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**Irish Nationalist Organisations in the  
North East of England,  
1890 – 1925**

**Stephen Desmond Shannon**

PhD Thesis

2013

**Irish Nationalist Organisations in the  
North East of England,  
1890 – 1925**

**Stephen Desmond Shannon**

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

Research undertaken in the School of  
History

June 2013

# Abstract

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This thesis is the first major study of organised Irish nationalism in the North East of England, set against the wider context of events in Britain and Ireland, from the division that followed Parnell's fall in 1890 until shortly after the foundation of the Irish Free State and the Irish Civil War. It is a significant contribution to our understanding of the history of the largest ethnic group in Britain before the Second World War – the Irish. It is also an important regional study, revealing the vitality and diversity of the North East's expression of Irish nationalism that was probably not equalled anywhere else in England and Wales, other than in London. That vitality was manifested in the raising of the Tyneside Irish Brigade for the British Army in 1914. The Tyneside Irish was the crowning achievement of the pre-1918 Irish nationalist organisations in the North East, and arguably in Britain, demonstrating the organisations' commitment both to John Redmond and to the region, where so many Irish migrants had settled. Irish nationalism's diversity in the North East was embodied in the Irish Labour Party, which, alone in England, took root on Tyneside, and sought to blend class and ethnic issues at a time of national crisis in Ireland. This organisation casts light on the complex issue of the transference of working-class Irish Catholic allegiance from nationalism to the labour movement in Britain, and, therefore, in the assimilation of that community into the wider British community. Though none of these nationalist organisations has left any extensive archive, this thesis utilises Irish and English manuscript sources, and a wide array of Catholic, labour, and regional newspapers, to demonstrate that these organisations were not only an important part of the history of the Irish in the North East, but also of the North East itself.

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# Abbreviations

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<i>ACC</i>	<i>Auckland and County Chronicle and Stanley News</i>	LHASC	Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester
BMH	Bureau of Military History, Ireland	<i>LL</i>	<i>Labour Leader</i>
<i>BN</i>	<i>Blyth News</i>	NBSP	National Brotherhood of St. Patrick
<i>BNW</i>	<i>Blyth News and Wansbeck Telegraph</i>	<i>NDC</i>	<i>Newcastle Daily Chronicle</i>
<i>CH</i>	<i>Catholic Herald</i>	<i>NDJ</i>	<i>Newcastle Daily Journal</i>
CSG	Catholic Social Guild	<i>NE</i>	<i>Northern Echo</i>
<i>CTCO</i>	<i>Catholic Times and Catholic Opinion</i>	<i>NEC</i>	<i>Newcastle Evening Chronicle</i>
<i>DC</i>	<i>Durham Chronicle</i>	<i>NEDG</i>	<i>North East Daily Gazette</i>
DCRO	Durham County Record Office	<i>NIC</i>	<i>Newcastle Illustrated Chronicle</i>
<i>FJ</i>	<i>Freeman's Journal</i>	NLI	The National Library of Ireland
<i>GDL</i>	<i>Gateshead and District Labour News</i>	NLLGB	National Land League of Great Britain
<i>GH</i>	<i>Gateshead Herald</i>	<i>NM</i>	<i>North Mail</i>
GLP&TC	Gateshead Labour Party and Trades Council	<i>NWC</i>	<i>Newcastle Weekly Courant</i>
<i>GLPC</i>	<i>Gateshead Labour Party and Trades Council Monthly Circular</i>	PA	Parliamentary Archives, Houses of Parliament
HRCGB	Home Rule Confederation of Great Britain	RIC	Royal Irish Constabulary
<i>IE</i>	<i>The Irish Exile</i>	RORO	Report on Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom, Home Office Directorate of Intelligence
<i>II</i>	<i>Irish Independent</i>	<i>SDG</i>	<i>Shields Daily Gazette</i>
ILP	Independent Labour Party	<i>SII</i>	<i>Sunday Independent</i>
ILP&TUC	Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress	<i>SS</i>	<i>Southern Star</i>
INA	The National Archives of Ireland	<i>TCN</i>	<i>Tyneside Catholic News</i>
INLGB	Irish National League of Great Britain	TI	Tyneside Irish Brigade
IPP	Irish Parliamentary Party	<i>TN</i>	<i>The Nation</i>
IRA	Irish Republican Army	TNA	The National Archives, Kew
IRB	Irish Republican Brotherhood	<i>TSCN</i>	<i>Teesside Catholic News</i>
IrLP	Irish Labour Party	<i>TT</i>	<i>The Times</i>
ISDL	Irish Self-Determination League of Great Britain	TWA	Tyne and Wear Archives
<i>IT</i>	<i>Irish Tribune</i>	<i>TWCN</i>	<i>Tyneside and Wearside Catholic News</i>
IV	Irish Volunteers	UILGB	United Irish League of Great Britain
<i>IV</i>	<i>The Irish Volunteer</i>	UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force
<i>LCH</i>	<i>London Catholic Herald</i>	<i>VOL</i>	<i>Irish Opinion: The Voice of Labour</i>
		WCN	<i>Wearside Catholic News</i>

# Acknowledgements

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This thesis would not have been completed without the friendly guidance, generous advice, positive encouragement, and necessary cajoling of my principal supervisor, Professor Don MacRaild, whose extensive knowledge of the Irish in Britain enabled me to see deeper into the subject. My sincere thanks must also go to Dr James McConnel, my second supervisor, for his invaluable assistance and, especially, for his detailed, constructive criticism of my draft thesis. Without these two, this thesis would have remained unwritten.

I must also acknowledge the professionalism and expertise of the staff of the University Libraries of Northumbria, Durham, and Sunderland; The National Library of Ireland; Durham Clayport Library; Gateshead Central Library; Newcastle City Library; The National Archives, Kew; The National Archives of Ireland; Durham County Record Office; Tyne and Wear Archives; Labour History Archive, Manchester; Beamish Museum; and, especially, the staff of the British Library's Newspaper Reading Room at Colindale.

Three individuals also require special thanks: the owner of Jarrow's ISDL Minute Book; Kevin Davies, who shared his detailed knowledge of the Irish in Northumberland; and especially John Sheen, author of *Tyneside Irish*. I have known John for many years, and he generously allowed me to tap into his unparalleled knowledge of the Tyneside Irish Brigade.

Finally, I must thank my long-suffering wife, Janet, who probably expected her husband to spend his retirement pottering in the garden. Thanks for everything.



# Declaration

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I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas, and contributions from the work of others.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

# Introduction

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In August 1922, following the deaths of the Irish Free State's leaders, Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins, requiem masses were said in St. Mary's Cathedral, Newcastle upon Tyne.<sup>1</sup>

Not since the magnificent church was consecrated has it held so many people within its walls. The congregation overflowed through the porch onto the street... The catafalque in the sanctuary was draped with the Irish national flag and stood between rows of flaming torches... The great majority of those in the congregation wore the tricolour bound in crepe as a rosette. The fervour of a great grief was in the sacred building... women wept and men exhibited emotion.<sup>2</sup>

Amongst the packed congregations attending these two masses were the leaders of the old and the new Irish nationalist organisations on Tyneside – the United Irish League of Great Britain, Irish National Club, Ancient Order of Hibernians, Irish National Foresters, Tyneside Irish Brigade Committee, Irish Labour Party, Tyneside Pro-Treaty Committee, Irish Republican Brotherhood, and Irish Republican Army. Some of these men, and women, had been, or remained, members of more than one nationalist organisation. Some had undertaken the political journey from the confident expectation of Home Rule in 1914, to the republican anger of 1920 and 1921, to the desire for peace in 1922. Only the leaders of one Irish nationalist organisation on Tyneside were not present in the cathedral, the republican rump of the Irish Self-Determination League, and their absence was subsequently highlighted in a letter to the *Evening Chronicle* from Theresa Mason that angrily denied that the ISDL had been 'officially represented' at the requiem for Michael Collins, or had sent any floral tribute.<sup>3</sup>

To this list of active or recently decommissioned nationalist organisations in

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<sup>1</sup> *Newcastle Evening Chronicle (NEC)*, 17, 19, and 28 August 1922.

<sup>2</sup> Requiem mass for Michael Collins. *NEC*, 28 August 1922.

<sup>3</sup> *NEC*, 29 August 1922.

August 1922 could be added a further list of defunct organisations that had flourished in the North East in the previous decades, for example the National Repeal Association, Felon Repeal Club, Home Rule Confederation of Great Britain, Northern Land League Confederation, Ladies' Land League, Irish National League of Great Britain, Parnell Leadership Committees, Amnesty Association, and the local Irish Registration Associations. This combined list of organisations not only illustrates the enduring vitality of Irish nationalism in the North East of England, but also its diversity, and it is probable that this range of Irish nationalist experience was not matched anywhere else in England and Wales, other than, possibly, in London.<sup>4</sup> Seeking an explanation for this vitality and diversity is one of this study's key objectives, as it explores in detail for the first time the history of organised Irish nationalism in the North East from the division and dissension that followed the fall of Parnell in 1890 until the foundation of the Irish Free State and the Irish Civil War in the early 1920s.

A number of important previous studies have inspired and informed this thesis. The first was written by Joseph Keating as part of *Irish Heroes in the War*, a hagiography published in 1917 endorsing John Redmond's decision, as leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, to support the British war effort. Keating's work, however, despite its limitations provides an invaluable structure of key events, dates, and participants, together with occasional insights into the internal workings of Irish

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<sup>4</sup> For comparison, see John Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse: The History of the Liverpool-Irish, 1800-1939* (Liverpool, 2007); Steven Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity. Irish Catholics in England, 1880-1939* (Buckingham, 1993); John Hutchinson, 'Diaspora Dilemmas and Shifting Allegiances: The Irish in London between Nationalism, Catholicism and Labourism (1900-22)', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 10.1 (2010), pp. 107-125; Donald M. MacRaild, *Culture, Conflict and Migration: The Irish in Victorian Cumbria* (Liverpool, 1998); Paul O'Leary, *Immigration and Integration. The Irish in Wales, 1798-1922* (Cardiff, 2000); and Andrew Maguire, "*We'll Wreath the Shamrock with the Rose*": *Irish Nationalism in the West Riding, 1870-1922*, <http://www.scolairestaire.com/index.php/articles/34-irish-history/79-irish-nationalism-in-west-yorkshire> (Accessed 22 January 2013).

nationalism on Tyneside.<sup>5</sup> Roger Cooter's pioneering research on the Irish in County Durham and Newcastle has a chapter on 'Political Awakenings' that examines the progress of Irish nationalism from the 1840s, and proposes that it was the North East's indigenous Liberal/Radical tradition and pro-Irish sympathies that enabled Irish Catholics, and their political organisations, to develop largely shielded from the worst of the sectarian excesses of Liverpool and Glasgow. Cooter's study, however, ends in the 1880s, before those organisations had reached maturity.<sup>6</sup> In her important study of the Radical activist and Liberal MP for Newcastle, Joseph Cowen, Joan Allen has significantly enhanced our understanding of Irish nationalist organisations and their relationship with the Liberal/Radical political establishment that dominated the North East in the nineteenth century, but again the narrative concludes in the 1880s, and rarely looks beyond Tyneside.<sup>7</sup> The link between Irish nationalism and Liberal/Radicalism, and the extent of Irish involvement in British political and trade associations in the Northumberland coalfield before 1914, has been further explored in a useful local study by Kevin Davies.<sup>8</sup> Keiko Inoue's unpublished thesis, 'Political Activity of the Irish in Britain, 1919-1925', however, remains the best overall study of Irish nationalist activity in Britain during the Irish Revolution with a detailed, comparative analysis of activity in four regions – Glasgow, Liverpool, South Wales, and Tyneside – and her identification of several key primary sources has been of the greatest assistance to my study.<sup>9</sup> Importantly, Inoue explored beyond the Irish Self-Determination League and the IRA's military campaign in Britain, and was the first

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Keating, 'The Tyneside Irish Brigade: History of its Origin and Development', in Felix Lavery (compiler), *Irish Heroes in the War* (London, 1917), pp. 37-128.

<sup>6</sup> Roger Cooter, *When Paddy Met Geordie: The Irish in County Durham and Newcastle 1840-1880* (Sunderland, 2005), pp. 143-172.

<sup>7</sup> Joan Allen, *Joseph Cowen and Popular Radicalism on Tyneside, 1829-1900* (Monmouth, 2007), pp. 79-101.

<sup>8</sup> Kevin Davies, 'The Irish Community in South East Northumberland, 1874-1914' (unpublished MA thesis, University of Northumbria, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Keiko Inoue, 'Political Activity of the Irish in Britain, 1919-1925' (unpublished PhD thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 2008).

historian to describe the Irish Labour Party on Tyneside. Inoue, however, was unable to map in detail the Irish Labour Party, in particular its origins, and she did not fully recognise the organisation's significance. This present study says much more, revealing the crucial connection between the IrLP and the Catholic social movement in Britain before the Great War.

## **Irish Settlement in the North East**

The context into which these Irish nationalist organisations were set is important, and, whilst there were commonalities of Irish immigrant experience in Britain, each region produced its own characteristics. Thus the collective experiences of struggling for Irish independence and economic survival were influenced according to place as well as era. It is, therefore, important to consider at the outset the origins and pattern of Irish settlement in the North East. Irish migrants, who first began to settle in Britain from the eighteenth century, were, until the end of the Second World War, the largest ethnic group in Britain, and, though these migrants had a considerable influence on British life and culture, at no time was the Irish-born population of England and Wales more than three per cent of the total, and by 1921 this had fallen to less than one per cent.<sup>10</sup> These migrants, however, did not settle uniformly across Britain. They settled in London, around the entry ports such as Liverpool and Glasgow, and in the industrial towns of the Midlands, Lancashire, Yorkshire, South Wales, Central Scotland, and the North East of England: anywhere where work and housing could be found.<sup>11</sup>

In December 1915, Joseph Keating, describing the origins of the Irish on

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<sup>10</sup> Donald M. MacRaild, *Irish Migrants in Modern Britain, 1750-1922* (Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 1, 43.

<sup>11</sup> Roger Swift (ed.), *Irish Migrants in Britain, 1815-1914. A Documentary History* (Cork, 2002), p. 28.

