenstown, Co. Meath, thought the Fascist policy of compulsory tillage eminently suited to Irish needs.⁸⁴ Fr Cahill, meanwhile, quoted Mussolini in his own harangues against the moral dangers associated with city life.⁸⁵ Likewise, Fr Ryan, who was fond of arranging audiences with the *Duce* for the boy pilgrims of Belvedere College, employed *The Standard* to proclaim ruralism as the jewel in the crown of Mussolini's reign.⁸⁶ For Fr Hayes in particular, farming was man's natural vocation. Hence, he retained a life-long attachment to Mussolini for facilitating the link between workers, their families and the life-blood of the soil.⁸⁷ Indeed, as Chairman of the Irish Grain Growers Association, Fr Hayes, with the help of the British Ambassador, had contrived to meet Mussolini "after hours" in 1931. At his charming best, the dictator advised his guest that 'the whole life of the Irish nation depended upon the rural people and on rural industries'.⁸⁸ Armed with these words of wisdom (which he subsequently imparted to de Valera)⁸⁹ and a signed photograph for Archbishop Harty of Cashel, Hayes left the Palazzo Chigi feeling 'a better person through meeting that noble ... kind man, a human man, a man with the grace of God shining through his eyes'.⁹⁰

Confident in the moral correctness of Fascist ruralism, Fianna Fáil thus made Italy a key reference point when challenging Cumann na nGaedheal. For

⁸³ Morgan, *Italian Fascism*, p. 102.

⁸⁴ *Meath Chronicle*, 22 Mar. 1930.

⁸⁵ Alice Curtayne, 'Italy's Battle of the Wheat' in the *Irish Rosary*, xxvi, no. 7 (July 1931), pp 501-05; E. J. Cahill, 'The Social Question in Ireland', p. 238.

⁸⁶ 'The Belvedere Pilgrims' in the *Irish Independent*, 9 Apr. 1929, p. 11; Thomas F. Ryan, 'Eight Years of Fascism Reviewed' in *The Standard*, 13 Dec. 1930, pp 1-2.

⁸⁷ See, for example, *Irish Independent*, 20 Mar. 1931; cf. Liam Maher (ed.), *The Mind of Canon Hayes: A Collection from the Writings and Speeches of the Late Founder of Muintir na Tíre* (Tipperary, 1961), p. 30.

⁸⁸ *Nenagh Guardian*, 2 Apr. 1932.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Rynne, *Father John Hayes*, pp 100-101. Clearly smitten, upon returning to Ireland Fr Hayes despatched a silver-mounted blackthorn stick by way of thanking Mussolini for his hospitality—a news story that gave rise to running jokes about the gift's likely use across the

instance, when defending proposals to curtail wheat imports, provide a minimum price for homegrown grain and induce the millers to use Irish flour, party activists invariably pointed to the Fascist “Battle for Grain”.⁹¹ Moreover, some commentators tended to note with approval the element of compulsion favoured in Italy. Prominent in this regard were M. J. Hennessy, Francis Carty, “Dublinensis” of the *Catholic Bulletin* and the bane of the U.C.D. Officer Training Corps, Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh.⁹² Their pronouncements were symptomatic of a general Fianna Fáil antipathy to perceived Irish “Kulaks”. Nevertheless, compulsion along Fascist lines sat ill at ease with the party hierarchy. Rather than dismiss the graziers of Leinster and Munster completely, when it came to changing productive methods, figureheads like Dr James Ryan stressed the need for inducements and education rather than obligation.⁹³ Even so, tensions arising from this issue erupted at the 1930 Ard Fheis. On this occasion, a motion in favour of compulsion—without reference to Mussolini, but replete with references to the archaic dictates of Papal Rome and the Brehon Laws—was only narrowly defeated on the grounds that ‘Nothing ... would do more to injure the movement than to associate it with the threat of general compulsion’.⁹⁴

This fear of general compulsion notwithstanding, Fianna Fáil also tended to celebrate the novel, if not bizarre, laws that accompanied the “Battle for

backs of the Italian people.

⁹¹ See, for example, ‘L.S.’ (pseudo.) ‘Wheat Growing in Ireland: Has Mr. Hogan Heard the Last of It?’ in *The Nation*, 16 Aug. 1930, p. 2; cf. de Valera’s address to the 1929 Ard Fheis in *The Nation* (special supplement), 29 Oct. 1929.

⁹² Ó Dálaigh, to give one example, was outraged by a curious “ploughmen’s protest” that arose in the early summer of 1929. Some sixty ploughmen turned out in Santry to oppose an action of the Land Commission against the family of a deceased dairy farmer. Neighbouring farmers believed that the Commission was corrupt, and acting at the behest of a local racehorse trainer who apparently espied a cost-effective way to extend his gallops. Not amused, Ó Dálaigh chastised the men for ‘gathering so thoughtlessly to the support of the rancher’ and ‘aiding a cause that must pass away before Ireland can flourish’. To his mind, Irish ploughmen should have been demonstrating in favour of the policies pursued by Fascist Italy, where compulsion had ‘placed the wisdom of the measure beyond question’. See, *Irish Independent*, 19, 22 Apr. 1929; *The Nation*, 4 May 1929.

⁹³ *The Nation*, 4 May 1929.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29 Nov. 1930.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*; cf. *Irish Independent*, 31 Oct. 1930.

Births”.⁹⁵ Entitled ‘The Mass Honeymoon’, the following front-page article from *The Nation* was not unusual at the time:

In this country a hopeless economic system makes marriage practically impossible for hundreds of thousands of Irishmen and Irishwomen. The State looks on ... unperturbed. In Italy, they give thought to the people ... So, while Mussolini closes the door on emigration, on the one hand, he encourages marriage with the other. His latest plan is the mass honeymoon. At Trieste ... seventy couples were married in the same church by the same preacher at the same hour. The State then gave the seventy brides and bridegrooms a free trip to Rome, with public welcomes and festivals ... To our minds there may be crudeness in this, but there is a great deal more of wisdom and true patriotism. In Ireland, we all sit with folded hands while our young men and women fly unmarried to America or remain unmarried at home...⁹⁶

Such commentary occurred in the context of the intense anti-Malthusianism of Fianna Fáil. Borrowing from a critique perfected by Pádraig Pearse, de Valera and his followers railed against the two outstanding characteristics of Irish country life: marital abstemiousness and emigration. Both phenomena were linked to the Famine, the consequences of which, to quote Terence Browne, had ‘confronted the small farmer with the abject insecurity of his position and the economic folly of the mode of life tradition had bequeathed him.’⁹⁷ This newfound economic realism shaped a stifling social order that stipulated late marriage for those who stood to inherit the land, and exile for those who did not.⁹⁸ Briefly interrupted by the First World War, this pattern was well established by the 1920s. Indeed, the 1926 census suggested that the number of unmarried persons of all ages in the Free State was without comparison, and that an astonishing 43% of the people born in Ireland were living abroad.⁹⁹ Accordingly, de Valera, who was not above taking an offhand approach to the statistics, identified a symbiotic relationship between the pasture policy pursued by the Government and the continued exodus from the Irish countryside.¹⁰⁰ The Government remained indifferent. Unlike Fine Gael,

⁹⁵ See, for example, *The Nation*, 1 Dec. 1928; *ibid.*, 9 Feb. 1929; *Irish Press*, 28 Oct. 1932.

⁹⁶ *The Nation*, 26 Apr. 1930.

⁹⁷ Terence Brown, *A Cultural and Social History of Ireland, 1922–79* (London, 1981), p. 11.

⁹⁸ F. S. L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine* (2nd ed., London, 1973), pp 44–7.

⁹⁹ Brown, *A Social and Cultural History*, pp 9–10.

¹⁰⁰ Enda Delaney, ‘State, politics and demography: The case of Irish emigration, 1921–71’ in

which later pursued emigration and population estimates with great vigour, Cumann na nGaedheal, as demonstrated by its own election literature, failed to even *acknowledge* that rural Ireland was haemorrhaging, let alone formulate policies to deal with the problem.¹⁰¹ This in itself was hardly surprising. The Cosgrave ministry had little to gain from drawing attention to a problem that disproportionately affected the traditionally republican periphery.¹⁰² Fianna Fáil, on the other hand, had to react to the major concern of its primary constituency. Endorsing concerns already expressed by E. J. Cahill in his best-selling pamphlet, *Ireland's Peril* (Dublin, 1930), the party thus identified demographic growth as 'the central social issue in Ireland, in reference to which almost every other public question has to be considered'.¹⁰³ Once again, therefore, propagandising the apparent dynamism of Fascist Italy helped to emphasise the "callousness" of Cumann na nGaedheal.

5.5. Self-identification with Fascist Italy

It was obvious, however, that the self-sufficient Ireland desired by Fianna Fáil was not likely to be secured in the short-term. Nevertheless, the rapid advances made by Fascist Italy towards similar objectives provided a morale-boosting role model. Consequently, when the "Economic War" began in earnest, de Valera's government, not yet troubled by the apparent synonymy between Fascism and Blueshirtism, frequently invoked Mussolini's Italy. For instance, in October 1932, the *Irish Press* commemorated the tenth anniversary of the "March on Rome" in inspirational and highly revealing terms. Surveying a decade of Fascist rule, Frank Gallagher sketched thinly veiled parallels between de Valera and Mussolini. Without touching upon the particular contribution made by either of his heroes to the chaotic circumstances of 1922, he explained that Italy, only ten years previously a 'torn and distracted land', had since been restored to greatness 'largely

Irish Political Studies, xiii, (1998), p. 28.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp 28, 30.

¹⁰² Peter Pyne, 'The Third Sinn Féin Party: 1923–1926, part II: Factors contributing to collapse' in *Economic and Social Review*, i, no. 2 (Jan. 1970), pp 244–5; cf. J. Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army: The IRA, 1916–1979* (Dublin, 1989), p. 50.

through the agency of one man'.¹⁰⁴ Continuing in a vein that could have done little to reassure the opposition, Gallagher argued that 'the architect of Italy's resurgence' enjoyed the support of the people, in whom 'an upward movement, a stirring' helped to 'carry the plans of the leader to near fulfilment. Italy seems to have been ripe for dictatorship.'¹⁰⁵ Gallagher next launched into the "accomplishments" of Fascism that so appealed to Fianna Fáil, the foremost of which was 'the creation of the self-sufficing nation'.¹⁰⁶ Paying close attention to the "Battle for Grain", Gallagher revealed that 'Fascist Italy was now producing practically every ounce of bread her people needs'.¹⁰⁷ Likewise, 'In coal, in manufactures, in all the fundamental needs the same progression towards self-sufficiency is going on ... it is obvious that Italy today is far healthier economically than Ireland'.¹⁰⁸ As he neared a conclusion, Gallagher succumbed to hyperbole:

As the result of this economic revival unemployment is less in Italy today than it is in other of the bigger countries ... At the same time, the emigration which formerly sent considerable Italian colonies to many countries is practically ended and the Italian birth-rate is one of the highest in the world. All these facts mark the growth of a new Italy which in home affairs is Sinn Féin, and in foreign affairs is taking a lead to establish international affairs on realities. Whatever may be said of Mussolini, he has presided over the swiftest march of events in the history of a European nation.¹⁰⁹

Quite apart from the staple references to Fascist economy, some of the other key themes raised in this eulogy had long featured in Fianna Fáil commentary. The allusion to Mussolini's efforts to 'establish international affairs on realities', for instance, was only atypical in the sense that on this occasion it was a positive one. Indeed, the standard party line actually tended to support the later claims of Fianna Fáil apologists that Mussolini's concept of diplomacy 'produced in de Valera ... a healthy scepticism about the abstract seductions of Fascism which gripped so many of Europe's 'Catholic'

¹⁰³ *The Nation*, 8 Nov. 1930.

¹⁰⁴ Ed. 'Fascism' in the *Irish Press*, 28 Oct. 1932.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

peoples'.¹¹⁰ If true, this scepticism did not prevent other party activists from exploiting Fascist diplomacy for domestic purposes. Consequent of a pessimistic belief in the pre-eminence of British diplomacy, Fianna Fáil was an intensely isolationist party.¹¹¹ Moreover, the paternalistic relationship that developed between Tory Britain and Fascist Italy—the result of a Foreign Office miscalculation that constant flattery would dissuade Mussolini from risky adventures—seemed to confirm this supremacy.¹¹² This cosy relationship between London and Rome clearly annoyed Fianna Fáil, which revelled in prophesising about another general war. Repeatedly invoking the spectre of treaty commitments to imperial defence, the aim of this exercise was to frighten voters into abandoning Cumann na nGaedheal. As such, when tensions over Albania provoked a mini-crisis between Rome and Belgrade in 1927,¹¹³ the response of *The Nation* was typically paranoid. Casually predicting another Great Power conflict, correspondents suggested that the British, who apparently showed reckless disregard for the strategic ties that linked Paris with Belgrade, had secretly undersigned Italian aggression.¹¹⁴ This type of spurious analysis continued into 1928, when Fascist Italy made clumsy attempts to separate Montenegro from Yugoslavia. On this occasion, Frank Gallagher pre-empted Fianna Fáil rumblings against the Volunteer Reserve. Insisting upon some secret military alliance between Dublin and London, and once again predicting a general war, *The Nation* pleaded with Irishmen 'not be lulled by the "peace talk" of the great militarist powers', but to ready

¹¹⁰ Declan Kiberd, 'Éamon de Valera: The Image and the Achievement' in Philip Hannon & Jackie Gallagher (eds), *Taking the Long View: 70 Years of Fianna Fáil* (Dublin, 1996), p. 27.

¹¹¹ Memorandum outlining Fianna Fáil opposition to the League of Nations, 1929 (U.C.D.A., Archives of the Fianna Fáil Party, P176/36).

¹¹² Preceding tactics later applied to Hitler's Germany, this policy, somewhat successful in the 1920s, facilitated the myth that Mussolini was an exceptional diplomat. Moreover, the patronising of Mussolini contrasted sharply with the tense relationship between London and Moscow, which in turn made the Soviet Union something of a *cause célèbre* for Irish Republicans. Indeed, the Fianna Fáil left often lamented the "victimisation" of the U.S.S.R., even when Stalin's interests clashed with those of 'Catholic' Poland. Lyttelton, *Seizure of Power*, p. 425; cf. Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, pp 690–2; Michael McInerney, 'The Gerard Boland Story' in the *Irish Times*, 11 Oct. 1968, p. 10; cf. *The Nation*, 28 July 1928; *ibid.*, 11 Aug. 1928; *ibid.*, 12 Apr. 1928.

¹¹³ See, File on Italy, Yugoslavia and Albania, Dec. 1926–Apr. 1927 (N.A.I., DT, S5233).

¹¹⁴ *The Nation*, 2 Apr. 1927. Alongside Poland, Rumania and Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia was then a secret signatory to the French-inspired *Cordon Sanitaire* or "Little Entente".

themselves instead to ‘resist any attempt on the part of England to use the manhood of Ireland to fight the battles of Imperialism.’¹¹⁵ Other prophets of doom included the aforementioned Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh, who epitomised Fianna Fáil isolationism. Writing from U.C.D. in early 1931, and again demonstrating his own (but far from unique) *à la carte* approach to Fascist Italy, Ó Dálaigh penned a scathing article that portrayed Mussolini as a ruthless gambler whose ego made him a singular threat to the European peace.¹¹⁶

Similarly, the analogies between Fascism and revolutionary Sinn Féin were commonplace long before the arrival of the *Irish Press*. This exercise appealed to both sides of the treaty divide, with government supporters frequently comparing Mussolini to Michael Collins.¹¹⁷ From the Fianna Fáil perspective, however, the spirit of 1916-21 survived in that party alone. Accordingly, less subtle de Valera partisans than Frank Gallagher placed great expectations upon their own *bona fide* “Irish Mussolini”. Outstanding in this regard was the aforementioned “Dublinensis”. Sceptical as always of parliamentary democracy, in the summer of 1932 he had this advice for the new President:

Sir, the *Duce* has set a precedent which I take the liberty to commend to you. Cast out by the nation, the late ministry will resort, as such men do, to snare-setting, to the vogue of the parliamentary question. The people understand that vogue. Take a leaf, Sir, from Signor Mussolini’s book. Leave to your ministers the main task of dealing with these masters of hocus-pocus until the people deal finally with them in the fall of 1936. Your office—to repatriate, to draw the teeth of the Soviet, to give valiance to the slave, purpose to the valiant, sagacity to the ardent, character to the mean—the prerogative of your exalted office is apart.¹¹⁸

Notwithstanding the appeal that this type of polemic held for less sober minds within Fianna Fáil, the views expressed by “Dublinensis” were exceptional.

¹¹⁵ *The Nation*, 11 Aug. 1928.

¹¹⁶ Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh, ‘An Chéad Chogadh Eile—Ci’aca is Cliste de Lucht na gCleas? in *The Nation*, 24 Jan. 1931, p. 3. This prescient article suggested interests other than the author’s chosen field of Celtic Studies. Amongst other things, Ó Dálaigh predicted the coming to power of Hitler, the *Anschluss* and the German invasion of Poland.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, *Freeman’s Journal*, 24 Mar. 1923; *United Irishman*, 9 June 1923; *Connacht Tribune*, 31 Oct. 1927.

¹¹⁸ Dublinensis (pseudo.), ‘On Guard!’ in *Catholic Bulletin*, xxii, no. 7 (July 1932), pp 542-3.

For all of the emphasis subsequently placed on the ‘slightly constitutional’ quip of Seán Lemass, Fianna Fáil rarely questioned the principles of representative government. In fact, when the crisis sparked by the murder of Kevin O’Higgins provoked hostile mumblings about the need for a dictatorship in Ireland, Fianna Fáil forcibly denounced the would-be autocrats. For instance, in reply to the Mussoliniphile editor of the *Irish Rosary*, Fr Michael McInerney O.P., who made the case that only fascism could save the Irish from themselves, *The Nation* denounced the Dominican Order for advocating ‘a lawless un-Christian dictatorship like that of Mussolini, which is held up as an example to the rulers of the Free State’.¹¹⁹ Likewise, in response to the restive musings of Ernest Blythe and other sceptics in the treatyite press, the party revelled in portraying itself as the champion of parliamentary government. Piqued by the facetious attitude to Dáil business displayed by the *Sunday Independent* in particular, Fianna Fáil maintained that press reporting deliberately undermined parliament during the twilight years of the Cosgrave ministry.¹²⁰ Taking a dim view of the lampooners, the party argued that journalists were imitating a ‘Cumann na nGaedheal mentality to which parliamentary government has become a burden, an obstacle, a hindrance.’¹²¹ Adopting a moralist tone, Fianna Fáil instead stressed the importance of parliamentary institutions in protecting ‘the rights of a people against a despotic and incompetent executive, and to provide a means of expression and redress for popular grievances.’¹²² To emphasise the point, a romanticised interpretation of Irish history and cultural values helped to explain why ‘a non-democratic form of government could not succeed in Ireland for long’.¹²³ Referencing ‘a vigorous and ancient tradition of democratic independence’ that had long resisted ‘the spirit of Cromwellianism’, *The Nation* warned that ‘if anyone in the future should try to impose a dictatorship on the Irish people the force of public opinion would

¹¹⁹ “Delta” (pseudo.), ‘The Murder of Kevin O’Higgins’ in the *Irish Rosary*, xxxi, no. 8 (Aug. 1927), pp 625–8; *The Nation*, 20 Aug. 1927.

¹²⁰ See, for example, *The Nation*, 5 July 1930.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 20 Dec. 1930, p. 5.

¹²² *Ibid.*

soon convince him that he is not living in Russia or Italy. The weapon of Caesarism would certainly break the hand that used it.’¹²⁴

Nevertheless, party propaganda was emphatic about the importance of charismatic leadership. In line with the internal structures and politics of Fianna Fáil, which prescribed discipline, iron loyalty to “the Chief” and a peculiar brand of democratic centralism, a cult of veneration for de Valera did exist.¹²⁵ When considered in the context of the obsequious *Ducismo* preached in Fascist Italy, however, it was relatively circumscribed. Besides, leadership cults in Irish politics did not begin with de Valera, whose eulogists were encouraged to think in terms of Tone, O’Connell, Parnell and Pearse rather than contemporary European figureheads.¹²⁶ Moreover, well-intentioned comparisons with the Italian dictator usually put de Valera on the defensive. For example, when the Cork City Management Bill provoked Gerry Boland into admitting his own personal preference for ‘a good Mussolini’,¹²⁷ de Valera, much to the amusement of the Government benches, was quick to point out that Boland’s opinions were entirely his own, before lecturing the House on the drawbacks of dictators and the particular offence they caused to Irish democratic instincts.¹²⁸ Similarly, when interviewed by the *Manchester Guardian* in 1927, de Valera reacted badly to the suggestion that he had both the ambition and the mettle to follow in the footsteps of the great man in Rome. Clearly offended, he bluntly remarked that ‘I do not fancy myself as a Mussolini. I think some of Cosgrave’s cabinet had that role in mind, and

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 1 Feb. 1930.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Dunphy, *Making of Fianna Fáil power*, p. xvi, quoted in Eunan O’Halpin, ‘Parliamentary Party Discipline and Tactics: The Fianna Fáil Archives, 1926-1932’ in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxx, no. 120 (Nov. 1997), p. 584.

¹²⁶ Kevin Boland, *The Rise and Decline of Fianna Fáil* (Cork & Dublin, 1982), p. 13; cf. Patrick Murray, ‘Obsessive Historian: Éamon de Valera and the Policing of His Reputation’ in *The Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, vol. 101C, no. 2 (2001), p. 46.

¹²⁷ See above, p. 169.

¹²⁸ *Irish Independent*, 12 October 1928.

Ireland has made it pretty plain that she did not like it. No, I have no faith in imitation Mussolinis.’¹²⁹

Yet if de Valera balked at suggestions that he had the qualities of a dictator, he was nonetheless prepared to acknowledge that Fascism had brought certain mystical benefits to the Italian people. In the same interview with the *Manchester Guardian*, he described himself as a fervent believer ‘in the spiritual exaltation of the people’ before conceding that ‘whatever Mussolini has accomplished is attributable to just that.’¹³⁰ Perhaps some selective reading recommended by Dónal Hales influenced this remark. A few months previously, de Valera, in line with the hurried programme of social and political education undertaken by early Fianna Fáil,¹³¹ asked the republican envoy to recommend ‘some authoritative books or articles on Fascist organisation and method of government’.¹³² Hales’ reply to this request does not survive, but any syllabus recommended by him was not likely to promote a dispassionate view of Fascism. Regardless, the thinking divulged to the *Manchester Guardian* re-appeared two years later. By 1929, the “unity appeal” of Fianna Fáil was at its height. Directing his attentions to the post-revolutionary generation of voters, de Valera liked to pose as the leader of a redemptive national movement rather than a “sectional” political party.¹³³ Sandwiched between staple themes like partition, emigration and the withholding of land annuities, it was in this context that he told a major rally at Granard, County Longford, that:

... if they could get the young people with their energy and enthusiasm into the movement, Fianna Fáil could be for Ireland what Fascismo was for Italy. They had heard a lot about the progress of Italy. The secret was that the young Italians were fired with enthusiasm, they put Italy above every other consideration, and thought no effort too great to make Italy a great force. That was the spirit which had animated Ireland from 1919–

¹²⁹ Cutting of *Manchester Guardian* interview with De Valera, 27 June 1927 (U.C.D.A., Blythe papers, P24/539).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ See, circulars and memoranda relating to the party information bureau, 1927 (N.L.I., Frank Gallagher papers, Ms. 18,357).

¹³² De Valera to Hales, 22 Jan. 1927 (C.C.C.A., Hales papers, U53).

¹³³ Boland, *Rise and Decline of Fianna Fáil*, p. 13.

1921, and if they could get even a little of it back they would not have to look with envy at the progress that other countries were making.¹³⁴

Intriguing as these remarks are, it would be improper to exaggerate what was more of a Freudian slip than an important revelation about de Valera's long-term thinking. For one thing, the Granard address did not fit into a pattern of similar pronouncements, nor did the Fascist parallel appear in relevant party literature like *An Appeal to the Young Men and Women of Ireland* (1928).¹³⁵ Moreover, there is every indication that the controversial comments were unplanned. When prefacing his analogy, de Valera spoke of press reports he had read whilst en-route to Granard. On that day, both the *Irish Independent* and the *Irish Times* had published approving articles about Fascist unemployment relief schemes.¹³⁶ These reports caught de Valera's eye because they appeared alongside glowing coverage of the ongoing "Dublin Civic Week". Youth-oriented and with military overtones, this largely forgotten event was patronised by treatyites but generally ignored by republicans.¹³⁷ For suspicious minds in Fianna Fáil, the parades, bands, exhibitions and battle re-enactments—a restaging of the Siege of Clonmel by the National Army was a highlight of the week¹³⁸—that attended the event were a politically inspired distraction from more pressing issues. Accordingly, an unimpressed de Valera took the opportunity to illustrate 'the difference between what was being done here by the Government and what was being done by those [i.e. the Fascists] who realised their responsibilities'.¹³⁹

Digression or not, de Valera soon regretted his remarks. The speech provided his opponents, long-since tired of Fianna Fáil imputations about a "treatyite

¹³⁴ *Anglo-Celt*, 21 Sept. 1929, quoted in Reynolds, 'Formation and Development of F.F.', p. 177.

¹³⁵ As described by de Valera in a letter to J. J. Hearn, 29 Apr. 1928 (N.L.I., Hearn papers, Ms. 15,987).

¹³⁶ *Irish Independent*, 15 Sept. 1929; cf. *Irish Times*, 15 Sept. 1929.

¹³⁷ There were two such Civic Weeks (1927 & 1929). Held under the auspices of the Dublin City Commissioners, the Civic Weeks invited co-operation from cultural organisations, the universities and the business community. For further background information, see E. M. Stephens (ed.), *Dublin Civic Week Official Handbook* (Dublin Civic Week Committee, Dublin, 1929).