Tyneside, compared the Irish settlements along the Tyne to ‘clusters of wild flowers, the seeds of which had been blown to the river banks by strange winds and had taken kindly to the soil’.<sup>12</sup> Though overly sentimental, this comparison does reflect an element of the historical pattern of Irish settlement in the North East, which rather than being concentrated in one centre, as in Liverpool, or dispersed across the mill towns of the West Riding, was, instead, both concentrated along the Tyne and Tees and widely scattered in the colliery villages and small industrial towns of County Durham and Northumberland.<sup>13</sup>

Irish migration to the North East had first become significant in the 1840s, somewhat later than in other parts of Britain, and, by 1851, 8.6 per cent (2,195 individuals) of Gateshead’s population was recorded as Irish-born, whilst Newcastle, with 7,100 Irish-born migrants (8 per cent of the population) was noted as having the tenth highest total of Irish-born in a British town.<sup>14</sup> The 1851 census also assigned to County Durham and Northumberland the fourth highest Irish-born population in England with 31,167 people (4.4 per cent of the total). Irish migrants continued to settle in the North East in the 1860s and 1870s and census returns reveal that, whilst Northumberland peaked in 1861 with 15,034 Irish-born people (4.4 per cent of the total), County Durham’s Irish-born population continued to expand, reaching 37,515 in 1871 (5.5 per of the total). After 1871, the number of Irish migrants settling in the North East declined and continued to decline until the Great War, paralleling the decline experienced across the rest of Britain. Thus, in 1921, for example, only 1.95 per cent (1,217 individuals) of the population of Gateshead County Borough

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<sup>12</sup> Keating, ‘Tyneside Irish’, p. 45.

<sup>13</sup> See Frank Neal, ‘Irish settlement in the north-east and north-west of England in the mid-nineteenth century’, in Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley (eds), *The Irish in Victorian Britain. The Local Dimension* (Dublin, 1999), pp. 75-100.

<sup>14</sup> Paragraph part derived from MacRaild, *Irish Migrants*, pp. 67-68; Frank Neal, ‘A Statistical Profile of the Irish Community in Gateshead - The Evidence of the 1851 Census’, *Immigrants and Minorities*, 27.1 (2009), p. 54.

(population 125,142) was Irish-born.<sup>15</sup> It must not be forgotten, however, that whilst the number of Irish migrants settling in Britain might have fallen, their children and grand-children, and the descendants of the previous waves of migrants, remained in Britain, and one estimate has suggested that, by 1900, 75 per cent of the Irish population in England was locally born.<sup>16</sup>

Before the mid-nineteenth century, a combination of distance from the entry ports and, especially, lack of work had restricted the numbers of Irish migrants to the North East to seasonal agricultural workers and transient navvies. Few of these seasonal migrants settled permanently in the region, but they did establish links between Ireland and the North East that facilitated later migration.<sup>17</sup> From the 1840s, however, large numbers of Irish migrants were permanently drawn to the North East by the unprecedented expansion of the region's heavy industry. Coal, iron, and shipbuilding had existed in the region before the 1840s, but the sudden and massive growth in the local economy after that decade demanded labour on a scale that could not be satisfied locally and, hence, provided opportunities for migrant labour.<sup>18</sup> Male Irish migrants were not slow to seize these opportunities, as Keating graphically described:

They became jetty-men, blast-furnace men, shipbuilding, and engine-yard workers. They lifted countless tons of iron ore from the deep holds of vessels. They toiled in metal and brass foundries and roughing and finishing mills, loading brass onto trucks... and poisoning their lungs in chemical factories... Wherever there was a call for pick, shovel, sledge-hammer, or mere physical energy, the new-come-overs were engaged.<sup>19</sup>

Irish females, however, found far fewer employment opportunities in the North East than were available in the textile mills of Lancashire and Yorkshire, or as domestic

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<sup>15</sup> *Census of England and Wales 1921: County of Durham* (HMSO, 1923).

<sup>16</sup> Hutchinson, 'Diaspora Dilemmas', 108.

<sup>17</sup> Cooter, *When Paddy Met Geordie*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>18</sup> Donald M. MacRaid, 'Foreword', in Cooter, *When Paddy Met Geordie*, pp. xi-xii.

<sup>19</sup> Keating, 'Tyneside Irish', p. 44.

servants in London.<sup>20</sup>

The first Irish migrants on Tyneside, as elsewhere in Britain, found work as unskilled labourers in the heavily industrialised towns on the north bank of the river from Newcastle to Wallsend and North Shields, and on the south bank from Gateshead to Jarrow and South Shields.<sup>21</sup> On Tyneside, Irish migrants, as in Liverpool and other large industrial towns, settled in the poorest areas, for example Sandgate in Newcastle or Pipewellgate in Gateshead, where the cheapest, and poorest, accommodation could be found. It is probable that in 1851 over 40 per cent of these migrants in Newcastle originated from the counties of Roscommon, Sligo, Mayo, and Galway; others, including many Protestant Irish, were from Ulster; and all, most probably, had emigrated from the northern ports of Belfast, Derry, or Newry, via Scotland or the Cumbrian ports.<sup>22</sup> There were similar large clusters of migrants on the Durham coast at Sunderland and Hartlepool, and further south on Teesside at Stockton on Tees and, especially, at Middlesbrough, where, in 1871, there was an Irish-born population of 3,621 (9.2 per cent of the total population).<sup>23</sup> Away from the North East's main industrial urban centres, Irish migrants lived in tightly-knit groups in 'furnace towns and pit villages' in Northumberland and Durham.<sup>24</sup> Thus Irish workers were recorded not only across the Durham coalfield, where they had faced initial resistance from employers, but also in the developing iron-making towns of Bishop Auckland, Consett, and Tow Law.<sup>25</sup> During the North East's decades of industrial expansion, the ability of Irish migrants to adapt to a

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<sup>20</sup> Neal, 'Irish settlement in the north-east', p. 88.

<sup>21</sup> MacRaild, *Irish Migrants*, p. 69.

<sup>22</sup> Frank Neal, 'The Foundations of the Irish Settlement in Newcastle upon Tyne: the Evidence of the 1851 Census', in Donald M. MacRaild (ed.), *The Great Famine and Beyond. Irish Migrants in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Dublin, 2000), pp. 90-91.

<sup>23</sup> Swift, *Irish Migrants in Britain*, p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> Cooter, *When Paddy Met Geordie*, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> MacRaild, *Irish Migrants*, p. 69.



changing labour market matched the fluid nature of the region's industrial expansion, which repeatedly saw pits sunk, prosper, and then close within a few years.<sup>26</sup> Thus, from empty moorland in the 1840s, Tow Law expanded and by 1871 had an Irish-born population of 519 (10.5 per cent of the total population), working both in the collieries that supplied the furnaces, and in the iron-works themselves.<sup>27</sup> A similar settlement pattern was recorded in the Northumberland coalfield, where Irish migrants found work in Ashington, Bedlington, Morpeth, and other colliery villages.<sup>28</sup>

In 1872, as part of attempts to rally the Irish in Britain to the emerging cause of Home Rule, the Irish-born journalist, Hugh Heinrich, undertook a survey of the Irish in the North East for *The Nation*.<sup>29</sup> He estimated that living alongside the Tyne within ten miles of Newcastle there were 83,000 Irish people, both first and second generation. This total established Tyneside as the fourth largest Irish settlement in England after London, Liverpool, and Manchester.<sup>30</sup> Though the majority of these Tyneside Irish worked in heavy industry as unskilled labourers, Heinrich reported that there were over 4,000 skilled Irish artisans in Newcastle and, most importantly, a developing Irish middle-class of some 400 businessmen, similar to that he had observed in Liverpool and Manchester, who had 'worked upwards from the severest drudgery to a condition of comparative prosperity', and he believed that Irish living conditions in Newcastle were better than those experienced by many amongst the indigenous population.<sup>31</sup> Away from Newcastle, Heinrich found large Irish

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<sup>26</sup> Neal, 'Irish settlement in the north-east', p. 84.

<sup>27</sup> MacRaid, *Irish Migrants*, p. 69.

<sup>28</sup> MacRaid, *Irish Migrants*, p. 70.

<sup>29</sup> Hugh Heinrich, *Survey of the Irish in England, 1872* (London, 1990, edited and introduced by Alan O'Day). Heinrich's purpose was both political, to assess the potential of the Irish vote in England, and religious, as he feared for Catholic Irish well-being in Protestant England.

<sup>30</sup> Graham Davis, *The Irish in Britain 1815-1914* (Dublin, 1991), pp. 119-120.

<sup>31</sup> Heinrich, *Survey of the Irish in England*, p. 119.

concentrations along the Tyne. In the parishes of Walker, Wallsend, and Howdon, 10,000 out of a total population of 23,000 were Irish, whilst at North Shields ten per cent of the population was Irish. South of the river in Gateshead, Hebburn, and Jarrow, one-third of the populations were noted as Irish, with a further ten per cent at South Shields.<sup>32</sup>

Twenty years later, John Denvir, a Liverpool-Irish political activist, re-surveyed the Irish in Britain and established that the majority living in the North East came from Ulster, including ‘a small proportion of Orangemen’, and from Connacht, and the results of Denvir’s survey are confirmed by an examination of the birth places of 30 leading North East Irish nationalists, or their fathers, which suggests that almost 50 per cent originated from Ulster, with a further 20 per cent from Connacht.<sup>33</sup> Most of the Irish in Newcastle, Denvir reported, had made ‘satisfactory progress’ and a ‘fair number had attained to good social and public positions’, whilst ‘several of them who had come here as packmen are now among the foremost citizens of the place’. Thus the improvements in social and economic conditions highlighted by Heinrick had been maintained. Denvir also observed that, whilst most Tyneside Irish remained labourers, some had become skilled workers in the ship yards. South of the Tyne in the Durham coalfield, Denvir found the Irish working in collieries, coke and iron works, and living in small, tied cottages, ‘just as in similar districts in Wales and Scotland’, and noted that many had previously suffered eviction from homes in Ireland. On the Durham coast at Sunderland, Denvir observed that the Irish ‘had increased in numbers and prosperity with the progress of the town’ and he particularly noted that ‘young people’ were being ‘put to trades’ in

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<sup>32</sup> MacRaid, *Irish Migrants*, pp. 71-73.

<sup>33</sup> John Denvir, *The Irish in Britain from the Earliest Times to the Fall and Death of Parnell* (London, 1892), pp. 440-442; see Appendix 4: Biographies of Irish Nationalists in the North East.

shipbuilding, as on Tyneside, and could be found in ‘the fitting and engine shops’, as well as working as riveters and platers, whilst on Teesside Denvir recorded the ‘extraordinary development of the iron trade’ at Middlesbrough. Irish workers were observed on the docks and in the iron works, and Denvir’s writing both confirms the mobility of Irish workers and, interestingly, suggests that many of these workers had not migrated from Ireland but from other places in Britain:

We have seen how the Irish are often the first to move whenever there is a depression in trade, so that you find here a good number who formerly lived in the Black Country... and other seats of the iron-working industry.

In 1914, as in the rest of Britain, most Irish people living in the North East, whether Irish-born or of a later generation, remained working-class, with many no more than unskilled labourers, though some had achieved the status of skilled artisans, especially in ship-building and engineering. Fewer still by 1914 had escaped into the middle-classes through education or business acumen, and Keating particularly identified, amongst those with ‘ambition to improve their worldly status’, those migrants who had left Ireland with ‘some savings’ or were the ‘sons of farmers or trades people’, and who then ‘built up businesses in Newcastle or succeeded in the professions’. But, wrote Keating, ‘such lucky ones were not numerous’, and he blamed the inability of the remainder to achieve self-improvement on ‘centuries of bitter and even vile oppression’ in Ireland that had ‘almost murdered the desire for social improvement in the many’.<sup>34</sup> It was amongst these Irish working-class men and women, struggling to make a new life in an alien environment and faced with their own urgent social and economic priorities, that the Irish nationalist organisations sought, for over five decades, to sustain the migrants’ nationalist zeal, and garner their support.

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<sup>34</sup> Keating, ‘Tyneside Irish’, p. 45.

## Irish Nationalism in the North East before 1890

Though the core of this study opens with Parnell's fall in 1890, an overview of Irish nationalism in the North East before that date is necessary to provide the historical context and highlight some of the key issues that originated in the earlier decades. During the 1840s, a number of nationalist organisations were formed in Newcastle by a successful businessman, Bernard McAnulty, including a branch of the National Repeal Association and, following the Young Ireland rebellion in 1848, a Felon Repeal Club. All, however, were short-lived; the result, it has been suggested, of the majority of migrants, though 'fervently patriotic for Ireland', being too poor to be politically active.<sup>35</sup> Irish political life in Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was dominated by strong personalities, for example John Ferguson in the west of Scotland and Austin Harford in Liverpool, and in the North East this role was filled by Bernard McAnulty.<sup>36</sup> Undaunted by his early failure, McAnulty maintained his enthusiasm, became central to every nationalist organisation in Newcastle, and beyond; and on his death in 1894 was lauded as having held 'the foremost place amongst Irish Nationalists in the North of England'.<sup>37</sup> No other local Irish nationalist leader ever again achieved such a reputation and influence within the North East's Irish community, and much of the vitality and persistence of organised Irish nationalism in the region must be credited to this man.

Whilst constitutional organisations found little success in the region before

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<sup>35</sup> Cooter, *When Paddy Met Geordie*, p. 143.

<sup>36</sup> See E. W. McFarland, *John Ferguson 1836-1906 Irish Issues in Scottish Politics* (East Linton, 2003); and Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*.