¹³⁸ *Irish Independent*, 4 Sept. 1929.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 16 Sept. 1929.

dictatorship”, with a gilt-edged opportunity to respond in kind. The subsequent barbs from this constituency were, however, illuminating in a different way. Remaining notably mute about the merits of democracy, Government supporters preferred to ridicule the “wreckers” of 1922-23 for imagining themselves capable of replicating the Fascist success story. Given the source of de Valera’s musings, it was somewhat ironic that Timothy Harrington and the *Irish Independent* best expressed this sentiment. Acknowledging that ‘wonderful changes and reforms to the advantage and credit of Italy have been effected under Fascist rule’, he remarked that there was one ‘great difference between Signor Mussolini and Mr de Valera. The former did not destroy any of the material resources of his country—he has been consistently, actively and usefully constructive’.¹⁴⁰ Michael Sweeney, editor of the unofficial mouthpiece of the Government, *The Star*, agreed. According to him, ‘de Valera, with his lack of moral courage, blunder and defeat, is no Mussolini. His party could give this country none of the impetus and none of the spiritual rejuvenation which Fascism has given to Italy’.¹⁴¹

This type of *blasé* mockery did not reassure the editor of *The Irishman*, R. J. P. Mortished. Demanding the unlikely axing of de Valera by Fianna Fáil, Mortished offered an alternative view of Fascism as ‘a dictatorial tyranny and a disgrace to civilisation’ that stood for ‘murder, arson, brutal beatings, the smashing up of trade unionism, the arrest of political opponents without trial, deportation with every circumstance of barbarity and imprisonment in conditions calculated to bring the prisoner speedy release by death.’¹⁴² Given that de Valera denied any basic difference in the policies of Fianna Fáil and Labour, this was a highly embarrassing development.¹⁴³ As such, his apologists moved swiftly to nullify the controversy, with Frank Gallagher in particular fighting a frantic rearguard action. On one level, the theologically sound

¹⁴⁰ Ed., ‘Fianna Fascisti!’ in *Irish Independent*, 16 Sept. 1929.

¹⁴¹ Ed., ‘The End of Free Elections’ in *The Star*, 14 De. 1929, p. 4.

¹⁴² *The Irishman*, 21 Sept. 1929.

¹⁴³ Donal Nevin, ‘Labour and the Political Revolution’ in MacManus (ed.), *The Years of the Great Test*, p. 60.

Gallagher pointed out that it was a poor statesman who ignored the constructive work of the Fascist and Soviet regimes simply because they did not incorporate elected parliaments into the decision making process.¹⁴⁴ On another, *The Nation* dismissed the notion that de Valera could condone the excesses of Fascism as ‘insane’ before crying ‘Shame on those of such little faith that an *Irish Independent* headline should weigh more with them than a man’s life record’.¹⁴⁵ Apparently, this record amounted to ‘one continued sacrifice for the people against tyranny’, which made de Valera and Fianna Fáil the foremost opponents of ‘anti-democratic terrorism ... in Italy, in Ireland, in Russia or anywhere else’.¹⁴⁶ These gymnastics implicitly acknowledged that de Valera was fallible when it came to gauging the public mood. Carried away with the exuberance of a party rally, he clearly erred in comparing his movement, still hampered by the anti-democratic behaviour of republicans in 1922, with Fascism. Acknowledging the seriousness of this error, de Valera never again offered any personal opinion on the Mussolini regime, no matter how often his subordinates quoted Italy in support of the particular economic and social policies pursued by Fianna Fáil.¹⁴⁷

5.6. Chapter summary

For many in Fianna Fáil, Fascist Italy appeared as an attractive and dynamic counterpoint to the supposed indolence of Ireland under Cumann na nGaedheal. However, apart from exceptional zealots like Fr Eugene Coyle and “Dublinensis”, party members rarely extolled the merits of dictatorship for itself. Quite the opposite: busily denouncing the supposed autocratic tendencies of the Government, Fianna Fáil, whilst indulging in common cant that described dictatorship as somehow understandable in an Italian context, consistently maintained that democracy was the only model acceptable to Irish political culture. Consequently, and despite an obvious fixation with Fascist propaganda, self-identification with Mussolini’s movement was

¹⁴⁴ *The Nation*, 12 Oct. 1929;

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2 Nov. 1929.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Reynolds, ‘The Formation and Development of Fianna Fáil’, p. 178.

extremely rare, and quickly abandoned in the face of withering criticism. With hindsight, therefore, it appears that Fianna Fáil perceptions of Italian Fascism were shallow, self-serving and somewhat misinformed. Posing as a movement that would complete a national and social revolution stilted by the Anglo-Irish Treaty, Fianna Fáil celebrated Fascist initiatives in the arenas like population growth, agronomics, and the cost of living, all of which, according to the myths perpetuated by Fascist propaganda, had transformed a lethargic Italy into the most dynamic country of the post-war era.

CHAPTER 6:

THE LABOUR CRITIQUE OF FASCIST ITALY

This final chapter involves no apology for the Fascist regime. Rather, as a general survey of left-wing opinion, it follows the efforts of a constituency determined to counter common perceptions of Mussolini's Italy. Highly sensitive to the travails of the Italian working class, the Irish left endeavoured to expose the worst excesses of *Squadrismo* and the fallacies of Fascist corporatism. Closer to home, the left kept a watchful eye on the Italian community in Ireland whilst remaining alert to evidence of Fascist influence upon the major nationalist parties.

6.1. Documenting the Fascist assault upon Italian labour

Clearly, a general assault upon the working class was the first essential activity of Fascism. Since their inception, the Black Shirts had indulged in terror tactics that targeted the Italian unions. Already apprehensive labour commentators thus kept a watchful eye on the early policies of the Mussolini regime. It soon became apparent that the post-empowerment period of “normalisation” did not extend to Fascism's relationship with independent unions. Instead, the anti-labour violence continued unabated, with state pressure now added to the established methods of street thuggery. On the pretext of “public order”, the funds and property of the non-Fascist organisations were systematically confiscated.¹ Next, the regime dismantled consultative bodies like the Ministry of Labour—a move mimicked in Ireland by Cumann na nGaedheal, which reduced the equivalent Dáil ministry to a

¹ Lyttelton, *Seizure of Power*, p. 231.

section of the Dept. of Industry and Finance in 1923²—thus denying the unions any input to state policy. Further demonstrations of the regime’s hostility included the withholding of the state’s contribution to unemployment insurance and the replacement of the International Labour Day holiday (May 1) with the ‘Birthday of Rome’ (21 April).³ For the working class, these combined assaults were disastrous. Rendered defenceless in a period of economic crisis, real wages and the standard of living collapsed. Consequently, long before their abolition in 1925, the independent unions went into rapid decline as dispirited workers joined the opportunists and optimists who hoped that membership of the Fascist Labour Confederation (C.L.F.) would lead to better terms and conditions.⁴

The Irish labour press recorded these developments with bitter resentment. Determined to expose the sufferings of their comrades, editors bypassed established institutions like Reuters and the United Press. Instead, they published information provided by the rival Social Democratic and Communist *Internationales*. For instance, the Irish Labour Party and Trades Union Congress (I.L.P.&T.U.C.) received regular reports from the Amsterdam-based International Federation of Trade Unions (I.F.T.U.).⁵ The I.F.T.U. had a vibrant press office, which was intensely anti-Fascist in outlook. So too was the *News Letter* of the London-based International Transport Workers Federation (I.T.F.), which was the principal sub-section of the I.F.T.U. Both organisations smuggled clandestine reports in and out of Italy, thereby providing the successive organs of the Irish party-congress, the *Voice of Labour*, *The Irishman* and *The Watchword*, with a wealth of material that documented the depredations of the Fascist regime.⁶ For their

² Lee, *Ireland*, p. 127.

³ Lyttelton, *Seizure of Power*, p. 232.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 231–2.

⁵ For a short overview of the I.F.T.U., see Edo Fimmen, *The International Federation of Trade Unions: Development and Aims* (Amsterdam, 1922), available online at <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/netzquelle/01299.pdf>.

⁶ See, for example, *Voice of Labour*, 22 Mar. 1924; *ibid.*, 2 Jan. 1926; *ibid.*, 13 Feb. 1926; *The Irishman*, 30 July 1927; *ibid.*, 18 May 1929; *ibid.*, 18 Oct. 1930; *The Watchword*, 15 July 1931; *ibid.*, 29 Aug. 1931. It is necessary to emphasise, however, that the Irish party-congress was not affiliated to the I.F.T.U. Uniquely so, it was the only representative labour body in Europe

part, the revolutionary leftists (i.e. the Larkinites, who published the *Irish Worker*, and the orthodox Bolsheviks who aired their views in the *Workers' Republic*, the *Hammer and Plough* and the *Workers' Voice*) tapped into the anti-Fascist propaganda generated by the Moscow controlled Red International of Labour Unions or "Profintern".⁷

Solidarity appeals were a feature of these *exposés*. In the early days of the Fascist regime, for example, the *Voice of Labour* published a striking petition from the Italian railway syndicate. Therein, Irish workers learnt that the Mussolini formula for making the trains run on time consisted of beatings, arrests, suspensions and dismissals.⁸ Similarly, at a time when Irish republicans were clamouring for the release of their comrades, the *Workers' Voice* maintained an Italian oriented "release the prisoners" campaign of its own. This journal kept abreast of the harsh sentences handed down by the Special Tribunal (a kangaroo court operated by the Fascist Militia), and provided graphic descriptions of life on *Santo Stefano*, a notorious prison-island reserved for communist opponents of the regime.⁹ Another prominent appeal concerned the legacy of Giacomo Matteotti. A leader of the social-democratic *Partito Socialista Unitario* (P.S.U.) and a fearless critic of Mussolini, Matteotti was famously kidnapped and murdered in June 1924. The subsequent police investigation revealed that high-ranking Fascists were responsible. However, the direct involvement of Mussolini has never been proven, and has divided historians ever since.¹⁰ For a time, the political reaction to the assassination—the so-called "Aventine Secession"—seemed to presage the end of Fascism. Instead, Mussolini weathered the storm and his coalition government became a dictatorial regime.¹¹ Yet with the exception of an infuriated left, the Irish response to this public scandal was mute, if not

to remain completely independent of the Social Democratic International based in Amsterdam, the Moscow-controlled Comintern, and the Catholic dominated Christian Democratic International based in the Hague. See, Mitchell, *Labour in Irish Politics*, pp 226-228.

⁷ See, for example, *Irish Worker*, 13 & 27 Oct. 1923; *Workers' Voice*, 12 Apr. 1930.

⁸ *Voice of Labour*, 2 Dec. 1922.

⁹ *Workers' Voice*, 12 Apr. 1930.

¹⁰ Bosworth, *Mussolini*, pp 194–5.

morally questionable. After two years of pro-Catholic legislation, many confessional commentators, in common with the Vatican, were happy to believe that Mussolini was not responsible for the actions of “renegades” outside of his control.¹² On other levels, treatyites were reluctant to cast stones that would only serve to reignite acrimonious debate about the recent history of political killings in Ireland, whilst the severe censures of the MacDonald government in London prompted republicans to crow about British hypocrisy rather than the deed itself.¹³ In short, only the Left chose to remember Matteotti in a meaningful way, which it did by publicising international commemorative ceremonies and campaigns to relieve the ongoing Fascist persecution of his family.¹⁴

Not surprisingly, labour spokespersons frequently grumbled that the Catholic and broadsheet papers were dangerously amiss in their attitude to Fascism. Delivering a public lecture at Liberty Hall in late 1922, for example, the well-known literary critic and labour activist, Lawrence Patrick Byrne, who described the Fascists as ‘an armed mob, recruited from the university students, the bourgeoisie and the aristocrats whose nationalism was as intense as their hatred of the workers’, prefaced his remarks by complaining that the Black Shirts ‘had been taken to the bosom of the *Irish Independent*’.¹⁵ Possibly provoked by the reports of Gertrude Gaffney, Byrne’s comments did not accurately reflect the editorial policy of the *Independent* at this time. In fact, when treating with the Fascist seizure of power, Timothy Harrington and his team actually oscillated between understanding, apprehension and forthright condemnation.¹⁶ Had Byrne targeted the *Irish Times*, he may have made a more valid point. Imitating the patronising tone immediately adopted

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp 195–204.

¹² Seton-Watson, Italy from *Liberalism to Fascism*, p. 656; cf. Ed., ‘The New Italy’ in the *Irish Catholic*, 16 Aug. 1924, p. 5.

¹³ *Irish Worker*, 21 June 1924; *Sinn Féin*, 28 June 1924; Stannous (pseudo.), ‘Notes From Rome’ in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xiv, no. 7 (July 1924), pp 589–93.

¹⁴ *The Irishman*, 24 Sept. 1927; *The Watchword*, 1 Oct. 1932.

¹⁵ *Voice of Labour*, 11 Nov. 1922.

¹⁶ See, for example, Ed., ‘Italy’s Policy’ in the *Irish Independent*, 2 Nov. 1922; cf. Ed., ‘From Bolshevism to Fascismo’ in *ibid.*, 21 Dec. 1922.

by the Tory press in London, this paper openly lauded the arrival of Fascism.¹⁷ In any event, when criticising the carefree attitude of others, journalists like Archie Heron¹⁸ did not bother to distinguish between the individual components of the “capitalist” press. Editorialising in the *Voice of Labour*, Heron thought it

... most significant that many of the people who maintain that “the will of the people” must prevail in Ireland seem to rejoice at the “will of the people” being flouted in Italy. The will of the people is a sacred thing—so long as it conforms with the policy of the Bosses and their spokesmen! This is not merely cant and inconsistency, it is the rankest of rank hypocrisy.¹⁹

Another labour heavyweight worth mentioning in this regard is Michael P. Linehan. Better known as an influential Catholic Actionist during the 1930s, Linehan was then Assistant Secretary of the I.N.T.O. and a militant member of the National Executive of the I.L.P.&T.U.C.²⁰ In the spring of 1923 he wrote a series of anti-Fascist articles that were duly published by Heron and the *Voice of Labour*.²¹ Recommended by that paper as ‘a most effective reply to the “tosh” on Italian politics which has, for some time past, been appearing in the British and Irish capitalist Press’, these compelling articles were in reply to the musings of the famed American journalist, Sir Percival Phillips.²² As one of the handful of accredited correspondents tasked with masking the horrors of the western front (hence the knighthood), Phillips rose to prominence during the Great War.²³ Since captivated by Mussolini, Phillips

¹⁷ Ed., ‘Young Italy’ in the *Irish Times*, 2 Nov. 1922. On the British conservative press and Mussolini, see, R. J. B. Bosworth, ‘The British Press, the Conservatives, and Mussolini, 1920-1934’ in the *Journal of Contemporary History*, v, no.2 (1970), pp 163–82.