<sup>37</sup> *Freeman's Journal (FJ)*, 14 December 1842; Bernard McAnulty (M'Anulty), born in County Down in 1818, worked as a seasonal cattle drover before settling in Newcastle c.1838, and becoming a wealthy linen draper and businessman. *Newcastle Weekly Courant (NWC)*, 15 September 1894; also T. P. McDermott, 'Irish Workers on Tyneside', in Norman McCord (ed.), *Essays in Tyneside Labour History* (Newcastle, 1977), pp. 165-168; and Cooter, *When Paddy Met Geordie*, pp. 145, 235.

the 1870s, clandestine nationalism, though condemned by the Catholic Church and prosecuted by the civil authorities, flourished. Formed in Ireland in the 1810s, Ribbonism was a Catholic secret society that found support among the peasantry and urban proletariat before reaching Britain, where it provided Catholic migrants with continuity, support, and purpose in an alien, and often hostile, environment.<sup>38</sup> Ribbon cells persisted, and in 1858 rival Ribbonmen clashed in a street fight in Sunderland.<sup>39</sup>

In March 1858, a new secret society – the Irish Republican Brotherhood or Fenians – was formed in Dublin by veterans of the failed 1848 rebellion, who swore ‘to make Ireland an independent democratic republic’ by force of arms.<sup>40</sup> Fenianism spread to Irish communities in Britain aided by the surviving Ribbon cells, and under cover of the National Brotherhood of St. Patrick, an open society established in Dublin in 1861.<sup>41</sup> Later credited by John Denvir, who had himself been a Fenian, as being the IRB’s ‘chief recruiting ground’ in Britain, the NBSP established branches in Glasgow, Liverpool, London, and in Newcastle, where Bernard McAnulty was president.<sup>42</sup> Fenian activity in Britain reached its peak in 1867 with the planned arms raid on Chester Castle, the Manchester shooting, and the Clerkenwell bombing.<sup>43</sup> In the North East, Fenian activity has been critically examined by Cooter, and, whilst newspapers reported Irishmen in arms, and there was fearful expectation of imminent

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<sup>38</sup> Joseph Lee, ‘The Ribbonmen’, in T. Desmond Williams (ed.), *Secret Societies in Ireland* (Dublin, 1973), p. 27; MacRaid, *Irish Diaspora in Britain*, pp. 114-115; Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>39</sup> Donald M. MacRaid, “‘Abandon Hibernisation’: priests, Ribbonmen and an Irish street fight in the north-east of England in 1858”, *Historical Research*, 76.194 (2003), pp. 557-571.

<sup>40</sup> Oath taken by the IRB’s founders, quoted by E. R. R. Green, ‘The Beginnings of Fenianism’, in T. W. Moody (ed.), *The Fenian Movement* (Dublin, 1968), p. 17.

<sup>41</sup> For the NBSP in Britain, see Marta Ramón, ‘National Brotherhoods and National Leagues: The IRB and its Constitutional Rivals during the 1860s’, in Fearghal McGarry and James McConnel (eds), *The Black Hand of Republicanism Fenianism in Modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2009), pp. 18-33; Máirtín Seán Ó Catháin, *Irish Republicanism in Scotland, 1858-1916, Fenians in Exile* (Dublin, 2007), pp. 32-40; and Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, pp. 163-164.

<sup>42</sup> Denvir, *Irish in Britain*, pp. 178-179; McDermott, ‘Irish Workers on Tyneside’, p. 166.

<sup>43</sup> Alan O’Day, ‘The political organization of the Irish in Britain, 1867-90’, in Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley (eds), *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1939* (London, 1989), p. 188.

insurrection, he found little evidence to substantiate these reports, and concluded that the number of Fenians active in the North East was ‘probably very small’.<sup>44</sup> Cooter, however, acknowledged that there was widespread support for Fenianism, and this support intensified with the deaths of the ‘Manchester Martyrs’; executions that provoked almost universal, and lasting, sympathy amongst the Irish in Britain.<sup>45</sup>

In 1874, the IRB’s North of England division had some 4,000 members, and, in 1881, this division boasted 70 per cent of the IRB’s total British strength.<sup>46</sup> How many of these Fenians lived in the North East, rather than in Liverpool or Manchester, was not recorded, and few names of leading IRB members in the region are known with any certainty, though suspicion must fall on Bernard McAnulty, both through his presidency of Newcastle’s NBSP and his close association with known Fenians. Two North East Fenians, who have been identified, were Wexford-born John Barry, a successful businessman in Newcastle and Manchester and a co-opted member of the IRB’s Supreme Council; and Tipperary-born John Walsh, an ex-British soldier and iron worker in Middlesbrough, who represented the North of England on the Supreme Council during the 1870s.<sup>47</sup> In 1873, McAnulty joined Barry and Walsh at a ‘Manchester Martyrs’ demonstration in Dublin.<sup>48</sup>

Whilst concluding that Fenianism had ‘no revolutionary significance’ in the

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<sup>44</sup> Cooter, *When Paddy Met Geordie*, pp. 148-157.

<sup>45</sup> Owen McGee, *The IRB: The Irish Republican Brotherhood from the Land League to Sinn Féin* (Dublin, 2005), pp. 36-37; also see Paul Rose, *The Manchester Martyrs: the story of a Fenian tragedy* (London, 1970).

<sup>46</sup> T. W. Moody and Leon Ó Broin, ‘The IRB Supreme Council, 1868-78’, *Irish Historical Studies*, 19.75 (1975), p. 332; McGee, *IRB*, p. 86.

<sup>47</sup> Born in 1845, John Barry moved to Newcastle as a child. He served on the IRB’s Supreme Council to 1877, was secretary of the Manchester Home Rule Association, and was active in the Home Rule Confederation of Great Britain, and the Land League. Barry was Nationalist MP in Wexford, 1880-1893. Moody and Ó Broin, ‘IRB Supreme Council’, pp. 294-295, 328; John Walsh’s obituary, *The New York Times*, 7 March 1891; John Walsh, born c.1826, was also a member of the Invincibles, and, though he probably had no direct role in the Phoenix Park killings in May 1882, he fled to France, and then to exile in the USA. Moody and Ó Broin, ‘IRB Supreme Council’, p. 326; also P. J. P. Tynan, *The Irish National Invincibles and their times* (London, 1894), pp. 548-549.

<sup>48</sup> *FJ*, 24 November 1873.

North East, Cooter has argued that it demonstrated ‘Irish political potential’, and provided the ‘catalyst for a secularist Irish political awakening’.<sup>49</sup> This awakening was reflected in the formation of nationalist clubs and institutes, such as those in Consett, Middlesbrough, and Newcastle, and in the growing demands for the release of Fenian prisoners that found voice in the Amnesty Association established in London in 1869 by Isaac Butt.<sup>50</sup> Both these nationalist initiatives, however, were heavily influenced, if not locally controlled, by Fenians. In Newcastle, John Barry was a member of the Irish Literary Institute, as was Bernard McAnulty, and John Walsh was a regular visitor.<sup>51</sup> In October 1872, Barry, as secretary of Newcastle’s Amnesty Association, organised a demonstration, chaired by McAnulty, on Town Moor, that reportedly attracted 30,000 people, and the plight of Irish political prisoners with its potent emotional appeal became a significant feature of all subsequent Irish nationalist organisations in Britain.<sup>52</sup>

In May 1870, Isaac Butt formed the Home Government Association in Dublin, and within months the initiative spread to Britain. One of the first meetings to demand Irish self-government was held in Middlesbrough in September 1870, and a network of clubs and societies rapidly developed, as the Home Rule movement ‘took over the reins of moderate constitutionalism and inspired Irishmen in Britain’.<sup>53</sup> In London, Home Rule clubs declared that the Irish vote in Britain ‘if well organised, would turn the scale of an election contest’ in favour of those candidates supporting self-government, and organising the Irish vote, most usually in support of the Liberal Party, became the central strategy of constitutional Irish nationalism in

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<sup>49</sup> Cooter, *When Paddy Met Geordie*, p. 157.

<sup>50</sup> O’Day, ‘Political organization’, pp. 188-189.

<sup>51</sup> Founded in 1871, Newcastle’s Institute was renamed the Irish National Club in 1908. Keating, ‘Tyneside Irish’, pp. 54, 59, 77-78.

<sup>52</sup> Keating, ‘Tyneside Irish’, p. 54; Cooter, *When Paddy Met Geordie*, pp. 157-160.

<sup>53</sup> O’Day, ‘Political organization’, p. 189.

Britain before the Great War.<sup>54</sup> Though widespread, the Home Rule movement in Britain was, however, fragmented, and so, in February 1873, delegates from associations, including Jarrow and Newcastle, established the Home Rule Confederation of Great Britain, under Isaac Butt's chairmanship.<sup>55</sup> From the first, this new organisation housed 'a number of influential' Fenians within its ranks.<sup>56</sup>

In August 1873, underlining the North East's growing importance to the nationalist cause, Newcastle was selected as the venue for the Confederation's first conference. Amongst the 200 delegates attending were representatives from Consett, Durham, Gateshead, Jarrow, Newcastle, South Shields, Sunderland, and Middlesbrough, where the strength of the town's Home Rule Association was highlighted by Butt.<sup>57</sup> Isaac Butt spoke at a meeting of Middlesbrough's Association later that month, and this meeting reveals both the depth of Fenian influence, and growing clerical approval for Irish political organisation in Britain.<sup>58</sup> In the chair was Father Richard Lacy, later the first Bishop of Middlesbrough; whilst on the platform were John Barry, Bernard McAnulty, and John Walsh, secretary of the Middlesbrough Association.<sup>59</sup>

From the first, there was conflict within the HRCGB between those who believed that the organisation should focus exclusively on Home Rule and those who sought broader political activity, especially that concerning Catholic education.<sup>60</sup> Initially Butt conceded that the Irish in Britain might have legitimate concerns beyond Home Rule, but this latitude was opposed, and, in late 1873, Hugh Heinrich

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<sup>54</sup> *FJ*, 18 October 1871.

<sup>55</sup> *FJ*, 25 February 1873; O'Day, 'Political organization', p. 193.

<sup>56</sup> F. S. Lyons, *The Fall of Parnell 1890-91* (London, 1960), p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> *FJ*, 5 September 1873.

<sup>58</sup> *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough*, 26 August 1873.

<sup>59</sup> *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough*, 31 October 1873.

<sup>60</sup> Michael Morris and Leo Gooch, *Down Your Aisles, The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, 1850-2000* (Hartlepool, 2000), pp. 24-25.



demanding the exclusion of 'all matters foreign to Home Rule... to preserve a clear Home Rule platform, and create a distinct Home Rule party'.<sup>61</sup> This purist stance prevailed, and Confederation branches were instructed that 'no resolution shall be introduced, nor discussion entertained... which does not relate to the question of Home Rule', and warned that transgressors would be expelled.<sup>62</sup> Disagreement over allowing non-Home Rule issues was to plague nationalist organisations down to the 1920s, and was, in essence, a clash between centralism and localism. In Newcastle, the local Home Rule Association had suggested, before the HRCGB had been formed, that Irishmen should be 'nominated for public positions, in order that they might the better sense the interests of their countrymen', and in 1874 the HRCGB's restrictions were clearly ignored, when Bernard McAnulty stood in Newcastle's All Saints ward, and became the first Irish nationalist to be elected to an English town council.<sup>63</sup> McAnulty's pioneering election victory provided the model for Irish nationalists in the North East enabling Irish men and, eventually, women to stand for public office to address those issues that materially affected the Irish community, without jeopardising or compromising their nationalism.

In spite of the formation of a pro-Home Rule party of Irish MPs after the 1874 general election, and Isaac Butt's praise of its accomplishments, the Confederation declined, and, at the Liverpool convention in 1877, Charles Stewart Parnell replaced Butt as president.<sup>64</sup> Only 40 delegates attended this convention, and Parnell's election has been attributed to Fenian support.<sup>65</sup> Even with the addition of Parnell's ambition and drive, however, the HRCGB failed to thrive, though some 50

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<sup>61</sup> O'Day, 'Political organization', p. 193; *FJ*, 24 December 1873.

<sup>62</sup> *The Nation (TN)*, 29 May 1875.

<sup>63</sup> O'Day, 'Political organization', p. 191; *TN*, 30 November 1872; McDermott, 'Irish Workers on Tyneside', p. 167; McAnulty held the ward until 1882. *NWC*, 3 November 1882.

<sup>64</sup> O'Day, 'Political organization', pp. 199-203.

<sup>65</sup> Lyons, *Fall of Parnell*, p. 5.

branches were represented at the Newcastle convention in 1880, including those from Bishop Auckland, Durham, Gateshead, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, North Shields, South Shields, and Sunderland.<sup>66</sup>

During the late 1870s, severe agricultural depression in Ireland led to widespread distress amongst tenant farmers and a Land War against rents and evictions, and, in October 1879, the Irish National Land League was formed by the Fenian Michael Davitt with Parnell as president.<sup>67</sup> The British government's uncompromising response to the agitation in Ireland prompted widespread condemnation in Britain, and the HRCGB called for protest meetings.<sup>68</sup> In Newcastle, a meeting chaired by Bernard McAnulty heard angry speeches from John Barry, Robert Mason, and Edward Savage, whilst Davitt, welcomed 'with martial strains of music and by cheering crowds', spoke at a meeting in Gateshead, chaired by the ubiquitous McAnulty.<sup>69</sup> Unintentionally, the call for mass action led to the final eclipse of the ailing Confederation, as Land League branches multiplied. In Newcastle, a Land League committee, chaired by McAnulty, was formed in February 1880, and, in February 1881, delegates from Land League branches across the North East met in Newcastle's Irish Institute to create the Northern Land League Confederation, nominating McAnulty as president, and as secretary a young entrepreneur, Charles Diamond, whose name, as will be seen, features throughout this study, and who, through his newspaper empire, both moulded and reflected Irish Catholic opinion in Britain for over four decades.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *FJ*, 10 August 1880.

<sup>67</sup> R. V. Comerford, 'The land war and the politics of distress, 1877-82', in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A New History of Ireland*, vi, *Ireland under the Union, 1870-1921* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 26-52.

<sup>68</sup> *FJ*, 21 November 1879.

<sup>69</sup> *NWC*, 28 November and 5 December 1879; *TN*, 6 December 1879.

<sup>70</sup> *NWC*, 6 February 1880, 25 February 1881; Charles Diamond, born in County Derry in 1858, the son of an evicted tenant farmer, moved to Newcastle in 1878, and established his own successful

In March 1881, the National Land League of Great Britain was established to co-ordinate activity, and, once again, the North East's importance to the nationalist cause was demonstrated, when Newcastle was chosen for the NLLGB's first annual convention.<sup>71</sup> Whilst it has been suggested that the NLLGB attracted few members and had little impact, the early 1880s has been described as 'a period of frantic local organisation' for the Irish in Britain, as they were gripped by 'a new vibrancy and urgency'.<sup>72</sup> This was the case in the North East, where the plight of the Irish tenant farmers aroused the sympathy not only of Irish but also of British Nonconformist and trade union audiences, who were reminded of 'their own past history of suffering persecution'.<sup>73</sup> Thus in Newcastle, the Durham Miners' Association and other 'trade societies' joined a Land League demonstration, and heard T. P. O'Connor declare that, 'in fighting the battle of the Irish Democracy', Irish Nationalist MPs were simultaneously 'advancing the best interests of the English working class'; whilst on Spennymoor's race course, an estimated 5,000 Irish and British miners attended a Land League meeting, chaired by Bernard McAnulty.<sup>74</sup> The well-publicised distress in Ireland moreover sparked sympathy in the town halls, and meetings in support of the Irish Distress Fund were held in Houghton le Spring, Tynemouth, and Newcastle, where the mayor was authorised to send £300 to the Mayor of Dublin.<sup>75</sup> The vibrant mood also affected the North East's Irish women, who answered the call 'to unite for the purpose of alleviating the distress and suffering' in Ireland, opening branches of the Ladies' Land League in Bedlington, Durham, Newcastle, Stockton, Tow Law,

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business. He published his first newspaper, *Irish Tribune*, in Newcastle in 1884. At his death in 1934, Diamond owned 37 Catholic newspaper titles. Allen, *Joseph Cowen*, pp. 144-145, 147; David Fitzpatrick, 'The Irish in Britain, 1871-1921', in Vaughan (ed.), *New History of Ireland*, p. 673.