¹⁸ A northern Presbyterian and a prominent socialist-republican during the revolutionary period, Heron was appointed editor of the *Voice of Labour* in 1921. In this capacity, Heron urged his readers to accept the treaty, although he soon became an outspoken critic of the social and economic policies pursued by Cumann na nGaedheal. As a capable organiser with an immense capacity for electioneering work, Heron was a central figure in the I.L.P. & T.U. C., and one who strongly opposed the dissolution of the party-congress in 1930. See, Diarmaid Ferriter, ‘Heron, Archibald (“Archie”)’ in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

¹⁹ Ed., ‘The Fascisti Menace’ in the *Voice of Labour*, 18 Nov. 1922.

²⁰ Ibid., 23 Mar. 1923; *Irish Independent*, 21 Apr. 1928; Puirseil, *Irish Labour Party*, p. 61.

²¹ M. P. Ó Luinneacháin, ‘The “Red” Dragon and the Black Shirts’: a worker’s comments on the Fascisti movement in Italy’ (4 parts) in the *Voice of Labour*, 3 Mar., 24 Mar., 31 Mar., 28 Apr. 1923.

²² Ibid., 3 Mar. 1923.

²³ ‘Obituary: Sir Percival Phillips, K.B.E.’, in the *Irish Times*, 30 Jan. 1937, p. 15.

idolised his subject in a best-selling work entitled *The “Red” Dragon and the Black Shirts*.²⁴ Serialised in advance by the *Daily Mail* and interested Irish papers like the *Connaught Tribune*,²⁵ this polemic delighted in the destruction of Italian trade unions, and boldly listed the principles of Fascism as ‘Christianity, patriotism, loyalty to the state, liberty of the individual, recognition of the rights and duties of all classes of society, obedience to established authority, social morality’.²⁶ Begging to differ, Linehan, who noted a growing interest in Phillips’ work, criticised Fascism within the frameworks of Christian charity and “Black-and-Tannery”.²⁷ Linehan also advised Irish workers not to make the same mistakes as their Italian counterparts. Criticising the latter for not establishing a self-defence force, he suggested that Irish labour should imitate the Irish Volunteers, which, through its association with Fianna na hÉireann, had demonstrated the importance of ‘roping in the young’.²⁸ To Linehan’s mind, it was a matter of urgency that the labour youth organisations (social and athletic clubs, etc.) imbue themselves with a similar fighting spirit, thereby cradling the ‘storm troops’ that could meet prospective Irish fascists ‘on their own ground’.²⁹

6.2. Co-operativism

Whatever about the fate of the socialist unions, labour journalists might have expected their competitors to highlight the sufferings of the Italian co-operatives. Co-operativism (sometimes referred to as “Guild Socialism” by Anglophones, especially when applied to the realm of industry) had a variety of meanings attached to the term. From a Catholic perspective, it simply meant the practical application of Distributist theory.³⁰ With a strong

²⁴ Sir Percival Phillips, *The “Red” Dragon and the Black Shirts. How Italy Found Her Soul: The True Story of the Fascisti Movement* (London, 1923).

²⁵ *Connacht Tribune*, 30 Dec. 1922.

²⁶ Phillips, *The “Red” Dragon and the Black Shirts*, p. 13.

²⁷ *Voice of Labour*, 24 Mar. 1923.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 28 Apr. 1923.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ The Guild Socialist (pseudo.), ‘The Guild System in Theory and Practice’ in the *Voice of Labour*, 22 Oct. 1922, p. 5; cf. Henry Somerville, ‘An Alternative to Capitalism’ (with comments by John A. Ryan, Hilaire Belloc, John Kelleher, George O’Brien and Joseph E. Canavan), in *Studies*, xiv, no. (Dec. 1925), pp 520–44.

emphasis on self-reliance and the Christian concept of community life, co-operativism appealed to the nationalist mindset of Irish labour. It also satisfied the dictates of *realpolitik*. Recognising that the demographic weakness of the Irish proletariat did not justify the traditional postulates of socialism and syndicalism (a reality hammered home in 1913), the party-congress was quick to embrace a philosophy acceptable to the Catholic Church.³¹ Via labour, co-operativism also wound its way, however briefly, into the consciousness of Sinn Féin, a fact demonstrated by the inclusion of co-operatist aims and methods in both the Democratic Programme of Dáil Éireann (1919) and the Free State Constitution of 1922.³²

Yet co-operativism made little impact beyond the Irish countryside. Here, the dairy co-ops founded by Horace Plunkett in the 1890s continued to thrive. In industry, however, co-operators were few and far between. Some urban prototypes—for example the Building Guilds and the Co-operative Clothing Manufacturing Society—had emerged by 1923, but their presence was negligible.³³ In post-war Italy on the other hand, the reformist-socialists and the Catholic unions demonstrated that co-operativism could thrive in an urban environment.³⁴ Influential observers like George Russell (Æ) took note. Indeed, Russell wrote a public letter to the Irish Trades Congress ‘advising the workers to develop their union activities on the same lines as the Italian workers were doing.’³⁵ Similar advice was imparted in the pages of the Jesuit press. The *Irish Monthly*, for example, published a laudatory article by the aforementioned L. P. Byrne. Clearly pining for the Middle Ages, therein Byrne declared that ‘The cooperative idea and method tried by the Italians ... in almost every branch of industry ... is an object lesson for us who are in the

³¹ Mitchell, *Labour and Irish Politics*, p. 224.

³² *Democratic Programme of Dáil Éireann*, 21 Jan. 1919, pars. 1 & 7; *Constitution of the Irish Free State (Saorstát Éireann) Act, 1922*, Art. 45.

³³ Charles F. Ronayne, ‘Italian Catholics and Industrial Co-operation’ in *Studies*, xii, no. 47 (Sept. 1923), pp 391–2.

³⁴ Idem, ‘Italian Catholics and the Economic Problem’, *ibid.*, xii, no. 45 (Mar. 1923), pp 106–19; cf. Andrew E. Malone, ‘Co-operation in Italian Industry’ in the *Irish Monthly*, xlviii, no. 552 (June 1919), pp 308–14.

³⁵ *Voice of Labour*, 3 Mar. 1923.

twentieth century the inheritors of the ruin of six preceding centuries.’³⁶ Writing for *Studies*, the Revd Charles F. Ronayne made a similar argument. Moreover, notwithstanding his appreciation of Mussolini’s propaganda efforts on behalf of the Irish Republic,³⁷ Ronayne expressed grave reservations about the monopolist tendencies of Fascism with regard to Italian labour.³⁸ Accordingly, labour journalists developed a keen interest in the progress of the Italian co-operatives, and an equally keen interest in the brutal Fascist campaign to eliminate them.³⁹

6.3. The Fascists Abroad Organisation

Well versed in the Fascist attitude to rival unions, the Irish left was highly intolerant of the aforementioned *Fasci Italiani all’Estero* (Italian Fascists Abroad Organisation).⁴⁰ Established in 1923, the Irish branch of this institution, the ‘Fascio di Dublino Michele D’Angelo’, attracted a small but loyal membership from the Italian emigrant community.⁴¹ Like the British Fascisti, the Italian Black Shirts made an occasional appearance on Armistice Day.⁴² Beyond that, however, their activities were somewhat low key. According to the Inspector of the Fascisti in Britain and Ireland from 1922–1925, Camillo Pellizzi, the purpose of the organisation before 1930 was simply the “Fascistisation” of emigrant Italians, rather than convincing their host countries of the fallacies of democracy.⁴³ On a visit to Ireland in 1924, Pellizzi’s eventual successor, Count San Marzano, made much the same point. Speaking to a representative of the *Irish Independent*, Marzano explained that ‘Such a movement amongst Italians resident in a foreign country ... did not mean any interference as an organisation in the political or economical

³⁶ Malone, ‘Co-operation in Italian Industry’, p. 314 — Andrew E. Malone was Byrne’s preferred pen-name.

³⁷ See above, p. 14.

³⁸ Ronayne, ‘Italian Catholics and the Economic Problem’, p. 108.

³⁹ *Voice of Labour*, 19 Nov. 1921; *ibid.*, 25 Feb. 1922; *ibid.*, 15 Apr. 1922.

⁴⁰ On the Italian Fascists Abroad Organisation, see Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism*; cf. Luca de Caprariis, ‘Fascism for export? The rise and eclipse of the Fasci Italiani all’Estero’ in the *Journal of Contemporary History*, xxxv, no. 2 (Apr. 2000), pp 151–183.

⁴¹ Dermot Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland: refugees, anti-Semitism and the Holocaust* (Cork, 1998), p. 107.

⁴² *Irish Independent*, 12 Nov. 1926.

⁴³ Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism*, p. 9.

life of that country, save in so far as it might relate to counter-acting anti-Fascist propaganda, and the propagation of knowledge concerning the movement.’⁴⁴ This caveat did result in some letters of complaint about “errant” journalists. However, such missals invited a response that usually exposed the complainants as amateurs in the art of controversy.⁴⁵ In consequence, the Fascist colony remained largely circumspect until the late Mussolini era, when, expounding an ugly anti-Semitism imbibed from Hitler and the Nazis, leading members earned the attention of the Gardaí and the military intelligence services.⁴⁶

Notwithstanding the limited aims of the *Fasci Italiani all’Estero*, the Irish left kept a watchful eye on their activities. For example, as a notable foray into the public sphere, the commemorative ceremony for the Janina victims⁴⁷ provoked an angry response from Larkin and the *Irish Worker*. Infuriated by the prominent coverage granted to Captain Radoani and his Irish friends, Larkin contextualised the pious antics in the pro-Cathedral by reference to the Fascist appetite for ‘murder, arson and wholesale massacres’.⁴⁸ Focusing in particular upon the recent killing of Don Giovanni Minzoni, a Catholic priest whose brutal assassination foreshadowed the death of Giacomo Matteotti in 1924, Larkin complained that it was hypocritical of Irish Catholics to attend the Janina ceremony without demur.⁴⁹ Count Marzano’s visit, meanwhile, provoked a challenge to the Italian colony itself. Once more relating recent crimes of the regime, Larkin mocked the Count and his mission before setting strict guidelines for resident Black Shirts:

We have no objections to the Italians in Dublin starting any organisation they desire, and if it so pleases them they are quite at liberty to label them Fascismo. We would only warn all members of the Dublin Fascisti that ...

⁴⁴ *Irish Independent*, 6 Oct. 1924; cf. ‘The Statute of the Fascists Abroad’, as forwarded to the Free State Dept. of External Affairs by the British Embassy in Rome, 10/02/1928 (N.A.I., DT, S4229)

⁴⁵ See, for example, correspondence between Madame Simone Tery, Paris correspondent of the *Irish Statesman*, and D. A. Cafolla, Secretary of the Fascists Abroad Organisation in Ireland, in the *Irish Statesman*, 11 Dec. 1926; *ibid.*, 25 Dec. 1926; *ibid.*, 15 Jan. 1927.

⁴⁶ Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, p. 107.

⁴⁷ See above, pp 127–8.

⁴⁸ *Irish Worker*, 29 Sept. 1923.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

strike breaking, union breaking, intolerance and bigotry are too common in Ireland at present and outside supplies are not required. The Italians are welcome to abide in Ireland, but the Italian brand of Fascismo would be better absent.⁵⁰

Similar warnings, this time issued by Archie Heron, attended the visit of Commendatore Luigi Villari. An eminent historian and diplomat, Villari was, in the words of Timothy Harrington, ‘by far the most skilful of Mussolini’s propagandists’.⁵¹ Promoting his latest book on Fascism, in 1926 Villari made a speaking appearance at the Members’ Hall of the Royal Dublin Society. Lecturing on ‘The Italy of Today’, he neatly avoided the iniquities of Fascism as he rehearsed staple themes like the attempted “Bolshevik revolution” of 1919-21; the rapprochement between the Catholic Church and the Italian state; the failure of Liberalism, and the “economic miracle” overseen by Mussolini.⁵² Describing the address as insidious, a worried *Voice of Labour* concluded that the event was part of a plot, spearheaded by the Fascists Abroad, to undermine Irish democracy.⁵³ This was mere speculation, however. Rather than engage in histrionics about the *Fasci Italiani all’Esterro* the *Voice* might have paid more attention to the relationship between Villari and his Dublin host, Dr Walter Starkie.⁵⁴ Of the Catholic faith, Starkie was an Anglo-Irish academic and member of the controlling council of the R.D.S. Resident in Rome during the heady post-war period, he gained a lasting respect for Fascism, which he saw as a potential antidote to the ‘sterile and unavailing’ Irish patriotism of the past.⁵⁵ Returning to Ireland in 1924, Starkie emerged as a capable propagandist in his own right. Dismissing the concerns expressed ‘by foreign Labour and Socialist circles’, in 1927 he joined Villari as a founding member of the aforementioned International Centre for Fascist Studies

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 11 Oct. 1924.

⁵¹ *Irish Independent*, 2 July 1928.

⁵² *Irish Times*, 13 Nov. 1926.

⁵³ *Voice of Labour*, 20 Nov. 1926

⁵⁴ *Irish Independent*, 13 Nov. 1926.

⁵⁵ Cronin, *Blueshirts and Irish Politics*, p. 58; Eda Sagarra, ‘Starkie, Walter’ in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009); Walter Starkie, ‘Whither is Ireland Going—is it Fascism? Thoughts on the Irish Free State’ in H. De Vries de Heekelingen (ed.) *A Survey of Fascism: The Yearbook of the International Centre of Fascist Studies* (London, 1928), p. 227.

(C.I.N.E.F.).⁵⁶ Moreover, when writing for the C.I.N.E.F. Starkie speculated that the R.D.S. was one of two key organisations capable of absorbing and recommending what he considered the constructive aspects of Fascist socio-economic thought.⁵⁷ As such, it is logical to assume that he organised the visit of Villari with this end in mind.

6.4. Fascist corporatism

In common with all of Mussolini's Irish apologists, Dr Starkie was particularly interested in the Fascist solution to class warfare.⁵⁸ Having secured a monopoly over Italian labour, from the mid 1920s to the eve of the Second World War, the dictatorship lumbered slowly along the unsteady road to the so-called "Fascist Corporate State". As Fascism's chief claim to political inventiveness, this project aroused intense interest abroad.⁵⁹ Because of the ambiguous treatment of Fascist corporatism by Pope Pius XI, Irish curiosity peaked in the early 1930s. In May 1931, Pius issued *Quadragesimo Anno*. As the Church's response to the Great Depression, this encyclical also preached the virtues of corporatism. Therein, the pope suggested that in much the same way as the medieval guilds had functioned, vocational groups drawing together labour, capital and consumer interests be established and invested with a practical role in social administration.⁶⁰ On a superficial level, this advice appeared to harmonise with developments in Fascist Italy. Here, however, the corporate structures were imposed and directed from above. Eventually forming the basis of political representation—following the establishment of "mixed" federations of employers and workers in 1934, a Fasces-Corporate Chamber replaced the moribund parliament on the very eve of the Second World War—they were merely a useful means of realising and

⁵⁶ Walter Starkie, 'The Fascist Experiment' in the *Irish Statesman*, 28 Aug. 1926, p. 685; James Whiston, 'Starkie, Walter Fitzwilliam (1894–1976)' in Lawrence Goldman (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2011).

⁵⁷ Starkie, 'Whither is Ireland Going?', p. 233. In line with the approaches made by J. S. Barnes to Fr Edward J. Cahill, the other organisation praised by Starkie was *An Ríoghacht*. See above, p. 45, note 142.

⁵⁸ Starkie, 'The Fascist Experiment', p. 696.

⁵⁹ Martin Blinkhorn, *Mussolini and Fascist Italy* (3rd ed., London & New York, 2006), p. 39.

⁶⁰ Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, pars. 83–7.

perpetuating the one-party dictatorship.⁶¹ The corporations recommended by *Quadragesimo Anno* were radically different. Intended to reflect the organic nature of society and protect individual rights from bureaucratic control, they did not require the patronage of the state (on the contrary; they were to be autonomous and voluntary), nor were they intended to *replace* existing political institutions: they were merely intended to supplement them.⁶²

Quadragesimo Anno, however, failed to make these distinctions sufficiently clear. Because Pius had no wish to offend Mussolini (as noted, *Quadragesimo Anno* anticipated the Catholic Action dispute by a matter of weeks), the encyclical was only mildly critical of Fascist corporatism.⁶³ Indeed, couching his objections in diplomatic language, the pope made certain to acknowledge the ‘obvious advantages’ of a system that had thus far produced social and economic stability.⁶⁴ This approach had long-term consequences: for many Catholics, concepts remained sufficiently blurred to enable Mussolini and his emulators, most notably Dollfuss and Salazar, to misuse the Church’s teaching in support of their social, economic and political policies.⁶⁵

Thanks to the scholarship of Swift, Lee and O’Leary, it is not necessary to revisit the debates of the 1930s here.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the early phase of Fascist corporatism did pose challenges to the Irish labour movement. The Law of Syndicates (1926) and the much-vaunted Charter of Labour (1927) announced Mussolini’s novel approach to the problem of industrial conflict. According to the Law of Syndicates, the Fascist state no longer tolerated the traditional weapons of class warfare like strikes, boycotts, lockouts and industrial

⁶¹ Blinkhorn, *Mussolini and Fascist Italy*, p. 40; Denis O’Keefe, ‘The Corporative Organisation of Society’ in *Studies*, xxvi, no.102 (June 1937), p. 183.

⁶² O’Keefe, ‘The Corporative Organisation of Society’, pp 185–6.

⁶³ O’Leary, *Vocationalism & Social Catholicism*, p. 16.

⁶⁴ Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, par. 95.

⁶⁵ O’Leary, *Vocationalism & Social Catholicism*, pp 15–16.

⁶⁶ John Swift, ‘Report of the Commission on Vocational Organisation and its times, 1930s–1940s’ in *Saothar*, i (1975), pp 54–63; Lee, ‘Aspects of Corporatist Thought in Ireland’; O’Leary, *Vocationalism and Social Catholicism*.

sabotage.⁶⁷ In future, workers and employers confederations would negotiate collective contracts under the auspices of a newly established Ministry of Corporations. If required, this institution would also referee any disputes that did arise concerning pay and conditions.⁶⁸ Reinforcing these laws, the Labour Charter sought to eliminate the need for arbitration. For workers, the Charter prescribed elixirs like an adequate living wage, proper health and accident insurance, annual paid leave, the right to Sunday rest and the observance of religious holidays.⁶⁹ Employers, meanwhile, were reassured that Fascism posed no threat to private property or enterprise, and that the regime considered labour itself to be a ‘social duty’ demanding honest endeavour on behalf of the workers.⁷⁰

For many Irish commentators, these laws appeared to complement the most famous social encyclical of the modern age, *Rerum Novarum*. Issued by Pope Leo XIII in 1891, *Rerum Novarum* vaguely anticipated the corporate social framework proposed in *Quadragesimo Anno*. Without condemning capitalism in itself, Leo challenged the Liberal presumption of minimal state intrusion in the economic sphere.⁷¹ According to *Rerum Novarum*, this philosophy had allowed the rich and powerful to exploit the labouring classes, engendered massive social inequality and provided the potential for violent revolution.⁷² Yet *Rerum Novarum* was not simply a vindication of the working masses and their grievances. In forthright terms, the encyclical also criticised the demagogic statism prescribed by the *Communist Manifesto*.⁷³ Rejecting the extremities of Liberalism and Marxism, Leo XIII instead defended the virtues of limited state intervention. Inviting the state to regulate the economic activities of its subordinate units, he held that governments, as the supreme authority in temporal affairs, had a moral duty to promote class co-

⁶⁷ ‘Fascist Reforms in Italy’ in the *Round Table*, xxvi, no. 62 (Mar. 1926), p. 259.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 260–1.

⁶⁹ O’Herlihy, ‘Fascist Italy’, p. 515.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ O’Leary, *Vocationalism & Social Catholicism*, pp 11-13.

⁷² Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, pars. 1–3.

⁷³ Corrin, *Catholic Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democracy*, p. 79 .

operation by organising economic life on such a basis that the need or temptation to revert to industrial warfare (the anarchy produced by which the Church considered no less an assault upon society than that wrought by political revolution) was eliminated.⁷⁴

Understood in this light, Mussolini's labour laws became a centrepiece of the Irish apologia for Fascism. In particular, clerical supporters were quick to voice their support. Adding to a chorus that included established Mussoliniphiles like "H O.N.", Timothy O'Herlihy, R. B. Taylor and Michael McInerney (a.k.a. "Delta"),⁷⁵ a new fellow traveller emerged under the pseudonym of "Bran Dubh". A clerical student of the Irish College Rome who wrote on behalf of the organ of the Gaelic League, *Fáinne an Lae*, this author provoked an angry response from the *Voice of Labour* by congratulating Mussolini for eliminating trade unionism in Italy.⁷⁶ Of the Catholic Action laity, *An Ríoghacht's* Italian expert, Hilliard Stack, sounded a less triumphalist note of approval. Smitten by the altruistic portent of the Labour Charter in particular, he decided that 'The Fascist attitude towards labour has not been unsympathetic on the whole.'⁷⁷ T. J. Kiernan, a devout Catholic and diplomat who was then Secretary of the Irish High Commission in London, came to the same conclusions.⁷⁸ Writing for a journal that persistently crossed swords with Irish labour on the legality of strikes, the *Irish Rosary*,⁷⁹ Kiernan cross-referenced praise for Mussolini in the British press (a consequence of the General Strike of 1926) with the broad thrust of *Rerum Novarum*.⁸⁰ This exercise convinced Kiernan, a prominent supporter of state corporatism along

⁷⁴ Cornelius Lucey, 'Strikes and Compulsory Arbitration' in *Studies*, xxv, no. 98 (June 1936), pp 177-203; Ed., 'The Folly of Strikes and Lockouts' in the *Irish Catholic*, 4 Dec. 1926, p. 5.

⁷⁵ H. O'N. (pseudo.), 'Notes From Rome' in the *Catholic Bulletin*, xxviii, no. 8 (Aug. 1928), pp 812-13; O'Herlihy, 'Fascist Italy', pp 513-15; *Irish Independent*, 22 Nov. 1926; "Delta", 'Misleaders of Irish Labour' in the *Irish Rosary*, xxxiv, no. 8 (Aug. 1930), pp 637-9.

⁷⁶ "Bran Dubh", 'Na Léinte Dubha — Fascism' i *Fáinne an Lae*, vii, uimh. 7 (Iúl, 1926), p. 1; cf. *Voice of Labour*, 20 Nov. 1926.

⁷⁷ Hilliard Stack, 'Some Aspects of Fascism (Part I)' in the *Irish Rosary*, xxxii, no. 3 (Mar. 1928), p. 343.

⁷⁸ Michael Kennedy, 'Kiernan, Thomas Joseph ("Tommy"; 'T. J.') in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁷⁹ *The Irishman*, 21 July 1928; *ibid.*, 28 July 1928; *ibid.*, 11 Aug. 1928.

⁸⁰ T. J. Kiernan, 'Religion and State Control' in the *Irish Rosary*, xxxii, no. 10 (Nov. 1928), pp

Fascist lines in the 1930s, that the Italian measures were an imperfect but acceptable staging post on the way to ‘an ideal Catholic industrial system.’⁸¹

Outside of the confessional milieu, minor politicians and major papers applauded Mussolini’s labour policies. Calling for compulsory arbitration on the Italian model, for instance, a somewhat surly Sir John Scott, who was an outspoken critic of labour, member of the Cork Chamber of Commerce and a several times unsuccessful candidate for election to the Dáil, remarked ‘it would be no harm if Signor Mussolini visited this country.’⁸² Editorially, the *Irish Independent* expressed similar views. Indulging in standard humbug about the average Latin’s desire to be subsumed by a strong state, Timothy Harrington described Mussolini as a fearless pioneer whose experiments, whilst not necessarily fit for universal application, were nevertheless necessary in an Italian context.⁸³ In addition, one of the *Independent’s* special correspondents and a frequent traveller to Italy, Prof. Martin MacLaughlin, penned several laudatory articles which, mimicking contributions he also made to the *Irish Statesman*, emphasised the affinity between Catholic doctrine and Fascist labour policy.⁸⁴

Predictably, worried labour journalists hurried to pre-empt any move to introduce similar measures in Ireland.⁸⁵ Such fears were groundless, however. Compared to the commercial elite, whose enthusiasm for compulsion waned in accordance with the rise of an apparently pro-labour Fianna Fáil, the influence of the Mussoliniphile clergy was negligent. Casting a cold eye over pre-existing arbitration courts in Australia, New Zealand and Canada, Irish capitalists were convinced that interfering states invariably favoured the

825–9.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 826; Keogh and O’Driscoll, ‘Ireland’, p. 287.

⁸² *Irish Independent*, 21 May 1926.

⁸³ Ed., ‘Results of Fascism’ in the *Irish Independent*, 31 May 1927, p. 6.

⁸⁴ See, for example, Martin MacLaughlin, ‘Impressions if Italy: Bringing Back Prosperity to the Nation’, *ibid.*, 3 July 1929, p. 12; cf. *idem.*, ‘The Corporative State’ in the *Irish Statesman*, 21 Apr. 1928, pp 127–29.

⁸⁵ See, Edo Fimmen, ‘The Meaning of Fascism’ in the *Voice of Labour*, 9 Jan. 1926, p. 2.

workers.⁸⁶ In the words of Timothy Harrington, the history of commonwealth labour courts had proven that ‘in practice, compulsory arbitration is compulsory only for the employers: the workers can and do defy the courts with impunity’.⁸⁷ Hoping that the future would prove otherwise, Harrington sensed that if Mussolini wished to retain his “popular appeal” the same results would eventually obtain in Fascist Italy.⁸⁸ The *Irish Times*, which quickly decided that the Law of Syndicates represented a triumph for the Fascist left, amplified these concerns.⁸⁹ This analysis demonstrated a lack of foresight. As labour journalists endeavoured to explain, the mechanics of the Law of Syndicates actually tilted in the employers’ favour. In consequence, the 1930s saw Italian livelihoods decimated by wage reductions, tax increases and “voluntary” contributions to cover the cost of weapons and an ever-expanding state bureaucracy.⁹⁰ Regardless, the captains of Irish industry remained wary of the cumbersome Fascist antidote to class conflict, which, under a less sympathetic government than Cumann na nGaedheal, might work to their disadvantage.⁹¹ Instead, Irish employers took comfort in the Protection of the Community (Special Powers) Act of 1926. Anticipating the British Trade Union Act of 1927, this legislation, a cause of acute embarrassment for the hapless Labour Party, granted the Government powers to break sympathetic strikes and to threaten objectors with military conscription.⁹²

6.5. Fascist-inspired vigilantism

Given the recent history of violent social and economic unrest in Ireland, the clamour for compulsory arbitration along Fascist lines might have been

⁸⁶ *Irish Statesman*, 31 Oct. 1925; *ibid.*, 24 Nov. 1925; *Sunday Independent*, 11 Jan. 1925.