<sup>71</sup> *The Standard*, 30 August 1881.

<sup>72</sup> O'Day, 'Political organization', p. 203; MacRaidl, *Culture, Conflict and Migration*, pp. 117-118.

<sup>73</sup> Eugenio F. Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism 1876-1906* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 81.

<sup>74</sup> *FJ*, 18 April. 1881; *NWC*, 10 June 1881.

<sup>75</sup> *NWC*, 6 February 1880.

and Wallsend.<sup>76</sup> In September 1881, Anna Parnell, the League's founder and Parnell's sister, visited the Newcastle branch.<sup>77</sup> For the first time, the North East's Irish women were officially involved in nationalist politics.

In October 1881, the British government suppressed the Land League in Ireland, and imprisoned Parnell and the League's leadership.<sup>78</sup> Following Parnell's early release in May 1882, and his understanding with the Liberal Prime Minister, William Gladstone, to end the Land War in exchange for concessions for Irish tenants, Parnell reasserted his control over the nationalist movement in Ireland, but he did not revive the Land League, and even dissolved the Ladies' Land League.<sup>79</sup> The Land League had not, however, been suppressed in Britain, and continued to function without direct control from Ireland. Even in the aftermath of the Phoenix Park killings, when several Land League leaders, including John Walsh, were implicated in the conspiracy, the Land League retained sufficient vigour to muster 300 delegates from almost 200 branches for its convention in Manchester in August 1882, at which Bernard McAnulty's importance was recognised by his election to the League's executive.<sup>80</sup> The Manchester convention also saw the League assert its independence with a new title – the Irish National Land and Labour League of Great Britain – and a constitutional change that made 'the protection of the general interests of the Irish population in Great Britain' a core objective. This independence was, however, short-lived. In October, Parnell created a new organisation in Dublin, the Irish National League, and, early in 1883, he extended his control to Britain, when the Land and Labour League's executive accepted affiliation to the new

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<sup>76</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 1 February 1881; *FJ*, 3 September 1881, 11 January, and 1 February 1882; see Marie O'Neill, 'The Ladies' Land League', *Dublin Historical Record*, 35.4 (1982), pp. 122-133.

<sup>77</sup> This meeting of Newcastle's Ladies' Land League was chaired by Bernard McAnulty. *NWC*, 9 September 1881.

<sup>78</sup> D. George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London, 1991), pp. 210-211.

<sup>79</sup> Alan O'Day, *Irish Home Rule 1867-1921* (Manchester, 1998), p. 77.

<sup>80</sup> *FJ*, 14 August 1882.

National League in Dublin, thus creating the Irish National League of Great Britain.<sup>81</sup>

Parnell secured his control at the INLGB's first convention in Leeds in September 1883, when a new executive composed entirely of Irish MPs was elected, with T. P. O'Connor as president, and John Redmond as secretary.<sup>82</sup> Faced with what was described by John Brady, the INLGB's general secretary, as a 'disorganised and bankrupt' organisation, Parnell then toured Britain with O'Connor to urge Irish voters to register and branches to organise.<sup>83</sup> Between 1884 and 1890, the INLGB's membership swelled from 4,600 to 40,985 and the number of branches from 127 to 630.<sup>84</sup> No complete list of North East INLGB branches appears to exist, but, away from the Irish heartlands of Tyneside and Teesside, where branches presumably flourished, a conference of 'South Durham' branches in 1888 attracted delegates from Bishop Auckland, Coundon, Crook, Darlington, Durham, Shildon, Spennymoor, Tow Law, Waterhouses, Willington, and Witton Park.<sup>85</sup> Individual branch memberships were rarely reported, but probably remained small, as convention delegates were reminded in 1889, when O'Connor acknowledged that the National League's membership 'represented a very small proportion indeed of the vast population of two million of Irish people scattered over Great Britain'.<sup>86</sup> The failure to secure wider support from the Irish in Britain was to frustrate all nationalist organisations until their demise in the 1920s.

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<sup>81</sup> O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, p. 80; *FJ*, 29 January 1883.

<sup>82</sup> *The Standard*, 1 October 1883; T. P. O'Connor, born in Athlone in 1848 and first elected as an MP in Galway in 1880, was MP for Liverpool (Scotland) from 1885 until his death in 1929. O'Connor was the only Irish Nationalist MP elected for a British constituency. L. W. Brady, *T. P. O'Connor and the Liverpool Irish* (London, 1983), pp. 2, 4.

<sup>83</sup> *Manchester Times*, 13 September 1884.

<sup>84</sup> *FJ*, 29 September 1890.

<sup>85</sup> *Northern Echo (NE)*, 11 June 1888.

<sup>86</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 30 September 1889.

As in the early years of the Home Rule Confederation, the INLGB initially encouraged ‘increasing the local influence of Irishmen in the various towns’, through social activities and events, and, especially, through participation in municipal politics.<sup>87</sup> At the Liverpool convention in 1886, however, following the defeat of the first Home Rule bill in parliament, T. P. O’Connor insisted that restoring ‘the liberties of Ireland... overrides and overwhelms in its importance all things in this organisation, and to that end all our policy and all our acts must be subordinated’. This decision was opposed in vain by many delegates, including one from South Shields, who argued that ‘every Irishman could take part in local elections as a ratepayer without bringing the League into it’.<sup>88</sup>

In September 1890, at its Edinburgh convention, the INLGB met as a united organisation for the last time. By the end of the year, Parnell’s involvement in a divorce scandal had split both the Irish Parliamentary Party and the National League, and that disunity was to last for the remainder of the decade. The history of organised Irish nationalism in the North East during that decade of disunity is examined in the first chapter of this study.

## **Structure of the Discussion**

The focus of this study is organised Irish nationalism in the North East of England from 1890 to the 1920s. The history of these organisations, however, is not comprehensible if considered in isolation, and so this study references both the wider history of Irish nationalism in Britain during these decades, and the events in Ireland that powered nationalist activity in Britain. Also crucial to the discussion is the nature of the political environment of the North East itself and how that environment

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<sup>87</sup> *TN*, 21 February 1885, quoted in O’Day, ‘Political organization’, p. 205.

<sup>88</sup> *FJ*, 8 November 1886.

moulded the experience of the Irish migrants to the region. In the first decades of post-Famine migration, Irish immigrants in the North East faced anti-Irish and anti-Catholic violence, but the Irish migrants also found a sympathetic Liberal/Radical tradition, and this tradition ensured that, from the mid-1870s, when Fenian violence no longer threatened, Irish demands for self-government were favourably received, or at least tolerated, in the region.<sup>89</sup> Thus, for example, in 1886, when Gladstone's first Home Rule bill went before parliament, the Newcastle Liberal Association approved the bill by an overwhelming majority; Joseph Cowen argued in parliament that Ireland had been ruled by coercion since the formation of the Union in 1800; and amongst the Northumberland and Durham pitmen, alongside whom so many Irish miners lived and worked, Home Rule had become 'the miners' orthodoxy'.<sup>90</sup>

Chapter one is a critical examination of Irish nationalist organisations in the North East from 1890 to early 1914, and explores not only the internal rivalries, organisational limitations, and strategic miscalculations that plagued the organisations, but also the twin, external forces of the labour movement and the Roman Catholic Church that eroded support for the nationalist movement amongst the Irish working-class. The advantages and disadvantages of the enduring nationalist alliance with the Liberal Party down to 1914 are also considered. In contrast, chapter two concentrates on just three years, 1914-1916, beginning with an assessment of the health of organised Irish nationalism in the North East in the months prior to the outbreak of the Great War, and reveals, for the first time, the extent of the Irish Volunteer movement on Tyneside. The chapter then explores the Irish nationalist response to the outbreak of the war that culminated in the raising of the Tyneside

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<sup>89</sup> See Cooter, *When Paddy Met Geordie*, pp. 73-110; and Frank Neal, 'English-Irish Conflict in the North East of England', in Patrick Buckland and John Belchem (eds), *The Irish in British Labour History* (Liverpool, 1993), pp. 59-85.

<sup>90</sup> Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism*, pp. 60, 72.

Irish Brigade, the crowning achievement of the pre-1918 Irish nationalist organisations in the North East. Chapter three opens with an assessment of the impact on nationalist opinion in the North East of both the rebellion in Dublin and the near-destruction of the Tyneside Irish on the Somme battlefield in 1916, before examining the decline of organised Irish nationalism in Britain during the later war years.

Though the title of this study suggests a chronological approach, and such an approach is followed in the first three chapters, this methodology is replaced in the final two chapters by a twin-pronged consideration of two contemporaneous, but variant, Irish nationalist organisations that emerged in Britain as a direct result of the Irish Revolution. Chapter four is a detailed examination of the rise and fall in the North East of the Irish Self-Determination League, the last Irish nationalist organisation in Britain to attract mass support, from its genesis in 1919 to its collapse in 1922 following the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. This chapter also explores the ISDL's initial association with the Irish Labour Party and its later symbiotic relationship with the Irish Republican Army on Tyneside.

The final chapter is a major study of the Irish Labour Party from its origins before the end of the Great War to its gradual absorption into the Labour Party in the years before the Second World War. This small party, formed on Tyneside by Irish working-class activists, inspired by the Catholic Social Guild, and independent of nationalist control from Ireland, was a noteworthy part of the narrative of organised Irish nationalism in the North East, and in Britain, as it uniquely enabled working-class Irish men and women to ally themselves to the British labour movement without surrendering their unique ethnic identity at a time of heightened national



crisis in Ireland. The study concludes with appendices that include biographical notes on the most significant members of the Irish nationalist organisations in the North East during the period under study.

## **Sources and Methods**

Though Irish nationalist organisations flourished in the North East, as elsewhere in Britain, for decades attracting many thousands of members, few of their branch minute books, membership lists, correspondence, and other records have survived. Some records possibly remain in private hands, as, for example, does a minute book of Jarrow's ISDL's branch, but most have probably long since been destroyed.<sup>91</sup> Though the organisations' records are not available, contemporary newspapers survive in abundance, and, despite the editorial prejudices and agendas that inhibit the use of newspapers as historical sources, regional, Irish, labour, and Catholic newspapers have been exhaustively mined and cross-referenced as the main primary source for this thesis. The importance of these newspapers lies in their providing not only details of key events, leading participants, and near-verbatim reports of speeches and manifestos, but also trivial reports of minor meetings and their attendees that have enabled, for example, the origins of the IrLP on Tyneside to be mapped for the first time.

Archival sources held in Ireland have also been utilised, for example the witness statement written in 1952 for the Bureau of Military History in Dublin by Gilbert Barrington, a South Shields school teacher, who was both a leader of the ISDL on Tyneside and Quartermaster of the IRA on Tyneside. This is the only memoir, so far found, written by anyone involved in Irish nationalism in the North

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<sup>91</sup> Jarrow ISDL Minute Book, 1922-1923 (Private Collection).

East during the Irish Revolution, and, in spite of its errors and subjectivity, provides a unique insight into the relationship between the ISDL and the IRA.<sup>92</sup> The most important archival source, however, is the extensive collection of Art O'Brien's papers preserved at the National Library in Dublin. O'Brien held various executive positions within the ISDL and ran its London office, and his fully-catalogued papers contain important correspondence with the League North East's branches that illuminate the ISDL's origins, early growth, and protracted collapse in the region.<sup>93</sup>

## Conclusion

This thesis ultimately uses a series of local and regional events, activities, and actors to make broader points which are of relevance nationally as well as in an Irish context. What follows in this study provides the most comprehensive treatment to date of the formation and progress of organised Irish nationalism in Britain in the final decades of the Union. Other historians have explored particular groups, or specific organisations in particular cities and regions, but none has previously followed the course of organised Irish nationalism in Britain from the 1890s to the 1920s, when the final phase of half-a-century of Irish nationalism in Britain reached its conclusion, and, by firmly locating that nationalism in the context of events in Ireland, this study unites the currents of activity on both sides of the Irish Sea. Without that context, Irish nationalism in Britain cannot be fully comprehended.

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<sup>92</sup> Witness Statement, Gilbert Francis Barrington (INA, BMH/WS 773) - henceforth Barrington Statement.

<sup>93</sup> Owen McGee, *Collection List No: 150, Art Ó Briain Papers*, National Library of Ireland (Dublin, 2009).

# Chapter 1

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## **‘Durham was painted green’: Irish Nationalist Organisations in the North East, 1890-1914**

### **Introduction**

Between 1903 and 1914, the North East branches of the United Irish League of Great Britain held an annual gala at Wharton Park in Durham City, and contemporary press reports of these galas provide not only an annual indicator of the UILGB’s state of health in the region, one of the League’s principal strongholds, but also of its concerns and priorities.<sup>1</sup> The first gala, held on Bank Holiday Monday 3 August 1903, attracted 3,000 people, many sporting badges commemorating the centenary of Robert Emmet’s abortive rising. At subsequent galas, ‘Durham was painted green’, as ‘Irishmen and their wives... poured into the streets of the old city’, and over 4,000 people attended the sixth gala in 1908 to welcome the League’s president, T. P. O’Connor.<sup>2</sup>

Though these crowds were lauded from the gala platform as ‘proof, if proof was needed, that the United Irish League party had the people of Durham at their backs’, in August 1913, with the House of Lord’s rejection of the third Home Rule Bill dominating the newspaper headlines, a speaker complained that not only were many of those attending the gala still not League members, but also that ‘they went away and forgot everything they had heard’.<sup>3</sup> These gala crowds, though large, must,

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<sup>1</sup> In September 1907, the Northumberland Irish organised a gala in Morpeth. *Blyth News and Wansbeck Telegraph (BNW)*, 25 June 1907.

<sup>2</sup> *Tyneside Catholic News (TCN)*, 8 August 1903; *Durham Chronicle (DC)*, 7 August 1903, 7 August 1908, 6 August 1909, 11 August 1911.

<sup>3</sup> *DC*, 7 August 1908, 8 August 1913.

however, be compared to the thousands of Irish Catholics in the North East, who were prepared, when the need arose, to demonstrate publicly with their English co-religionists in support of Catholic schools.<sup>4</sup> Thus, on 14 July 1906, 20,000 Catholics marched in Durham, whilst some 50,000 Catholics had marched in Newcastle the previous week.<sup>5</sup> No Irish nationalist organisation in Britain, even at the peak of its popularity, could dream of mobilising such support for Home Rule, and in 1914, despite decades of sustained constitutional agitation and argument, and with Ireland seemingly on the verge of achieving self-government, the UILGB could still only boast a membership of 47,000, which, though the highest ever attained by an Irish nationalist organisation in Britain, was a mere 12.5 per cent of the Irish-born population of Great Britain in 1911, and an almost negligible percentage of the additional tens of thousands of British-born members of the Irish community living in Britain in 1914.<sup>6</sup>

The failure to mobilise the support, either active or passive, of a greater proportion of the Irish in Britain was common to organised Irish nationalism in Britain throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and has prompted a consensual explanation among historians. David Fitzpatrick captures the common view succinctly: bar ‘an aging core of enthusiasts still bedded in Irish political culture’, most of the Irish in Britain ‘avoided all Irish organisations’.<sup>7</sup> Equally, Roger Swift dismisses them as holding ‘little attraction’ for most of the Irish in Britain.<sup>8</sup> Alan O’Day too has concluded that ‘the vast majority of Irish did not take a

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<sup>4</sup> ‘The great majority of Catholics in Britain, and the North of England, were Irish’. E. David Steele, ‘The Irish Presence in the North of England, 1850-1914’, *Northern History*, 12.1 (1976), p. 221; the Catholic population in 1912 of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle (comprising Cumberland, Durham, Northumberland, and Westmoreland), was 200,787, about 8.4% of the total population of 2,403,545 living in these counties in 1911. *Northern Catholic Calendar*, 1914, p. 84.

<sup>5</sup> *DC*, 20 July 1906.

<sup>6</sup> *FJ*, 1 June 1914.

<sup>7</sup> Fitzpatrick, ‘Irish in Britain’, pp. 679-680.

<sup>8</sup> Swift, *Irish Migrants in Britain*, p. 178; also see MacRaid, *Irish Diaspora in Britain*, p. 134.

regularised active interest in national politics or for that matter in other forms of ethnic life' and that the UILGB never commanded 'the enthusiasm of more than a tiny section of the ethnic cohort', and was, therefore, 'an irrelevance'.<sup>9</sup> Whilst accepting the consensus and acknowledging the 'extremely unimpressive' performance of these organisations, Steven Fielding has sought to explain their lack of members as being the product of the disproportionate number of unskilled Irish Catholics in Britain: a group identified by him as being 'not noted for their habit of joining even allegedly working-class socialist parties', though, manifestly, this did not stop their marching in their thousands in support of Catholic schools.<sup>10</sup>

This chapter is a critical study of organised Irish nationalism in the North East of England from the division and discord surrounding Parnell's fall in 1890, through reunification and revival in 1900, to the very edge of Irish Home Rule, under the leadership of John Redmond, in 1914. During these years, the nationalist organisations campaigned, not always successfully, as will be seen in Jarrow in 1907, to mobilise support amongst the Irish in Britain for the Irish Parliamentary Party, and the goal of self-government. This chapter will examine the underlying reasons for this underachievement, reasons that sprang not only from organisational limitations and strategic miscalculations, but also from two external pressures, the rise of the Labour Party that gradually eroded the nationalist organisations' working-class base, and the competing demands for loyalty of 'the most important institution within Irish Catholic working-class culture' – the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>11</sup> Whilst, however, organised nationalism failed to win mass support amongst the Irish in the North East, and across Britain, it did, as will be seen, have a important, and lasting, consequence

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<sup>9</sup> Alan O'Day, 'Irish Diaspora Politics in Perspective: The United Irish Leagues of Great Britain and America, 1900-14', in MacRaild (ed.), *The Great Famine and Beyond*, pp. 234-236.

<sup>10</sup> Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity*, p. 83.

<sup>11</sup> Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity*, p. 38.

in facilitating the development of a committed and confident Irish leadership in the North East; a leadership that looked beyond its own ethnic confines to the wider British community, and sought an elected voice within North East local politics.

## **Division and Disunity in the 1890s**

On 10 May 1898, beneath banners bearing the names of Irish heroes past, some one hundred leading North East Irish nationalists, including municipal councillors and businessmen, sat down to a celebratory dinner in the Crown Hotel, Newcastle, to mark the centenary of the 1798 Irish rebellion.<sup>12</sup> In the chair for the evening was John Lavery, a prominent Tyneside nationalist, whilst the organising secretary was Daniel O’Keeffe, secretary of Stockton’s ‘Sir Thomas Esmonde’ branch of the Irish National League of Great Britain. Other attendees included Peter Bradley from Newcastle, John O’Hanlon from Wallsend, and Councillors Francis Joseph Finn and William John Costelloe from Gateshead. In itself unremarkable, this dinner, just one of many held in Ireland and Britain to commemorate the centenary, marked the first public meeting of two nationalist factions that had been the bitterest of rivals in the struggle for the support of the Irish living in the North East.

This rivalry, which was but the regional expression of a division that had debilitated and undermined the nationalist cause in Ireland and across the diaspora for almost a decade, had begun in mid-November 1890, when ‘the shattering revelations’ of Parnell’s involvement in the O’Shea divorce scandal were published.<sup>13</sup> By the end of the month, Parnell’s resignation from the chairmanship of the Irish Parliamentary Party was being demanded by a coalition of opponents. In

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<sup>12</sup> *NEC*, 11 May 1898; these men were the North East’s equivalent of the ‘notables’, who ‘effectively controlled’ the Irish nationalist movement in Manchester. Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity*, p. 84.

<sup>13</sup> For the circumstances and aftermath of Parnell’s fall, see Lyons, *Fall of Parnell*; and Frank Callanan, *The Parnell Split 1890-1891* (Cork, 1992).

Ireland, the Archbishop of Cashel spoke for the Catholic hierarchy, when he contended that unless Parnell resigned ‘the elections would be lost, the Irish party seriously damaged if not broken up, coercion perpetuated, the evicted tenants hopelessly crushed, and the public conscience outraged’.<sup>14</sup> In Chicago, Irish-American delegates argued that without Parnell’s resignation ‘an impassable gulf between the Irish and Liberal parties’ would be opened, and Ireland would be plunged into ‘the horrors of dissension’.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile in Britain, the Prime Minister, William Gladstone, under pressure from his outraged Nonconformist supporters, and with the active support of Liberal associations across the country, distanced himself from his erstwhile ally.<sup>16</sup> More seriously still, the majority of the IPP turned against Parnell, in spite of John Redmond’s call to unite behind their leader and ‘treat with absolute derision the stupid, malicious insinuations and prophesies of our enemies’.<sup>17</sup> Refusing to countenance resignation, Parnell struck back at his critics at the end of November with a manifesto ‘To the People of Ireland’ that asserted his leadership and the IPP’s independence over the ‘wire-pullers of the English Liberal Party’, who had ‘sapped and destroyed’ that independence.<sup>18</sup> On 6 December 1890, following days of public and private argument, the IPP met in Westminster. After a chaotic and rancorous meeting, the majority of the Irish MPs walked out of Committee Room 15.<sup>19</sup> The Irish nationalist movement had split.

The argument over Parnell’s continuing leadership of the Irish party, and, hence, the nationalist cause, animated the Irish in Britain to an extent not seen since the failure of the first Home Rule Bill in 1886, and at a time when the INLGB had

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<sup>14</sup> *NE*, 1 December 1890.

<sup>15</sup> *NE*, 2 December 1890.

<sup>16</sup> For example, the president of Middlesbrough’s Liberal Association wrote to Gladstone supporting his decision regarding Parnell. *NE*, 29 November 1890.

<sup>17</sup> *NE*, 19 November 1890.

<sup>18</sup> *NE*, 1 December 1890.

<sup>19</sup> *NE*, 8 December 1890.

never been more popular with over 40,000 members.<sup>20</sup> Few of these National League branches, however, declared their allegiance for Parnell.<sup>21</sup> Most approved of the judgement delivered by Charles Diamond's *Irish Tribune*: 'What all the enemies of Ireland failed to do against Mr Parnell, he has done for himself', and echoed the damning resolution passed by the East Manchester branch that Parnell had 'by his dishonourable and unpatriotic conduct forfeited all claims to the leadership of the Irish Parliamentary Party and to the support of the Irish people'.<sup>22</sup> This wave of anti-Parnell feeling had reached such proportions by January 1891 that when the *Irish Tribune* asked its readers if Parnell had the right 'to pose as the Irish leader', of the 5,102 questionnaires returned, a mere seven per cent supported him.<sup>23</sup>

Across County Durham, Parnell too found few supporters, as INLGB branches met to condemn his actions, reject his leadership, and confirm their support for Justin McCarthy, the emerging leader of the majority anti-Parnellite group within the IPP.<sup>24</sup> In Stockton, the 'Esmonde' branch not only withdrew its recognition of Parnell's leadership, but also applauded a motion, seconded by Daniel O'Keeffe, condemning Parnell's 'cowardly and unmanly treatment' of Timothy Healy, one of Parnell's principal critics within the IPP.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile in Darlington, the 'John Dillon' branch expressed regret that Parnell did not 'promptly retire when it was made manifest that he could no longer maintain that position with public advantage', and pledged 'unanimous support to the Irish party' led by Justin McCarthy, who had

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<sup>20</sup> O'Connor's report to the INLGB's Edinburgh convention. *FJ*, 29 September 1890.

<sup>21</sup> One tally counted only 20 INLGB branches supporting Parnell, as against 600 opposing his leadership. Though this tally almost certainly underestimates the extent of Parnell's support, it does reflect the contemporary measure of Parnell's fall. *Pall Mall Gazette*, 2 April 1891.

<sup>22</sup> Diamond boasted in 1887 that his *Irish Tribune (IT)* had a readership of 4,000,000 Irish Catholics in Britain. Allen, *Joseph Cowen*, p. 147; *IT*, 22 November 1890; *Manchester Times*, 9 January 1891.

<sup>23</sup> Only 346 of the returned questionnaires supported Parnell. *IT*, 3 and 24 January 1891.

<sup>24</sup> For example at INLGB meetings in Bishop Auckland, Crook, Shildon, and Witton Park. *NE*, 16, 17, and 24 December 1890.

<sup>25</sup> *NE*, 8 and 16 December 1890.



been elected IPP chairman in London that same day.<sup>26</sup> Some INLGB branches in County Durham, however, remained initially uncommitted. In Consett, members voted to retain all moneys collected within the branch ‘until there is a definite settlement amongst the leaders of the Irish Parliamentary Party’, whilst the Bishop Auckland and Willington branches demanded a national convention ‘in order to get the opinion of the Irish people in England on the present crisis’.<sup>27</sup>

In Newcastle, whilst the National League’s ‘Gladstone’ branch on Scotswood Road condemned Parnell’s ‘brazen audacity’ in seeking to retain power, a meeting of the influential ‘No. 1’ branch in the Literary Institute left the membership split, when the secretary, James Courtney Doyle, proposed a vote of no confidence in Parnell’s leadership, and was opposed by John Lavery.<sup>28</sup> After failing to get the meeting adjourned, Lavery and a small group of Parnellites walked out. Elsewhere on Tyneside, and on Teesside, a Parnellite rump remained loyal, and, though few in number, the members of this active minority, many of whom were to prove themselves able politicians, were to play a key role in the subsequent history of organised Irish nationalism in the North East.<sup>29</sup> It is also probable, as will be discussed later, that some of these Parnellites were active members of the IRB.

In early 1891, the anti-Parnellite National League branches found common cause in a parliamentary by-election in Hartlepool, which would, it was argued, through Irish support for the Liberal candidate, Christopher Furness, both ‘help put an end to the present despicable and coercionist Government’, and demonstrate that,

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<sup>26</sup> *NE*, 10 December 1890.

<sup>27</sup> *NE*, 20 December 1890; *IT*, 3 January 1891; *TN*, 7 March 1891.

<sup>28</sup> *IT*, 20 December 1890.

<sup>29</sup> Continuing support for Parnell was most widespread in London, where INLGB branches voted in his favour by 23 branches to two. *NE*, 1 December 1890.

in spite of the continuing leadership crisis, ‘Home Rule was alive and kicking’.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, a Liberal victory solidly supported by Hartlepool’s estimated 800 Irish voters would, declared the North Shields branch, ‘strengthen and consolidate the alliance between the English and Irish democracies’.<sup>31</sup> Hartlepool had been won by a Liberal Unionist in 1896, but Furness fully endorsed Gladstone’s repudiation of Parnell, made Home Rule the central issue of his campaign, and triumphed.<sup>32</sup> Following the Liberal victory, which Gladstone praised as ‘by far the most important since 1886’, a leader in the *Northern Echo*, the voice of Liberalism and Nonconformity in the south of County Durham, argued that Parnell’s retention of the IPP’s leadership would ‘create such a feeling in the English constituencies as would be dangerous to the chances of any candidate who came before them as a supporter of Home Rule’, and rejoiced that, during the campaign, Parnell’s ‘once powerful name was scarcely mentioned’.<sup>33</sup>

The annual St. Patrick’s Day celebration in 1891 provided the anti-Parnellites with the opportunity both to assert and demonstrate their superiority, and on Tyneside an organising committee was established under the chairmanship of the veteran Bernard McAnulty.<sup>34</sup> An evening meeting in Newcastle that attracted marchers from as far away as Jarrow, was followed by a concert in the town hall, where the walls were decorated with ‘green banners bearing the names of the anti-Parnellite’ MPs.<sup>35</sup> Even in such a controlled environment, however, a motion expressing support for McCarthy’s leadership attracted ‘three of four dissentients’,

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<sup>30</sup> Resolution passed by Stockton INLGB. *NE*, 13 January 1891; Hartlepool and West Hartlepool INLGB joint meeting. *NE*, 20 January 1891.

<sup>31</sup> *NE*, 20 January 1891.