⁸⁷ Ed., ‘Compulsory Arbitration’ in the *Irish Independent*, 2 Dec. 1927, p. 6.

⁸⁸ Ed., ‘Praefectus Urbis’, *ibid.*, 6 July 1927, p. 6.

⁸⁹ Ed., ‘The Corporative State’ in the *Irish Times*, 14 Feb. 1927, p. 7.

⁹⁰ *Irish Worker*, 10 Jan. 1931.

⁹¹ *Irish Independent*, 2 Dec. 1927; *ibid.*, 4 Feb 1928.

⁹² Mitchell, *Labour in Irish Politics*, p. 230; *Irish Statesman*, 21 May 1927. It is worth noting, however, that compulsory arbitration, clearly based upon the Italian model, was a central plank of the Blueshirt manifesto. Meanwhile, Seán Lemass toyed with the idea in 1937, but the cabinet rejected his plans. Sticking with Fianna Fáil, it is also worth noting the similarities between the Conditions of Employment Act 1935 and the Fascist Charter of Labour. Although the former only affected the Irish public sector, it emphasised the idea that work was a social duty, drew the unions closer to the State, and made pay demands subject to national

louder than it actually was. As the Civil War ended, a particularly bitter dispute arose in the south east of the country. Primarily contested between the landless labourers and the farmers of Waterford, the dispute soon brought trade in the towns and ports to a halt as the unions refused to handle “tainted” agricultural produce. Effectively a rural repeat of 1913, this conflict was rooted in the boom years of the First World War, when the introduction of compulsory tillage, best suited to the arable lands of south Leinster and central Munster, meant that these areas developed a large rural proletariat.⁹³ Moreover, a shortage of workers and a high demand for foodstuffs had placed the farmhands in an advantageous position.⁹⁴ Organised by the I.T.&G.W.U., the workers soon obtained wages and conditions that were unknown in peacetime. Intent upon reversing these gains, the farmers closed ranks in the form of the Irish Farmers Union (I.F.U.). Battle commenced in May 1923. The crucial factor in this struggle soon became the position adopted by the state. From mid 1923, the farmers could call upon the military resources of a sympathetic government. Having just embarked upon Patrick Hogan’s policy of export led pastoral specialism, the new regime deemed it essential that the labour position be crushed.⁹⁵ Accordingly, the Special Infantry Corps, a unit of the National Army led by Colonel Charles Dalton (a leading mutineer in 1924), was despatched to Waterford. Clearly a partisan force, the S.I.C. excelled at disrupting pickets and boycotts, thus causing lasting resentment between labour and the military.⁹⁶ Partisanship also affected the local police. Indeed, by taking sides against the workers, the Gardaí in Waterford accurately reflected the attitude of their commanders in Dublin: Assistant Commissioner Pat Walsh, who had no tolerance for what he scathingly termed the ‘unrealistic and tyrannical behaviour of Irish unions’,⁹⁷ was, because of O’Duffy’s commitments with the Army, effectively in charge of the

development. See, Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, pp 48-51.

⁹³ Emmet O’Connor, ‘Agrarian Unrest and the Labour Movement in County Waterford 1917-1923’ in *Saothar*, no. 6 (1980), p. 40.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 50; *Hammer and Plough*, 11 Sept. 1926.

⁹⁷ Confidential report to the Cabinet by Assistant Commissioner Pat Walsh concerning social and industrial unrest, 13 Oct. 1923 (U.C.D.A., Blythe papers, P24/323).

force at the time.

Whether escorting farm produce, protecting “scabs” or dispersing union rallies, the assistance provided by the state destroyed any prospect of a labour victory. Even so, the farmers deemed it necessary to form vigilante groups of their own. In fact, from the very beginning of the dispute there emerged armed bands who termed themselves “White Guards” or the “Farmers’ Freedom Force”. Supported and organised by puissant local landlords like Senator Sir John Keane of Cappoquin, by day these self-styled avengers toured rural Waterford by motorcar, waylaying strikers and pistol-whipping them.⁹⁸ By night, apparently unaffected by curfew restrictions imposed by the military, they set fire to union homes, seized union funds, staged mock executions, shot and wounded one unfortunate labourer, and threatened wavering farmers with similar measures.⁹⁹ It is worth noting that the national press did not record the appearance of these groups. Satisfied that violence was a tactic exclusive to the labouring classes, the coverage provided by the *Irish Independent*, *Freeman’s Journal* and *Irish Times* only mentioned damage done by the strikers to livestock and farm property.¹⁰⁰

Although agrarian violence had long existed in Ireland, there was clearly a relationship between the Waterford dispute and international events. Emmet O’Connor, the only historian to examine the events in detail, has looked at this relationship from a labour perspective. Without dismissing the traditional assumption that the exploits of the I.R.A. and Sinn Féin inspired the workers, O’Connor argues that it is equally important to place the dispute in a wider context. Accordingly, he suggests that contemporary events in Europe (including the unrest in Italy) had a profound impact on the workers’ mindset.¹⁰¹ O’Connor’s treatment of the vigilantes, however, is more cursory.

⁹⁸ Patrick Maume, ‘Keane, Sir John’ in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009); O’Connor, ‘Agrarian Unrest and the Labour Movement’, p. 51.

⁹⁹ *Workers’ Republic*, 6 Oct. 1923.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 23 June 1923.

¹⁰¹ O’Connor, ‘Agrarian Unrest and the Labour Movement’, pp 54–5.

Wrongly suggesting that they only emerged in the latter stages of the dispute, he does not “internationalise” their cause in the same way. Yet the misadventures of groups like the Italian *Fascisti*, the German *Freikorps* and the American Klu Klux Klan almost certainly inspired the “Farmers’ Freedom Force” of 1923. The contemporary labour movement certainly assumed as much, with each attack upon the strikers invariably described as the work of the “Farmers’ Fascisti Force” or some other variant thereof.¹⁰² Cartoon illustrations re-enforced the point. For example, by way of marking the appearance of vigilantism in Athy, County Kildare, the *Voice of Labour*, having denounced the protagonists for behaving ‘after the style of Mussolini’s Fascist terrorists in Italy, and after the style of the anti-Labour, anti-Negro and pro-Masonic K.K.K. in America’, reproduced a full-page illustration under the title ‘Brothers in Arms: The Dream of the Farmers Freedom Force’.¹⁰³ Leaving nothing to the imagination, this cartoon depicted an armed and masked farmer, flanked by an approving Black Shirt and an equally supportive Klansman, standing atop a corpse marked ‘Labour’.¹⁰⁴ Other cartoons lampooned public advocates of armed strikebreaking like Denis J. Gorey. Derided by his opponents as ‘Mussolini’s understudy’,¹⁰⁵ Gorey led the Farmers’ Party in Dáil Éireann. In this capacity, he implored the Government to suppress the picketing of railways and ports (in a parallel action to the Waterford dispute, Larkin had led the Dublin dockworkers out in October 1923), and offered the support of farmers in operating these enterprises until the strike was broken.¹⁰⁶ In response, a serious-minded Archie Heron promised that ‘any attempt at the introduction of Fascism in this country [would] get a hot response at the hands of Irish Labour’, whilst a more frivolous artist poked fun at the proposals by depicting a motley crew of farmers, under the watchful eye of a suitably attired ‘Signor Benito Gorey’, running amok in the Dublin docklands.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² See, for example, *Voice of Labour*, 13 Jan. 1923; *ibid.*, 21 July 1923; *ibid.*, 22 Sept. 1923.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 13 Jan., 1923; *ibid.*, 27 Jan. 1923.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 27 Jan. 1923.

¹⁰⁵ *Voice of Labour*, 1 Dec. 1923.

¹⁰⁶ *Dáil Éireann deb.*, v, 1133–34 (22 Nov. 1923).

¹⁰⁷ *Voice of Labour*, 1 Dec. 1923.

6.6. Censoring the heirs to Sinn Féin

For James Larkin, however, the rumblings in the Dáil were more than just loose talk. Gorey's intervention occurred against the backdrop of cattle auctioneers attempting to recruit ex-military types as armed strikebreakers for use at the North Wall.¹⁰⁸ Consequently, when treating with this threat and the violence in Waterford, Larkin preferred the written word to cartoons. Hailed by Roddy Connolly as the 'the one most capable of fitting the forces of Irish Labour to defeat and destroy Irish Fascism', Larkin had returned from America with a Messianic sense of his own importance.¹⁰⁹ Soon at war with the leadership of the party-congress, he issued a manifesto, which, clearly intended to embarrass the parliamentarians, deftly linked the spectre of Fascism with the labour troubles and the notorious Public Safety Act (P.S.A.) of 1923. Popularly known as the "Flogging Act", this law provided sweeping powers of arrest, detention and corporal punishment.¹¹⁰ In condemning the Act, Larkin overestimated the threat posed to labour and underplayed the Government's determination to tackle a still intact I.R.A.¹¹¹ This exaggeration notwithstanding, Larkin's thrusts were neat and to the point. On one hand, he wondered why it was that concerns for public safety did not prevent his *bête noir*, 'the venal subsidised press', from publishing 'veiled incitements ... to evil-disposed persons to use force and violence' against workers and their representatives.¹¹² On another, Larkin noted that one of the first people interned under the P.S.A. was the chief union organiser in Waterford, one James Baird, who was destined to sit out the remainder of the dispute in the local gaol.¹¹³ For Larkin, this was clear evidence that 'The Irish Fascisti are at work'.¹¹⁴ Accordingly, Thomas Johnson, William O'Brien *et al* were pilloried

¹⁰⁸ See, 'The Irish Fascisti' in the *Irish Worker*, 20 Oct. 1923, p. 1; cf. 'Organised Scabs?' in *ibid.*, 19 Jan. 1924, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Roddy Connolly, 'Larkin and Fascism' in the *Workers' Republic*, 16 June 1923, p. 4.

¹¹⁰ On the background and terms of the 1923 P.S.A., see, McCarthy, *Kevin O'Higgins*, pp 111-117.

¹¹¹ 'We Have it Made Manifest', Irish Workers League handbill, printed in the *Irish Worker*, 6 Oct. 1923, p. 1.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, par. 6.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, par. 7.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

for giving their ‘qualified approval, but an approval nonetheless’ to an Act that ‘was conceived, framed, drafted, introduced and passed into law for the purpose of destroying Trade Unionism.’¹¹⁵

These fears survived the passage of time. Indeed, the leitmotif introduced by Larkin grew ever louder with each subsequent instalment of the Public Safety Act. At moments of crisis such as the murder of Kevin O’Higgins and the “Red Scare” of 1931, even the most cautious labour leaders candidly condemned the anti-worker potential of emergency legislation.¹¹⁶ One significant convert was the Assistant Secretary of the Labour Party, R. J. P. Mortished. As previously noted, the anti-P.R. rhetoric of Cumann na nGaedheal had caused Mortished to issue severe warnings about the autocratic tendencies of Cumann na nGaedheal. One of these harangues, wherein Mortished predicted the establishment of a military dictatorship if the Government suffered an electoral defeat,¹¹⁷ provoked an angry response from the *Irish Statesman*. According to that organ’s political correspondent, “Spectator”, Mortished was guilty of ‘a piece of deliberate and discreditable scaremongering’.¹¹⁸ Mortished was unrepentant. Responding, he chastised “Spectator” for imagining ‘that nobody in this country had ever dreamed of a dictatorship of any kind, and that there was nothing in our experience in recent years likely to give encouragement to the dictatorship idea.’¹¹⁹ Invoking his personal experience of the Black Shirts,¹²⁰ Mortished then warned of ‘the remarkable similarity of outlook between the Fascist and the Sinn Féiner.’¹²¹ Continuing this analogy, he also claimed that the P.S.A. was ‘conceived in a typically Fascist spirit’, and that for the lifetime of the Free State, there had been ‘a difference only of

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ See, for example, Thomas Johnson, ‘The Law Allows It!’ in *The Watchword*, 21 Nov. 1931, p. 6.

¹¹⁷ *The Irishman*, 20 Sept. 1927.

¹¹⁸ *Irish Statesman*, 17 Sept. 1927.