<sup>32</sup> Lyons, *Fall of Parnell*, pp. 228-289.

<sup>33</sup> *NE*, 23 January and 12 February 1891.

<sup>34</sup> *TN*, 28 February 1891; McAnulty’s chairmanship of the anti-Parnellite committee suggests that he had abandoned his youthful Fenian sympathies. The committee included James Courtney Doyle, John O’Hanlon, and Charles Duggan. *IT*, 7 March 1891.

<sup>35</sup> *NE*, 18 March 1891; *NWC*, 21 March 1891.

and, more significantly, and presaging the future collapse of popular support for the INLGB, a demonstration in Stockton, at which Parnell was condemned as ‘doing the work of the Tory Party’, drew only a ‘moderate attendance’.<sup>36</sup>

On Saturday 21 March 1891, delegates from 70 of the North East’s INLGB branches met in Newcastle ‘to consider the present crisis in the Irish Parliamentary Party’, and, once again, McAnulty took the chair.<sup>37</sup> At this meeting, Charles Duggan, from the Walker branch, moved a resolution condemning Parnell and supporting McCarthy’s leadership. Whilst Francis Jones, from West Hartlepool, advised moderation, only one delegate, Mr Kelly from Blyth, was prepared publicly to oppose the resolution, declaring instead his ‘unbounded confidence’ in Parnell. Kelly’s, however, was not a lone voice in the North East, and, the day after the anti-Parnell conference, Newcastle’s Irish Institute, later described as being ‘a common camp’ to both revolutionaries and constitutionalists, hosted the inaugural meeting of the Newcastle and Tyneside Parnell Leadership Committee.<sup>38</sup>

The first Parnell Leadership Committee had been formed in Dublin in early December 1890, within days of the Irish hierarchy’s condemnation of Parnell, and on the initiative of the Irish Republican Brotherhood.<sup>39</sup> In late January 1891, a similar committee was established by the revolutionary organisation in London.<sup>40</sup> From the first, the Dublin committee was dominated by Fenians and their sympathisers, and Owen McGee has suggested that this support was forthcoming not because the IRB strongly identified with Parnell’s politics, but rather because the organisation viewed Parnell’s struggle against the British government and the Catholic Church as ‘simply

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<sup>36</sup> *NWC*, 21 March 1891; *NE*, 16 March 1891.

<sup>37</sup> *NE*, 23 March 1891; *IT*, 28 March 1891.

<sup>38</sup> *NWC*, 28 March 1891; Keating, ‘Tyneside Irish’, pp. 57-59.

<sup>39</sup> McGee, *IRB*, p. 196; Callanan, *Parnell Split*, pp. 249-250.

<sup>40</sup> Mark F. Ryan, *Fenian Memories* (Dublin, 1946), p. 151.

another manifestation of a struggle that Irish republicans had been fighting for generations'.<sup>41</sup> This view was confirmed by Dr Mark Ryan after he had joined the London executive of the National League's Parnellite offshoot: 'I accepted office, not because I believed in Parliamentaryism, but because I felt that it would help the Cause with which I had been so long identified'.<sup>42</sup> Ryan was one of the IRB's leading activists in Britain, and his participation in Irish nationalist and cultural organisations in Britain in the 1890s and 1900s, including the London Parnell Leadership Committee, Gaelic League, Amnesty Association, and '98 Centenary Association, reveals the depth of IRB penetration into these organisations. In his memoirs, Ryan declared that 'the active agents' in these organisations were 'practically the same', and that 'the primary object of many of them was to strengthen the Fenian movement', and this claim was confirmed by Thomas Barry, who was initiated into the IRB in London by Ryan in 1895.<sup>43</sup> The extent of the IRB's penetration of nationalist organisations in the North East during the 1890s is difficult to judge, as no local IRB member has left a memoir, but there are indications, as will be seen, that suggest that it was both extensive and influential.

Chaired by Stephen Bannon, late president of Newcastle's 'No. 1' branch, and with John Lavery as secretary, the inaugural meeting of the Leadership Committee in the Irish Institute was well attended, though not exclusively, by Parnell's supporters, and, when the committee's treasurer, Peter Bradley, moved a resolution pledging support for Parnell and his 'policy of independent opposition', he was met with shouts of 'We don't want an adulterer as leader!' and 'We will have no

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<sup>41</sup> Owen McGee, 'Fred Allan (1861-1937): Republican, Methodist and Dubliner', *Dublin Historical Record*, 56.2 (2003), p. 208.

<sup>42</sup> Ryan, *Fenian Memories*, p. 154.

<sup>43</sup> Ryan, *Fenian Memories*, p. 172; Witness Statement, Thomas Barry (BMH, WS 1), p. 1 - henceforth Barry Statement.

Irish dictator!’ from anti-Parnellites, who had, according to the press report, infiltrated the meeting from elsewhere in the Institute. In spite of these noisy interruptions, the resolution was carried, and the meeting finally ended when the rivals had ‘exhausted their arguments and abuse’.<sup>44</sup>

A letter from the anti-Parnellite Charles Duggan to *The Nation* illuminates the tactics allegedly employed by the Parnell Leadership Committee on Tyneside.<sup>45</sup> The letter described a meeting called by the Leadership Committee in Walker, and chaired by Stephen Bannon that was, according to Duggan, packed with ‘strangers’, whom he identified as Parnellites, drafted in to ensure that the resolution – ‘We the Irishmen of Walker, give our earnest support to Mr Parnell’ – was safely passed. News of this resolution was then sent to the local press to sow, asserted Duggan, ‘disunion and dissension amongst Irishmen’. Duggan also claimed to have recognised men at the meeting who were ‘bitterly opposed’ to the INLGB, but did not elaborate further, and this may have been a coded reference to local Fenians being present. In Duggan’s own National League branch in Walker, however, some support for Parnell lingered, and at a branch meeting three members voted against a resolution ‘expressing gratification’ at the outcome of the anti-Parnell conference in Newcastle.<sup>46</sup>

At the end of March 1891, John Brady, INLGB general secretary, announced an earlier than usual date for the League’s annual convention because of ‘the grave and perilous crisis in the Irish cause’, and because the ‘great majority’ of branches

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<sup>44</sup> NWC, 28 March 1891; Parnell’s policy of ‘independent opposition’ advocated independence of all British political parties and of the Irish Catholic hierarchy. See Matthew Kelly, ‘Parnell’s Old Brigade: the Redmondite-Fenian Nexus in the 1890s’, *Irish Historical Studies*, 33.130 (2002), p. 210.

<sup>45</sup> *TN*, 2 May 1891.

<sup>46</sup> *TN*, 4 April 1891.

had stopped forwarding subscriptions to headquarters.<sup>47</sup> The convention met in Newcastle's Assembly Rooms on 16 May 1891, with the League's treasurer, J. F. X. O'Brien, in the chair, as T. P. O'Connor, INLGB president, was unable to attend.<sup>48</sup> Sitting beneath banners confidently announcing the 'Extinction of British Parnellism', O'Brien claimed that 400 branches were represented (including 42 branches with 75 delegates from Northumberland and Durham), whilst a further 67 branches had been unable to send a delegate (including Seaham Harbour), but had expressed their 'utmost confidence' in McCarthy's leadership. With Parnell denigrated as 'a disruptionist and a divider', and as being 'both morally and politically unfit for any further trust or confidence', the anti-Parnell resolutions, moved by Frederick Crilly and John Denvir, received unanimous approval. Some delegates, however, also sought to exploit the mood of crisis, and O'Connor's absence, to assert local independence, but the Oldham branch's challenge to the League's executive to allow district councils was narrowly defeated by 184 votes to 136, as was the move by County Durham's Hetton branch to replace paid organisers, controlled by national headquarters, with unpaid, locally-recruited, and, therefore, locally-controlled, volunteers.<sup>49</sup>

Not to be bested by the disciplined success of the INLGB convention, 40 delegates representing Parnellite 'Independent' branches from across the North East, met in the Irish Institute on 31 May 1891.<sup>50</sup> Under the chairmanship of Stephen Bannon, the conference confirmed its faith in Parnell's 'policy of independent opposition... to secure the final success of the Irish cause', and agreed to establish

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<sup>47</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, 1 April 1891.

<sup>48</sup> *FJ*, 18 May 1891.

<sup>49</sup> For the 1891 INLGB Newcastle convention, see *FJ*, 18 May 1891; *TN*, 23 May 1891; *NE*, 18 May 1891; and *IT*, 23 May 1891.

<sup>50</sup> *FJ*, 1 June 1891.

new branches at Bishop Auckland, Gateshead, Hebburn, Howden, Shields, and Willington Quay. Arrangements were also finalised for Parnell's visit to Newcastle. This visit, on Saturday 18 July 1891, just three weeks after Parnell's marriage to the former Mrs O'Shea, was not, however, the triumph Parnellites had anticipated, and the visit was lambasted by the *Irish Tribune* as 'a memorable fiasco' that had 'sounded the death knell of Parnellism in the North'.<sup>51</sup> Despite widespread publicity, Parnell's name no longer had the power to fill a town hall, and the Parnellite *Freeman's Journal* claimed that 'considerable care had been taken in certain quarters to provide actively for the failure of the meeting', and accused the 'Irish Literary Institute, ably seconded by the Liberal wire-pullers in the district' of placing 'a handful of Liberals or denationalised Irishmen' in the audience to cause maximum disruption.<sup>52</sup> Ignoring shouted 'jibes and jeers, and vulgar references' from the audience, Parnell asked for the support of all 'independent Irishmen' and expounded his policy of 'independent opposition', attacking both the Liberal and Conservative parties as 'coercionists'.<sup>53</sup> Conscious, however, of his audience, Parnell, after declaring that 'my first duty is to Ireland as an Irish Nationalist', also explained his support, though 'elaborately qualified', for the Eight Hours Bill, and predicted that 'Labour has before her a great parliamentary and constitutional future'.<sup>54</sup>

Possibly more important, however, than Parnell's speech, his last major speech in Britain, was a private conference he held in the County Hotel, opposite Newcastle's main railway station.<sup>55</sup> There, accompanied by Joseph Nolan MP,

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<sup>51</sup> Callanan, *Parnell Split*, p. 184; *IT*, 25 July 1891.

<sup>52</sup> The audience was estimated at 1,500 by *NE* (20 July 1891), and 2,000 by *NWC* (25 July 1891), which also claimed that 'at least' one third 'were hostile' to Parnell; *FJ*, 20 July 1891.

<sup>53</sup> *NWC*, 25 July 1891.

<sup>54</sup> *NE*, 20 July 1891; Callanan, *Parnell Split*, p. 295; Parnell's interest in labour issues in 1891 has been dismissed as no more than a 'death-bed repentance'. Lyons, *Fall of Parnell*, p. 258.

<sup>55</sup> Neil C. Fleming and Alan O'Day, *Charles Stewart Parnell and his times. A Bibliography* (Oxford, 2011), p. xxii.

Parnell met Stephen Bannon, Peter Bradley, John Lavery, and ‘other officers of his Leadership Committees’ representing the main centres of Parnellite support in the North East.<sup>56</sup> What they discussed is unknown, but the names and home towns of the men who met Parnell are known, as they all subsequently pledged their personal loyalty to Parnell.<sup>57</sup> According to James McConnel, Parnell’s escort in Newcastle, Joseph Nolan, had links to American Fenianism, and had acted as Parnell’s ‘bridgehead’ to the IRB earlier in the decade.<sup>58</sup> Nolan also sat, with Mark Ryan, on the executive of the National League’s Parnellite wing.<sup>59</sup> It is, therefore, probable that the IRB, as in London, had members embedded on Newcastle’s Parnell Leadership Committee, and amongst the executive officers of the North East’s Independent Nationalists, and one of the Middlesbrough officers, who met Parnell in the County Hotel, was Patrick Walsh, the brother of the North of England’s late representative on the IRB’s Supreme Council.<sup>60</sup> When the North East’s Independent Nationalist leadership met Parnell, all, no doubt, echoed the Jarrow delegation’s sincere hope that ‘Providence will spare you until the aspirations of our country people at home and abroad are brought to a successful issue in the establishment of an Irish Parliament in Dublin’.<sup>61</sup> Within three months, however, Parnell was dead.

Newspaper predications that Parnell’s death would have ‘the almost

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<sup>56</sup> Keating, ‘Tyneside Irish’, p. 63.

<sup>57</sup> The officers were from the ‘Independent Nationalists of Newcastle upon Tyne’; ‘Sunderland Parnell Independent branch, Irish National League of Great Britain’; ‘Irish Amnesty Association of Middlesbrough’; ‘Walker on Tyne Parnell branch of the Irish National League of Great Britain’; ‘Jarrow on Tyne branch, Irish National League’; ‘Wallsend branch Irish National League’; ‘National League of Blyth’; and ‘Shildon Independent branch of the Irish National League’. *FJ*, 20 July 1891.

<sup>58</sup> James McConnel, ‘Fenians at Westminster: The Edwardian Irish Parliamentary Party and the Legacy of the New Departure’, *Irish Historical Studies*, 34.133 (2004), pp. 45, 60.

<sup>59</sup> Ryan, *Fenian Memories*, p. 153.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Most of the leading Fenians in Ireland, England and America declared in his [Parnell’s] favour’. F. S. L. Lyons, ‘Fenianism, 1867-1916’, in Moody (ed.), *The Fenian Movement*, p. 42; Patrick Walsh’s obituary. *NE*, 4 March 1892; John Walsh was replaced on the IRB’s Supreme Council by William McGuinness, whose obituary stated that he had shunned all ‘Parliamentary agitation until the Parnell split’. *Preston Guardian*, 15 April 1905.

<sup>61</sup> *FJ*, 20 July 1891.



immediate effect of reconciling the two sections of the Irish party' proved unfounded.<sup>62</sup> In Ireland, the Parnell Leadership Committee reformed as the Parnell Independent Union, and John Redmond emerged as the new leader of the Parnellite rump at Westminster, but with little support either in Ireland or in Britain.<sup>63</sup> Meanwhile, the anti-Parnellite INLGB continued to function with O'Connor as president, though membership steadily declined during the 1890s, and had fallen to 15,000 by 1898.<sup>64</sup> Publicly, O'Connor blamed much of this decline, especially in the North, on 'the deep distress, resulting from labour troubles', but later bemoaned the 'spirit of apathy' that had befallen the once-powerful organisation.<sup>65</sup> Though numerically weak, the continuing energy and activity of the Parnellites on Tyneside and Teesside must, in addition, have contributed to the INLGB's weakness. The League's finances also suffered, and O'Connor acknowledged that 'one of the worst consequences' of the division was 'the drying up of our large resources from America and Australia'.<sup>66</sup>

In the North East, INLGB branches initially continued to meet, and were especially active in mustering the Irish vote during parliamentary elections, though often to little effect. In Stockton, the local branch attempted to galvanise the estimated 1,000 Irish voters in the borough by reporting the activities of a 'Tory secret society', the 'British League', that was allegedly both anti-Catholic and anti-Irish.<sup>67</sup> The INLGB branch pledged the support of Stockton's Irish voters to the Liberal candidate and sitting MP, Sir Horace Davey, and energetically canvassed on his behalf, but, at the general election of July 1892, Davey was defeated by 311

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<sup>62</sup> *NWC*, 10 October 1891.

<sup>63</sup> See Kelly, 'Parnell's Old Brigade', p. 210.

<sup>64</sup> Fitzpatrick, 'Irish in Britain', p. 679.

<sup>65</sup> *FJ*, 6 June 1892; a general strike paralysed the Durham coalfield from March to June 1892. *NWC*, 4 June 1892; *Leeds Mercury*, 22 May 1899.

<sup>66</sup> *FJ*, 22 May 1893.

<sup>67</sup> *NE*, 21 March 1892.

votes.<sup>68</sup> Elsewhere during the campaign, INLGB branches in the North East urged Irish voters to ‘unitedly uphold the Irish policy of Mr Gladstone’.<sup>69</sup> It is not possible, however, to quantify the impact this intervention had on the Gladstonian Liberals’ victories across County Durham and Tyneside in 1892.<sup>70</sup> In Middlesbrough, however, many Irish voters seem to have ignored the plea for unity, voting instead for the Labour candidate.<sup>71</sup>

## **The Challenge of Labour, 1890-1900**

The growing preference of working-class Irish voters in Britain, the rank and file membership of the Home Rule organisations, for Labour candidates caused severe strains within the nationalist movement, especially as Irish workers, even the unskilled, began from the 1880s to become organised and take an active part in British trade unionism, with several rising to prominence, most notably James Sexton, the ex-Fenian and Irish nationalist, who led the Liverpool dockers’ union.<sup>72</sup> These Irish workers began to question the value of the traditional alliance between the constitutional nationalists and the Liberals, and received some support from within the Liberal Party itself.<sup>73</sup> Alone amongst the Irish leaders of the 1880s, Michael Davitt, though his influence was waning, questioned that alliance, convinced that only cooperation with the British working-class would deliver Home Rule, and urging Irish voters in Mid-Lanark in 1888 to vote for the Labour candidate, Keir

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<sup>68</sup> *NE*, 24 May 1892; *NWC*, 9 July 1892.

<sup>69</sup> From a resolution passed by Darlington’s INLGB branch. *NE*, 21 April 1892.

<sup>70</sup> Gladstonian Liberals were elected in 1892 in Darlington, Durham City, Houghton le Spring, Jarrow, Newcastle, South East Durham, and Tyneside. *NWC*, 9 July 1892.

<sup>71</sup> *NWC*, 9 July 1892.

<sup>72</sup> Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, pp. 50-51; also Joseph Clayton, ‘Irish Catholics and the British Labour Movement’, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 14.54 (1925), pp. 284-294.

<sup>73</sup> In 1888, Robert Cunninghame Graham, Liberal MP, and, later, co-founder of the Scottish Labour Party, argued that the INLGB’s support for Liberal candidates marked the League’s decision to ‘espouse the side of capital against labour’. *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 2 September 1888.

Hardie, rather than his Liberal opponent.<sup>74</sup> In December 1891, the INLGB's secretary warned that 'the desire of the Labour Party for parliamentary representation is showing as a rock ahead in many places' and that 'the liberals have no policy in this matter'.<sup>75</sup> Pressure on League branches to support Labour candidates increased, and, at the INLGB's convention in June 1892, a delegate from Sheffield asserted that 'the Labour leaders were the truest Home Rulers', and that 'it would be in the interests of Irishmen to make common cause with the Labour Party'.<sup>76</sup> In reply, T. P. O'Connor reaffirmed the League's policy of giving 'preference to the Liberal party above all others', and explained that 'our strength will be dissipated' unless voting discipline were maintained. O'Connor then argued that he regarded 'the Labour Party as a section of the Liberal Party' and, as the INLGB was drawn 'almost exclusively from labouring men', 'our party is a labour party', but that he would always prefer 'to win a seat with a middle-class Liberal candidate' than 'lose a seat with a Labour Liberal candidate'.<sup>77</sup>

At the general election in July 1892, Middlesbrough's Irish voters were presented with a choice between the INLGB's endorsed Liberal candidate, W. R. Robson, and Labour's John Havelock Wilson, the Sunderland-born secretary of the Seamen's and Firemen's Union. In an open letter to the town's Irish voters, John Dillon MP urged them to vote for Robson, and to reject Wilson as 'by splitting the Radical vote they [Irish voters] are doing their best to continue coercion in Ireland'.<sup>78</sup> O'Connor joined the fray, writing to the secretary of the 'John Dillon' branch in Grangetown that 'by the rules of the Irish National League' Irish voters were 'bound

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<sup>74</sup> Fitzpatrick, 'Irish in Britain', p. 683.

<sup>75</sup> J. F. X. O'Brien, 23 December 1891, quoted in Fitzpatrick, 'Irish in Britain', p. 682.

<sup>76</sup> The delegate was a vice-president of the Sheffield Trades Council. *FJ*, 6 June 1892; at the INLGB's Newcastle convention in 1891, during the Parnell crisis, a Liverpool branch had been forced to withdraw a pro-Labour resolution as inopportune. *FJ*, 18 May 1891.

<sup>77</sup> *FJ*, 6 June 1892.

<sup>78</sup> *NE*, 24 June 1892.

to support the candidate who is the choice of the Liberal elders and the local Liberal body', and that, even though Wilson had previously stood as a Liberal in Deptford and had received the support of the Deptford Irish, Robson was 'entitled to every Irish vote'.<sup>79</sup> Wilson was supported by Michael Davitt, but was warned that it would be a 'thousand pities if the Tory gets in through friction between the friends of Liberalism and the supporters of Labour'. Wilson also received support from seamen in Wexford and Belfast, whilst representatives of the Dublin Trades Council and the Amalgamated Society of Irish Railway Servants actually travelled to Teesside to lend their support.<sup>80</sup> In July 1892, Labour's voice in Middlesbrough called more strongly than that of nationalism to many of the town's working-class Irish voters, and Havelock Wilson was elected with a majority of over 600 votes.<sup>81</sup>

Following Gladstone's return to power in August 1892, the INLGB was immediately presented with the opportunity to demonstrate its continuing support for an alliance with the Liberals, and to emphasise its distance from the Parnellite policy of 'independent opposition'. This opportunity was the by-election triggered by John Morley, Liberal MP for Newcastle and a supporter of Home Rule, accepting office as Chief Secretary for Ireland, and the INLGB's conviction that the town's 3,300 Irish voters would play a key role in Morley's re-election. Morley's candidature was 'unanimously' endorsed at a meeting of Irish voters.<sup>82</sup> Meanwhile Newcastle's Independent Labour Party urged all working-class voters to vote for the Unionist candidate, who supported work-time legislation, prompting Michael Davitt to warn any wavering Irish Labour supporters that the issue before them in this election was

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<sup>79</sup> *NE*, 27 June 1892; Miles Prior, speaking for Middlesbrough's INLGB branch, predicted that Robson would receive 80% of the Irish vote. Jennifer F. Supple, 'The Political Attitudes and Activities of Yorkshire Catholics, 1850-1900', *Northern History*, 22.1 (1986), p. 246.

<sup>80</sup> *NE*, 29 June 1892; Supple, 'Yorkshire Catholics', p. 246.

<sup>81</sup> *NWC*, 9 July 1892.

<sup>82</sup> *NE*, 15 August 1892.

not ‘eight hours but Home Rule’, and Morley was duly elected.<sup>83</sup> Irish working-class voters would not be so easily persuaded in the future.

In February 1893, Gladstone introduced his second Home Rule Bill.<sup>84</sup> During the passage of the bill in the Commons, a meeting of Stockton’s INLGB branch thanked Gladstone for sending ‘a message of hope, peace and gratification... to the Irish race in every part of the world’.<sup>85</sup> Pious resolutions and mass extra-parliamentary demonstrations in favour of Home Rule, however, had no influence on the outcome.<sup>86</sup> Yet, after the bill’s rejection by the House of Lords in September 1893, O’Connor doggedly continued to assert that the cause of Ireland remained ‘indissolubly bound up with the Liberal Party’.<sup>87</sup>

As the decade progressed, so the challenge increased from the labour movement to the INLGB’s dominance over the Irish working-class in Britain. Even the very essence and purpose of Home Rule was challenged, when Michael Davitt told a ‘cheering’ audience at the Durham Miners’ gala in July 1893, whilst the second Home Rule Bill was still in the Commons, that Home Rule was no more than:

An Irish expression and phase of the great universal labour movement... what they wanted from Home Rule was the right of the workers of Ireland to the freedom to frame their own laws in their own way and to have the country governed for the benefit of industry, instead of being exploited for the benefit of an Irish aristocracy.<sup>88</sup>

The scale of this challenge was particularly evident in Middlesbrough, where, following the election of a Labour MP in 1892, whilst local nationalist leaders

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<sup>83</sup> A. W. Purdue, ‘The ILP in the North East of England’, in David James, Tony Jowitt, and Keith Laybourn (eds), *The Centennial History of the Independent Labour Party* (Halifax, 1992), p. 20; *NE*, 18 August 1892.

<sup>84</sup> See Alan O’Day, *Irish Home Rule 1867-1921* (Manchester, 1998), pp. 152-177.

<sup>85</sup> *NE*, 5 September 1893.

<sup>86</sup> A pro-Home Rule demonstration in Hyde Park was supported by 46 INLGB branches. *FJ*, 22 May 1893.

<sup>87</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, 14 May 1894, quoted in Brady, *O’Connor*, p. 139.

<sup>88</sup> *DC*, 4 August 1893; also Bill Dowding, *Durham Miners’ Association Centenary Gala*, (Seaham, 1983), p. 25.

attempted to reinvigorate their flagging organisation, the Middlesbrough Trades Council claimed the affiliation of 26 societies, representing 4,000 working men, many of whom must have been Irish.<sup>89</sup> Elsewhere, once-committed Irish nationalists transferred their support to the labour movement, as in Darlington, where William Holland, first secretary of the newly-formed Darlington Trades Council, had previously been secretary of the town's INLGB branch.<sup>90</sup> Whilst Fred Hammill, Newcastle's Independent Labour Party prospective candidate, in a direct appeal to Irish voters, argued that, as there would be no Home Rule until the House of Lords had been abolished, and that, as the Liberals were never going to deliver this, all supporters of Home Rule 'must join with the Labour Party, and force parliament to give them that measure'.<sup>91</sup> By early 1895, the North East Federation of Independent Labour parties had branches in Consett, Gateshead, Jarrow, Newcastle, South Shields, and Sunderland – all of which contained large Irish working-class minorities, and once thriving INLGB branches – and it is probable that the debilitating split in Irish nationalism during the 1890s benefitted the North East's emergent labour movement with increased Irish support.<sup>92</sup>

## **The Challenge of the Catholic Church, 1890-1900**

Meanwhile, during the years of division and decline that followed Parnell's fall, another threat emerged to the Irish National League's authority over the Irish in Britain. This threat came from the opposite end of the political spectrum, from the Roman Catholic hierarchy that held Catholic schools as being both the creator and guardian of a separate and distinct Catholic identity in Britain. Fielding has argued

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<sup>89</sup> *NE*, 12 January and 9 May 1893; in England in 1871 only Liverpool had a higher percentage than Middlesbrough of Irish-born residents. Malcolm Chase, 'The Teesside Irish in the nineteenth century', in Buckland and Belchem (eds), *The Irish in British Labour History*, p. 14.

<sup>90</sup> *NE*, 15 January 1894.

<sup>91</sup> *NWC*, 3 November 1894.

<sup>92</sup> *NWC*, 6 April 1895.

that ‘the defence of Catholic schools’ was the single most important question ‘to bedevil relations between the Church and Nationalists’, forcing Irish Catholic voters in Britain to make ‘a grim choice’ between defending their schools and voting Conservative, or voting for the Liberals and Home Rule.<sup>93</sup>

In July 1895, as the general election campaign began, an episcopal letter to all parishes from Thomas Wilkinson, Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle, requested that the views of all candidates should be sought regarding voluntary schools.<sup>94</sup> In Darlington, a rumour that all Catholics had been ‘ordered to vote for the Tory candidate’ was vigorously denied, and the local INLGB branch vowed to maintain its support for the sitting Liberal MP, Sir Theodore Fry, ‘no matter what his views on subjects which are not yet ripe for settlement’.<sup>95</sup> Meanwhile in Hartlepool, whilst Father van Hooff indignantly wrote to the local newspaper to deny that he was ‘using his influence amongst his congregation against the Liberal candidate’, the local League branch called on ‘every Irishman’ in the town to vote for the sitting Liberal MP, Christopher Furness, and asserted that the Conservatives would only bring ‘coercion, suppression, eviction and imprisonment to Ireland’.<sup>96</sup> In spite of the INLGB’s active support, the election resulted in defeats for both Fry in Darlington, and Furness in Hartlepool, where his narrow defeat was blamed on an alliance of ‘brewers, the publicans, the Church, and the bulk of the trading community’, and because ‘many Catholics who supported him three years ago voted against him on this occasion on the voluntary schools question’.<sup>97</sup> A more serious defeat was suffered in Newcastle by both the Liberals and the INLGB, when Fred Hammill, the

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<sup>93</sup> Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity*, pp. 61, 93.

<sup>94</sup> Candidates were asked if they supported all voluntary schools being granted ‘equality with Board schools’ over the annual rates contribution. *NE*, 10 July 1895; also see ‘Education in Catholic Elementary Schools’, in *Northern Catholic Calendar*, 1905, pp. 81-88.

<sup>95</sup> *NE*, 10 July 1895.

<sup>96</sup> *North East Daily Gazette (NEDG)*, 13 July 1895; *NE*, 11 July 1895.