¹¹⁹ *The Irishman*, 24 Sept. 1927

¹²⁰ Mortished was a regular delegate to the Annual Conferences of the International Labour Organisation (a secretariat of the League of Nations). Thereat, he observed, documented and criticised the behaviour of the Fascist delegates, who, shunned because of Mussolini’s attitude to independent unions, withdrew from the I.L.O. in 1926. See, the *Voice of Labour*, 12 July 1924; *ibid.*, 17 July 1926.

degree and hardly at all of kind in the treatment of the Dáil by the Ministry here and that of the Italian Chamber by Mussolini'.¹²² Concluding with the maxim that 'The price of liberty is eternal vigilance', Mortished called for greater awareness of the world beyond Irish shores:

It is ... a profound mistake to cherish the illusion that we are utterly unlike every other people in the world and that we can afford to ignore what happens in other countries. In most of the countries of Europe there is a decidedly anti-democratic, autocratic tendency in politics ... If it be scaremongering to take note of this fact and to be on the alert for any evidence of the same kind in this country—well, we think there is less mischief even in exaggerating a danger than in imitating the ostrich and refusing to see it at all.¹²³

Other correspondents in the *Irish Statesman*—an influential paper that, in line with the libertarian and co-operative principles of George Russell, tended to criticise rather than vindicate Mussolini¹²⁴—accepted Mortished's position. In particular, the noted labour journalist and historian R. M. Fox agreed that the repressive social, economic and security policies of Cumann na nGaedheal revealed a Fascist mindset hidden behind the veneer of English liberalism.¹²⁵ Yet in tracing similarities between the Cumann na nGaedheal and Mussolini regimes, neither Mortished nor Fox surpassed the explicit denunciations of Roddy Connolly.¹²⁶ In fact, so convinced was Connolly of a growing Irish fascism that he spurned the isolationist mentality traditional to Marxist cadres. Instead, as early as 1926 he attempted to rally a broad based coalition of "progressive" groups against the Government. In so doing, Connolly anticipated by several years the "Popular Front" phenomenon of 1930s Europe. The coalition he proposed included the Labour Party, Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin and the Workers' Party of Ireland.¹²⁷ Notably, Connolly found no use for Larkin in the coming crusade. From Connolly's perspective, Larkin had failed to live up to hopes invested in him in 1923. In a manner not

¹²¹ *The Irishman*, 24 Sept. 1927.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Ed., 'The Antecedents of Fascism' in the *Irish Statesman*, 17 Nov. 1925, p. 166; cf. Ed., 'Labour and Capital in Ireland', *ibid.*, 29 Mar. 1926, pp 568–9.

¹²⁵ *The Watchword*, 30 July 1932.

¹²⁶ See, for example, *Hammer and Plough*, 19 June 1926.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9 Oct. 1926, cit. in Maguire, 'Roddy Connolly and the W.P.I.', p. 40.

becoming the reputed scourge of Irish fascism, Larkin had shown neither an interest in, nor a capacity for, political strategy. Remaining a syndicalist at heart, he sabotaged all efforts to establish a truly revolutionary party, and deliberately allowed his own Irish Workers' League to wither and die.¹²⁸ Accordingly, Connolly attempted to replace Larkin as Moscow's man in Dublin. In turn, these manoeuvres prompted Larkin to launch a vicious attack upon the 'bourgeois elements' of the Workers' Party, thereby adding Connolly to the list of Larkin's former friends now turned enemies.¹²⁹

With or without Larkin, Connolly's project was doomed to failure. To a greater or lesser degree, Labour, Fianna Fáil and the W.P.I. were all trying to occupy the same political space. Thus, there was no incentive for the larger parties to share a platform with the smaller one. Not until mid 1927, when the murder of Kevin O'Higgins provoked a raft of legislation that threatened the survival of Fianna Fáil, did de Valera veer towards an accommodation with the radical left. By then the Comintern had resolved the tensions between Larkin and Connolly by dissolving the W.P.I.¹³⁰ Consequently, Connolly took no part in the extra-parliamentary manoeuvres of 1927. Involving a limited amount of joint action on behalf of the Irish Workers' League and Fianna Fáil, this effort failed to incorporate Labour, which wanted nothing to do with Larkin and refused to parley with de Valera until he entered the Dáil.¹³¹

Amidst this squabbling, Connolly, despite his marginalisation, continued to campaign against the "fascist" tendencies of Cumann na nGaedheal. Moreover, to cast the worst possible aspersions on the Government, he was wont to describe Mussolini's Italy in Orwellian terms. On the eve of the September election, for instance, a piece entitled 'Labour in Rome' made the front page of the *Workers' Republic*.¹³² Therein, Connolly described how the workers were subject to the combined pressures of the *carabinieri* and a

¹²⁸ Maguire, 'Roddy Connolly and the W.P.I.', p. 34.

¹²⁹ *Hammer and Plough*, 28 Aug. 1926.

¹³⁰ Maguire, 'Roddy Connolly and the W.P.I.', p. 41.

¹³¹ *Irish Times*, 5 Aug. 1927.

“feverish” capitalist press. Meanwhile, labour papers had become:

... hardly more than party gazettes ... confined to statements of the Fascist Party actions, official communiqués and details of construction work that is going on. Foreign news [is] wiped out almost entirely and personal journalism ... killed off. Workers! It will be the same in Ireland if you vote for the Free State government, so vote for Fianna Fáil and Labour, who will release all our Political Prisoners!¹³³

Suitably impressed, both Fianna Fáil and Labour attempted to recruit the partyless Connolly in 1928.¹³⁴ Plumping for Labour, he spent the next decade unsuccessfully trying to steer that party into an alliance with socialist republicans and communists.¹³⁵ De Valera’s transgressions at Granard, therefore, did not place Connolly in an invidious position. This speech was, however, the catalyst for an ugly dispute between the James Connolly Workers’ Club, an inner-city forum for Marxist politics founded by Roddy Connolly in 1924,¹³⁶ and Fianna Fáil. In the wake of de Valera’s musings about the “spirit of Fascism”, a protest letter, purporting to be from the Club Management Committee, was despatched to *The Nation*. Demonstrating a deep knowledge of the Mussolini regime, this missal traced the violent beginnings of Fascism, the murder of Matteotti, the campaigns against the ethnic minorities in the border regions, the torture and murder of political prisoners on *Santo Stefano*, and the destruction of representative government at local, provincial and national level.¹³⁷ Claiming that they now knew where he stood on each of these issues, the authors congratulated de Valera on locating his ‘spiritual home’ and losing the working-class vote.¹³⁸ Unfortunately for the James Connolly Workers’ Club, the protest had repercussions of a different kind. Objecting to the personal tone of the letter, other Committee members denounced it as the unsanctioned work of a clique. Affirming their respect for de Valera, the objectors also made themselves known to *The Nation*. Naturally, this organ stoked the discontent even

¹³² ‘Labour in Rome’ in the *Workers’ Republic* (monthly format), Sept. 1927, p. 1.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ White, ‘Connolly, Roderic James (‘Roddy’)’.

¹³⁵ Maguire, ‘Connolly and the W.P.I.’, p. 42.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹³⁷ *The Nation*, 12 Oct. 1929.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

further. As if to confirm de Valera's ability to provoke the "dreaded split", resignations followed. Ultimately, more damage was done to Marxist collegiality (and finances, for the casualties included Madame Despard) than to the electoral prospects of Fianna Fáil.¹³⁹

As President of the Irish Free State, de Valera continued to divide the labour movement. Within the unions, Louisa Bennett was an earnest critic of Fianna Fáil. Head of the Women's Workers' Union, from the mid-1920s she was also a member of the national executive of the I.L.P.&T.U.C. In this capacity, Bennett fought hard to keep labour and gender issues separate from nationalist politics.¹⁴⁰ As a convinced pacifist, she also warned workers against the dangers of revolutionary syndicalism and communism. As such, Bennett incurred the wrath of Larkin, who labelled her a fascist stool pigeon.¹⁴¹ This charge was highly misleading. As demonstrated by her work on behalf of the international Women's League of Peace and her later input to the Committee on Vocational Organisation (1943), Bennett was in fact a well-informed and outspoken critic of the Mussolini regime.¹⁴² Bennett also kept a watchful eye for fascist tendencies in the Sinn Féin factions, neither of whom she trusted. To her mind, Cumann na nGaedheal and Fianna Fáil were ambiguous democrats at best.¹⁴³ Nor did she see any significant difference between the economic policies of both parties. Despising the treatyite dependence upon "imperialist-capitalists", Bennett saw no advantages in the indigenous capitalism pursued by de Valera.¹⁴⁴

Accordingly, Bennett was the only member of the Labour Party to object to

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 12 Oct., 19 Oct., 2 Nov., 1929.

¹⁴⁰ Frances Clark, 'Bennett, Louisa' in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

¹⁴¹ *Irish Worker*, 8 Aug. 1931.

¹⁴² *The Nation*, 12 Oct. 1929; Ellen Hazelkorn, 'The Social and Political Views of Louie Bennett, 1870–1956' in *Saothar*, xiii (1988), p.38; Lee, 'Aspects of Corporatist Thought in Ireland', p. 333.

¹⁴³ *The Watchword*, 30 July 1932; cf. *The Wooden Horse: A Reply to Fascists*, pamphlet published by the Women's Workers Union, n.d., c. 1934 (U.C.D.A., Tierney papers, LA30/348).

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 13 Aug. 1932.

the parliamentary alliance with Fianna Fáil.¹⁴⁵ Ignored by the party leadership, she nevertheless had another forum from which to express her reservations. In 1932, Bennett became the first female president of the Irish Trades Union Congress (I.T.U.C.).¹⁴⁶ At the Annual Meeting of the Congress that July, she delivered a keynote address that criticised the de Valera administration for aping foreign trends born from the Great Depression. Elsewhere, state intervention, even in previous bastions of free enterprise like Great Britain and the U.S.A., was the weapon of choice in the battle to return to economic prosperity. For Bennett, this represented ‘a definite shift in the direction of either State Socialism or Fascism’.¹⁴⁷ It was in this context that she reviewed the latest measures introduced by Fianna Fáil (viz, new taxes and tariffs, the Control of Manufactures Bill, the Prices Tribunal and the Butter and Flour Schemes).¹⁴⁸ Clearly unimpressed, Bennett pointed out that ‘none of these measures are associated with any safeguards for the workers.’¹⁴⁹ Instead, ‘nationality rather than worker-welfare had been made the manufacturer’s passport’, whilst the new tariff policies had been ‘put into operation without any consideration for the effects upon the cost of living’.¹⁵⁰ Overall, Bennett concluded that the new measures only served to underline the ‘highly political mentality’ of a party that supported ‘the capitalist system and the Fascist microbe working within it’.¹⁵¹ As such, she chastised the Labour Party for allowing the Government to assume ‘powers of control over economic affairs so extensive as to practically put them into the position of a dictatorship.’¹⁵² In her closing remarks, Bennett urged de Valera to ignore Rome and to focus instead upon recent developments in Paris and Berlin. Germany and France had introduced policymaking institutes known as ‘National Economic Councils’ in 1920 and 1925 respectively.¹⁵³ Involving close co-operation

¹⁴⁵ Clark, ‘Bennett, Louisa’.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ *The Watchword*, 30 July 1932.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ *The Irishman*, 25 June 1927.

between unions, economic experts and government, the purpose of these bodies was to advise the elected legislatures about economic issues.¹⁵⁴ Nominated from below and free from party prejudices, the Franco-German bodies were much closer in spirit and function to Catholic corporatism than the grandiose experiment then underway in Mussolini's Italy.¹⁵⁵ Long recognised as such by Bennett and others, these Councils appealed to a labour leadership that felt marginalised by the quashing of the republican Labour Ministry in 1922.¹⁵⁶

Cathal O'Shannon, editor of the latest Labour journal, the *Watchword*, put forward an alternative viewpoint. As opposed to the societal socialism of Bennett, O'Shannon epitomised the statist minority within mainstream labour. During the period 1917-1923, O'Shannon emerged as the most radical union leader in Ireland.¹⁵⁷ Committed to a Workers' Republic, he used his journalistic talents to support the Russian Revolution and the several Irish Soviets that emerged at this time.¹⁵⁸ Ultimately, however, O'Shannon recognised that revolutionary rhetoric alone would not alter the underdeveloped rural economy and conservative social values of independent Ireland. Consequently, he remained loyal to the party-congress, using his profile therein to criticise the system (and his comrades) by articulating radical ideas like nationalisation and collectivisation.¹⁵⁹ As a supporter of state power, O'Shannon thus trivialised Bennett's forebodings. Declaring that there was nothing fascist about either Cumann na nGaedheal or Fianna Fáil, he suggested that petty motives and 'political prejudice' inspired such criticism.¹⁶⁰ Proving that ambiguous democrats thrive in every constituency,

¹⁵⁴ See, Edith C. Bramhall, 'The National Economic Council of France' in the *American Political Science Review*, xx, no. 3 (Aug. 1926), pp 623-30.

¹⁵⁵ P. J. S. Serrarens, 'Christianity and Trade Unionism' in *The Irishman*, 28 Apr. 1928, p. 7.

¹⁵⁶ R. J. P. Mortished, 'National Economic Council: why not a parliament of industry?' in *The Irishman*, 25 June 1927, p. 7; 'National Economic Councils in France and Germany', *ibid.*, 10 Dec. 1927, p. 8.

¹⁵⁷ Lawrence William White, 'O'Shannon, Cathal' in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *The Watchword*, 30 July 1932.

O'Shannon argued that the working-class need not

... be apprehensive about a dictatorship if dictatorship is in the right hands, is directed to the right ends and is based upon the right philosophy ... The more control over economic affairs the better—it all depends upon who exercises the control and for what purpose it is used. If used for the benefit of the workers, it need not scare them ... dictatorship will be found in the end to be an essential instrument in the hands of those who would set up a better social State, whether it be dubbed Socialist, Christian or Communist. Dictatorship is the essence of a political State. ¹⁶¹

Not amused, Bennett supplied an immediate response. Reiterating her view that 'Fianna Fáil was well on the way to Fascism, however diluted' and that the workers would 'get their castor oil in the form of unemployment and poverty', she claimed to be 'shocked' that someone in O'Shannon's position could support the dictatorship theory.¹⁶² Articulating the mainstream labour commitment to 'Christian Socialism, which can only be based on the appeal to reason and the finer emotions', she challenged O'Shannon (a challenge he failed to accept) to clarify his position with regard to 'the crushing of 'intellectual freedom; the steam-rolling of people into uniformity; the inevitable trend to tyranny and cruelty; the suppression of social ideas and experiments which do not fit in with the fixed idea of the ruling power.'¹⁶³ For Bennett, such were the characteristics of all dictatorships, and by supporting them O'Shannon had betrayed the first task of labour journalism, which she defined as a duty 'to keep alive the great vision of Liberty and Fraternity—a vision which can be realised by the Prophet and the Teacher, but never by the militarist or the tyrant.'¹⁶⁴

6.7. Chapter summary

Upset by sympathetic coverage of the Mussolini regime, Irish trade unionists felt compelled to highlight the troubles of their Italian counterparts. To this end, they took advantage of reports received from international labour organisations. Such vigorous propaganda demonstrates that Irish trade unionists never considered Fascism as anything other than a reactionary

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid., 13 Aug. 1932.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

assault upon working class rights. Unlike the many clergymen, journalists and nationalist politicians who praised the *Duce* for defeating revolution and reviving his country's fortunes, the Left condemned Mussolini as the hireling of Italian capitalists, who, in common with their Irish counterparts, had determined to reverse the wartime gains of the proletariat. The fact that the violent origins of Fascism appealed to some Irish employers only added to the hatred felt by the Left towards Mussolini. Familiarity with the anti-labour excesses of Fascism also bred contempt for the minute community of Italian Fascists in Dublin, whose activities were carefully monitored. Similarly, the Left was scornful of Fascist corporatism. In the 1920s, the so-called Fascist Corporate State had yet to take a concrete form. Nevertheless, the early phase of this project, which seemed to borrow heavily from Catholic social theory, did provoke eulogies from Mussolini's established band of clerical supporters. Needless to say, Irish legislators would mimic Italian developments, labour journalists endeavoured to counter this propaganda. Other issues affecting the Irish left included Fascist-style vigilantism and emergency legislation that seemed to anticipate a legal assault upon Irish unions. Frustration and fear translated into sustained criticism of Cumann na nGaedheal, which some labour figureheads considered particularly susceptible to the influence of Italian Fascism. Latterly, Fianna Fáil also incurred the wrath of normally antagonistic Marxists and Christian Socialists, who made common cause by denouncing de Valera as the latest threat to Irish labour. Identifying common threads, however tenuous, between Italian Fascism and Irish nationalism, labour activists thus acted as self-appointed censors of Fascist inflection in Irish public life.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this thesis was to assess the impact of Italian Fascism on key constituencies of Irish opinion. Focusing upon the confessional community, the study opened by exploring those aspects of the Mussolini regime that were most celebrated in Ireland. This discussion incorporated some suggestions about how Irish commentators overcame their reservations about Fascist violence. Examining the interlinked issues of clerical hostility toward the political left, the numbing effect of violence in Ireland, and Catholic dogma on the origins and purpose of political power, it was argued that many Irish observers felt somewhat underwhelmed by the controversial origins of Fascism. In addition, this part of the project provided a synopsis of Catholic theory regarding political organisation. Stressing Catholic anxieties about the Liberal state, the purpose here was to illustrate that the principle of popular sovereignty was not sacred to the confessional mindset. Indeed, for this constituency the spiritual freedom of the Italian Church was considerably more important than the political freedoms of the Italian people. Accordingly, the many Irish visitors to Rome admired and appreciated the pro-clerical measures introduced by Fascist Italy. Moreover, when set against the backdrop of the oppressive moralising that dominated the Irish Church at this time, Fascist initiatives in the sphere of public morality gave added impetus to Mussolini's apologists. So too did the Fascist assault on Italian Freemasonry. Borne from political motives not apparent to the outside world, the Irish response to this campaign illustrated the particular fears and resentments affecting Catholic nationalism in the Free State.

Yet we have also seen that confessional attitudes to Italian Fascism were neither consistent nor homogenous. Many Irish commentators viewed the

violent attempts to erase the cultural identity of the many Germans and Slavs absorbed by Italy with grave misgiving. For critics, these persecutions, directed against some of the most intensely Catholic regions of Europe, were analogous to the “Anglicisation” of Ireland. On the other hand, some commentators approved of Fascist prejudice against evangelical Protestants, the harassment of whom partially restored the damage done to Mussolini’s reputation by his controversial policies in Dalmatia and the South Tyrol. Even so, the 1931 attempt to suppress Italian Catholic Action provoked a rare but spectacular clash between pope and *Duce* that raised further alarming questions about the Fascist concept of state power. It also posed a direct threat to the infant Lateran Agreements. Consequently, on this occasion there was no counterbalance to the fury directed against Mussolini. Instead, the controversy suggested that the confessional apologia for Fascism was superficial and transient. Their sympathies clearly predicated on the perceived sincerity of the regime toward the papacy, even Mussolini’s most ardent admirers now bowed to an outpouring of Irish ultramontanist not witnessed since the annexation of Rome in the nineteenth-century.¹

In addition to confessional issues, this study examined diplomatic intercourse between Ireland and Italy. We have seen how, during the revolutionary period, the Irish Republic maintained an active diplomatic mission in Italy. Largely avoiding the religious politics of this mission (a subject amply covered in existing scholarship),² this project focused upon Irish contact with Italian revolutionaries, paying particular attention to the relationship between Sinn Féin and Mussolini’s mentor turned rival, Gabriele D’Annunzio. Oft thought of as the herald of Fascism, D’Annunzio was then busily fomenting revolution across Italy, the Balkans and the Arab world. As a self-styled prophet of the oppressed nations, he also placed himself at the disposal of the Irish Republic.

¹ See, Jennifer O’Brien, ‘Irish Public Opinion and the Risorgimento, 1859–60’ in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxxiv, no. 135 (May 2005), pp 289–305.

² See, Dermot Keogh, ‘The Papacy, the bishops and the Anglo-Irish War, 1919–1921’ in *idem*, *The Vatican, the bishops and Irish Politics*, pp 29–76.

In return for Irish participation in his projected anti-League of Nations, the so-called 'League of Fiume', he offered to provide volunteers, weapons and munitions to the I.R.A. Consequently, Sinn Féin diplomats involved themselves in a tale of intrigue that included not only D'Annunzio, but also Mussolini and senior government officials in Rome. Meanwhile, in the early Free State era the Corfu Crisis of 1923 provided a further test of Irish diplomatic skills. The first major threat to the post-war peace, the Corfu Crisis occurred simultaneously to the Free State's accession to the League of Nations. Consequently, it provided inexperienced Irish diplomats with a blunt introduction to European power politics. Focusing Irish minds on the deficiencies of the League of Nations, Fascist Italy's original war-like foray was widely condemned (but not by Republicans, who still cherished Mussolini's assistance during 1919-1921) and had a lasting effect on subsequent Irish policy at Geneva.

With regard to domestic politics, this study considered a number of controversial policies pursued by Cumann na nGaedheal. In the first instance, the project examined the impact of Fascist paramilitarism on the thinking of the governing elite. Established at the height of the Irish Civil War, the Fascist Militia gave a legal status to the violent Squads that paved the way for Mussolini's takeover. Sensing parallels with Mussolini's struggle against the Italian left, some government figureheads tried unsuccessfully to establish a similar organisation in Ireland. With the introduction of the Volunteer Reserve in the late 1920s, the issue resurfaced once more. The manner in which this force was established, the terms of service it involved, and the anti-democratic outbursts of its chief sponsor, Ernest Blythe, provoked a hostile response from a panicked opposition that condemned the Volunteer Reserve as fascist in its inception and purpose. In addition, we have seen that drastic reforms in the area of local government provoked further concerns about the limits of Cumann na nGaedheal constitutionalism. Quick to reverse the democratic reforms introduced during the Balfour era, the new regime clearly had little faith in the municipalities. Consequently, this led to further

accusations about the influence of Italian Fascism upon the treatyite mindset. Such perceptions may have been incorrect, but they persisted because of a muddled interpretation of municipal reform in Italy and intense criticism from the opposition parties. They also persisted because of a contemporaneous Cumann na nGaedheal campaign against proportional representation. With the emergence of new rivals in the shape of Fianna Fáil, the National League and Clann Éireann, the Government grew ever more hostile to a system intended to benefit minority parties. In post-war Italy, meanwhile, P.R. resulted in political deadlock. Accordingly, Mussolini made the supposed failings of the system a pretext for further electoral reforms, with the notorious Acerbo Law of 1923 laying the foundations for a further twenty years of Fascist rule. For opponents of the Government, these parallel developments were a serious cause for concern. Amidst the heady election seasons of the late 1920s, therefore, Cumann na nGaedheal was again charged with taking a lead from Fascist Italy. Once more, however, these charges bore little relation to the available facts, which suggest the Mussolini version of P.R. only appealed to a minority with no real hope of shaping government policy.

In the later chapters, we have seen that the opposition held conflicting attitudes to Italian Fascism. Clearly, the orthodox left harboured no apologists for the regime. Believing that the example set by Mussolini was pregnant with dangers for the Irish working class, this constituency was entirely negative towards the Fascist project. The same, however, can hardly be said of Fianna Fáil. If the later emergence of Blueshirtism encouraged Fianna Fáil to pose as a party completely opposed to continental fascism, this opposition was far from apparent in the period under review. Rather, of the major political parties, de Valera's was the one most intrigued by Italian developments. Given the shared ideology of Fianna Fáil and the P.N.F., this enthusiasm should not be surprising. Both movements proclaimed the values of integral nationalism, ruralism, anti-Malthusianism, and economic self-sufficiency. Likewise, Fianna Fáil tended to monopolise myths about the heroic past, whilst de Valera was also the subject of a leadership cult similar to that surrounding Mussolini in

Italy.³ These common interests, particularly in regard to agronomics, encouraged Fianna Fáil to accept Italian propaganda at face value and, however opaquely, to self-identify with *Fascismo*. Conversely, republicans frequently introduced the bogey of a fascist-style Cumann na nGaedheal dictatorship. Moreover, they felt offended by the imperialist British Fascisti. Indeed, anticipating republican attitudes to fascism during the Blueshirt era, frequent attacks upon the British Fascisti helped to reinforce the democratic, proletarian and nationalist credentials of Fianna Fáil. Finally, Fianna Fáil, in sharp contrast to the official spokespersons of the I.R.A., tended to criticise Italian foreign policy. Seeking to capitalise upon Irish fears of another general war, party propaganda contextualised Mussolini's occasional sabre-rattling with reference to the friendly relationship between Fascist Italy and Tory Britain.

In conclusion, chauvinism, pragmatism and opportunism rather than analytical vigour underlay Irish responses to the first fascist power. Taking a narrow view of the Italian national character, a striking number of Irish commentators believed in the historical basis of a regime that satisfied a Latin "inclination" to dictatorship. For others, Mussolini offered security to an Italian Church badly scarred by the Liberal era and recently threatened by the rapid rise of revolutionary socialism. Similarly, the pro-Catholic posturing of Fascist Italy stood in sharp relief to contemporary regimes like Mexico, the U.S.S.R., and anti-clerical France. In no sense, however, did any of Mussolini's admirers seriously propose that Fascist Italy was akin to the scholastic *Communitas Perfecta* (a reality gradually demonstrated during the corporatist debates of the 1930s). Instead, the regime simply represented an imperfect advance upon the secular politics of the contemporary world. Even so, whether celebrating the practical fruits of Mussolini's religious policy or indulging in wishful thinking about the elements of compatibility between Catholic and Fascist doctrine, dominant confessional opinion encouraged a sense of complacency, rudely shattered in 1931, toward a political philosophy

³ Lee, *Ireland*, pp 182–3.

that deserved greater scrutiny. Mussolini reaped further benefits from popular hatred of Great Britain. As we have seen, recalcitrant republicans were far from unique in celebrating a new power that seemed to threaten British hegemony. The intense rivalry between Cumann na nGaedheal and Fianna Fáil generated further interest in the Italian dictatorship, which in turn caused great distress to an Irish left only too sensitive to the historical parallels between the Black Shirts and revolutionary Sinn Féin. However, and notwithstanding the certain existence of crypto-fascists in the former constituencies, the Left almost certainly overestimated the autocratic potential of the nationalist parties. Both the Government and the government-in-waiting were conditioned by British parliamentarianism and located in a democratic Commonwealth. Accordingly, neither was primed to embrace dictatorship, even less “totalitarianism”, as a practical system. Most importantly, and notwithstanding the fact that some pre-conditions conducive to fascism elsewhere—viz, high urban unemployment, agrarian unrest and intense political excitement—did exist in 1920s Ireland, it remained *de facto* an agricultural, property enfranchised and Catholic state.⁴ Regardless of treaty and class divides, the Irish political mainstream represented these values, meaning that a detachment between civil society and the state—the key factor that enabled Italian Fascism to flourish—did not exist in independent Ireland.

This thesis, however, did not set out to explain the durability of the inter-war Irish democracy. Rather, it has sought to address a historiographical imbalance. Understandably, the Blueshirt era has focused attention upon the challenges then posed to the liberal legacy in Ireland. Nevertheless, scholarly emphasis on the melodrama of the early 1930s has also eclipsed another interesting chapter in the story of inter-war Ireland. As an empirical study of early Irish responses to Fascist Italy, this thesis has revealed that, in the less theatrical years beforehand, a broad range of social, political and economic issues provoked interesting, diverse and at times pronounced discussions

⁴ Lee, *Ireland*, p. 182; Keogh & O’Driscoll, ‘Ireland’, p. 283.

about Fascism and dictatorship. In consequence, this thesis has addressed a hitherto neglected aspect of Irish public and political discourse during the formative years of the Irish Free State.

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