<sup>97</sup> Fry was defeated by 657 votes and Furness by 81 votes. *NEDG*, 15 and 16 July 1895.

Independent Labour candidate, received 2,302 votes, enough to see two Conservatives returned, and John Morley, the Liberal's Chief Secretary for Ireland, defeated.<sup>98</sup> Though Morley had received a vote of confidence at a meeting of Newcastle's Irish electors, and his defeat was deplored at a meeting of the INLGB's 'National Press' branch, Morley's opposition to voluntary schools was widely known, as was his continuing opposition to work-time legislation; two reasons why it was unlikely that he received the same number of Irish votes as he had in 1892.<sup>99</sup>

The years after the Conservative's general election victory in 1895 saw the INLGB'S membership and authority decline still further, exacerbated by Justin McCarthy's resignation and replacement, as IPP leader, by John Dillon.<sup>100</sup> In Stockton, the once-numerous INLGB branch had 'gone down', though, at a public meeting in July 1896, attended by Thomas Sexton, the late branch president, and Daniel O'Keeffe, the late secretary, Owen Kiernan, the INLGB's organiser, attempted to revive the branch, saying that 'there was never greater need for organisation amongst Irishmen'.<sup>101</sup> In recognition of the damage caused by the continuing nationalist split, Kiernan also claimed, though somewhat prematurely, that 'Irishmen were coming to an end of their differences' and that until self-government had been achieved 'there was no room for difference of opinion'. Turning to the Liberal alliance, Kiernan admitted that, whilst the alliance had been 'of great benefit to the Liberal Party, and enabled them in the last Parliament to carry their principal measures... nothing whatever was done for Ireland', but Kiernan, perhaps wisely, did not refer to the continuing damage being done to the nationalist cause by its association with the Liberals' education policy. This had been keenly

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<sup>98</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette*, 18 July 1895.

<sup>99</sup> *FJ*, 13 July 1895; *NEDG*, 22 July 1895.

<sup>100</sup> *NWC*, 22 February 1896.

<sup>101</sup> *NEDG*, 20 July 1896.



argued in a letter to the *Northern Echo* by Daniel O’Keeffe, who stated that, if the ‘hostile attitude’ of the Liberals to ‘an equitable solution of exasperating civil and religious disabilities’ was removed, then the Liberals would have ‘no more loyal or devoted supporter than my Irish Catholic fellow countrymen’.<sup>102</sup> But, given the hostility of their Nonconformist supporters to voluntary schools, this was advice that the Liberals ignored, and the imbalance in the alliance between the Liberal and Nationalist parties, in addition to the emerging appeal of Labour, and the unresolved internal divisions, continued to undermine the constitutional nationalist movement into the twentieth century.

## **The Parnellites in the North East**

Though few in numbers, the Parnellite rump in both Ireland and the North East of England survived the premature death of their leader, and found renewed vigour in advancing grassroots nationalist movements. This was, it has been argued, in accordance with Parnell’s strategy of 1891, subsequently adopted by John Redmond, to appeal to the Irish Republican Brotherhood.<sup>103</sup> Thus the Parnellites took the lead in the amnesty campaign, which Parnell himself had ‘contrived to transform... into a bridge between Parnellism and Fenianism’, and looked to seize the initiative in the organisation of the centennial of the 1798 Rebellion.<sup>104</sup> In addition, the Parnellites in the North East maintained, perhaps more assiduously than their rivals, the nationalists’ traditional focus on voter registration.

In March 1892, a branch of the Amnesty Association was formed in London, and, a few months later, the Irish National Amnesty Association in Dublin was

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<sup>102</sup> *NE*, 10 February 1896; O’Keeffe had previously argued regarding voluntary schools that Home Rule was ‘no reason... to silently tolerate injustice in another part of government’. *NEDG*, 15 October 1895.

<sup>103</sup> Kelly, ‘Parnell’s Old Brigade’, pp. 211-212.

<sup>104</sup> Callanan, *Parnell Split*, p. 245.

reorganised, and given an executive composed of both Parnellites and Fenians.<sup>105</sup> Pre-dating both foundations, however, a meeting in May 1891 established a branch of the Amnesty Association in Middlesbrough, and, once again, there was a Fenian presence. Sharing the platform with the chairman, Councillor Miles Prior, was Joseph Nolan MP and two local men, John Harrington and Patrick Walsh, both of whom were to be signatories of the loyal address presented to Parnell in July 1891.<sup>106</sup> By 1893, there were two thriving branches of the association on Teesside at Middlesbrough and Grangetown.<sup>107</sup>

Initially, no amnesty branches were formed on Tyneside, possibly because the strength of the Parnellite Independent branches there obviated the need for a separate organisation. An amnesty meeting chaired by Peter Bradley was held in Newcastle in November 1893, and attracted a large paying audience from across Tyneside to hear speeches by John Redmond and John Ferguson from Glasgow.<sup>108</sup> Redmond used his widely-reported speech to claim that John Morley, the late Chief Secretary for Ireland, had previously acknowledged the Irish prisoners' political status, and stated that they should be released immediately 'in the name of justice, of humanity and of honour'.<sup>109</sup> It was, however, to be a further three years before the first Tyneside Amnesty Association branch was formed, when 'all sections of Nationalists' in Wallsend met under the chairmanship of John O'Hanlon to hear Robert McDonough Mason from Newcastle speak with 'power, pathos and vivid

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<sup>105</sup> Ryan, *Fenian Memories*, pp. 173-174; the INAA executive included William Redmond MP and Mark Ryan. Kelly, 'Parnell's Old Brigade', pp. 215-216.

<sup>106</sup> In 1891, Miles Prior, the INLGB's candidate, was elected to the municipal council, defeating the Trades Council's candidate. *NE*, 9 and 25 March, and 11 May 1891.

<sup>107</sup> *NE*, 19 August and 2 October 1893.

<sup>108</sup> Ferguson, an Ulster Protestant, had been involved in the amnesty movement since the 1870s, and used the cause as part of a 'healing momentum... which would unite nationalists of all persuasions'. McFarland, *John Ferguson*, p. 235.

<sup>109</sup> *FJ*, 13 November 1893.

eloquence'.<sup>110</sup>

Meanwhile, Amnesty meetings, featuring inspirational nationalist figures, provided the North East's nationalists with 'patriotic entertainment'.<sup>111</sup> On Teesside, the ex-prisoner John Egan spoke, as did Maude Gonne – both of them touring Britain on behalf of Mark Ryan's Amnesty Association of Great Britain.<sup>112</sup> Jarrow welcomed Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, and John Daly visited Newcastle in March 1897.<sup>113</sup> The release in August 1896 of Daly, the most famous of the Fenian prisoners, had presented Newcastle's Parnellites with the opportunity to stage a coup de théâtre that promised to generate attention beyond Tyneside's Irish community. Robert Mason took the lead in planning Daly's visit, and the first organising meeting was held at the end of January, when Mason made 'an eloquent and touching appeal to all Nationalists for help for the Prisoners' Aid Fund'.<sup>114</sup> At subsequent meetings, Mason was joined not only by Peter Bradley, but also by Lewis Barry and John Cunningham, recent recruits to the Parnellite camp from the newly-formed Byker Registration Association, but, notwithstanding the preponderance of Parnellites on the planning committee, an appeal was made to all nationalists 'to show their practical sympathy with those who have suffered so long and so terribly for the cause of Ireland'.<sup>115</sup>

Following Daly's visit, a branch of the Amnesty Association was formed in Newcastle with Mason as president and Cunningham as secretary, but, more importantly, the visit garnered the sympathy and support of the non-Irish population

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<sup>110</sup> *TN*, 1 August 1896.

<sup>111</sup> Fitzpatrick, 'Irish in Britain', p. 676.

<sup>112</sup> *NE*, 19 August and 2 October 1893; McGee, *IRB*, p. 243.

<sup>113</sup> *NEDG*, 18 March 1895; *TN*, 30 January 1897.

<sup>114</sup> *TN*, 30 January 1897.

<sup>115</sup> *TN*, 7 and 20 February 1897.

of Newcastle, including, crucially, that of Joseph Cowen, the ex-Liberal MP.<sup>116</sup> The result, on the initiative of John Proctor, an English Catholic Conservative, was a petition to the Queen, organised by Councillor John Weidner, who was also a Catholic, and signed by the Mayor of Newcastle, and many leading citizens, requesting the release of the Irish political prisoners to mark the Royal Diamond Jubilee.<sup>117</sup> The petition was rejected by the Home Secretary, though, before the end of the century, all the Irish political prisoners had been freed.<sup>118</sup>

In 1896, a small number of reports in *The Nation* provide a rare insight into the activities of Tyneside's Parnellites. In June 1896, north of the river at Byker, 'after nearly three months of secret preparation', the INLGB's 'National Press' branch seceded from the national organisation, shed unwanted members, and re-opened as the Byker Irish Registration Association, with a new executive, including John Quinn as president, John Cunningham as secretary, and Lewis Barry, the brother of John Barry, as registration secretary.<sup>119</sup> With a new constitution that stressed not only the importance of registering 'all Irish and Catholic' voters in the district, but also, significantly and in contrast to the INLGB's official isolationist edicts, in seeking 'adequate representation of the Irish and Catholic community on all public bodies', and 'where direct representation cannot be obtained' in taking 'such action as may seem best calculated to safeguard Irish and Catholic interests'. The association also proposed 'to aid, by means of lectures and the circulation of

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<sup>116</sup> *TN*, 27 March 1897.

<sup>117</sup> John Weidner was born in Newcastle in 1854. His father was born in Liverpool, but it is not known if he was of Irish descent. By 1910, Weidner was a wealthy ship owner and, in 1912, became Lord Mayor of Newcastle. *Catena: The Journal of the Catenian Association*, 975 (2011), p. 7; *TN*, 5 June 1897.

<sup>118</sup> *NE*, 17 July 1897; Dublin's Amnesty Association functioned until 1899, when the last Fenian prisoners were released, *FJ*, 30 August 1899.

<sup>119</sup> *TN*, 13 June 1896; Cunningham and Barry were delegates to INLGB conventions after the Parnell split, with Cunningham attending London in 1893, and Barry Liverpool in 1894. *FJ*, 23 May 1893, 14 May 1894.

literature, in the educating of Irish public opinion in the district', and *The Nation's* anonymous reporter confidently predicted that the association's members 'would easily hold their own against the whole of the League branches in the North of England'.<sup>120</sup> At the last-reported meeting of the Byker Association on 2 September 1896, Quinn announced that he had an advance copy of the balance sheet that was to be presented at the forthcoming INLGB convention in Dublin. Expressing little desire for reconciliation with the anti-Parnellite majority, Quinn claimed that this balance sheet, in revealing a decline in the League's membership and finances, exposed 'how miserable had been the failure' of the League's national leadership.<sup>121</sup>

South of the river, within a month of the coup d'état in Byker, the Gateshead Catholic Registration Association was set up by Canon Greene of St. Joseph's, the mother-church of Gateshead, and Peter Fanning 'an active and zealous young Nationalist', and *The Nation's* reporter anticipated that 'a sharp lesson must be taught certain Gateshead Liberals (and for that matter some of their Irish lackeys too) that the Irish vote is not bound by a patent attachment to the Liberal Party'.<sup>122</sup> Practical help was offered by a 'corps of volunteers', and by local Councillors Francis Finn and William Costelloe, whilst Councillor John Brennan financed the printing of the association's stationery, including registration claims forms. It is not known if the two Tyneside registration associations shared practical or political information, but socially there was contact, when Fanning spoke in Byker on 'old Irish ballads... recalling forgotten chapters of our social and national history'.

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<sup>120</sup> *TN*, 11 July and 15 August 1896.

<sup>121</sup> Quinn claimed that Manchester's contributions had declined from £257 to £124; the North East's from £292 to £105; and London's from £623 to £287. *TN*, 12 September 1896.

<sup>122</sup> *TN*, 27 June, 11 July, 1 and 15 August 1896.

## The '98 Centenary and Advanced Nationalism on Tyneside

Whilst there is no direct evidence of any involvement by active or lapsed IRB members in the Amnesty movement in the North East during the 1890s, the links with Mark Ryan's umbrella organisation, the advanced nationalism of the travelling speakers, and the ensuing activities of the key organisers, John Harrington and Robert Mason, strongly suggest that there was an echo of the Redmondite-Fenian nexus on Tyneside. Similarly, there is no clear evidence of IRB participation in the North East's planning for the commemoration of the centenary of the 1798 Rebellion, though there was unequivocal IRB involvement in Ireland from the very beginning.

This planning had been initiated in 1896 by the Young Ireland League, just one of the many fringe cultural/nationalist groups in Ireland that had sprung from a growing disillusionment with the established political groupings, and within a year 'a wide network of IRB-influenced centenary clubs' had spread across Ireland and Britain.<sup>123</sup> In September 1897, a meeting of the '98 Centenary Committee in Dublin, chaired by the IRB's president, John O'Leary, heard that '98 committees had been formed in Hebburn, Jarrow, Newcastle, North Shields, South Shields, Tyne Dock, and Wallsend, and that further committees were forming in Consett, Middlesbrough, Stockton, and Sunderland.<sup>124</sup> It has been argued that the '98 centenary presented Irish nationalists 'of every hue' with an opportunity to rouse the 'national spirit' and mobilise public opinion in Ireland and across the diaspora, and even proffered the

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<sup>123</sup> Founded in 1891, the Young Irish League sought 'to foster Irish culture and political ideas'. Members included Arthur Griffith, John O'Leary, and W. B. Yeats. Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland*, pp. 262-263; Senia Paseta, '1798 in 1898: The Politics of Commemoration', *The Irish Review*, 22 (1998), p. 47.

<sup>124</sup> *FJ*, 7 September 1897; London's '98 Association was formed in September 1897 at 55 Chancery Lane, the offices from where the IRB sought to influence all Irish nationalist and cultural organisations in Britain. Ryan, *Fenian Memories*, pp. 172, 174, 184-185.

possibility of healing the division within the ranks of constitutional nationalism.<sup>125</sup> Whereas Liverpool's '98 club had 880 members, with 776 in Glasgow, and 600 in Manchester, Newcastle's mere 95 members suggests, however, that the centenary failed to capture the nationalist imagination to the same degree in the North East.<sup>126</sup> These meagre British totals should be compared to the estimated 30,000 '98 club members in Ireland by the end of 1898.<sup>127</sup>

In October 1897, the '98 Centennial Association of Great Britain and France met in Manchester to plan for the commemoration, and to raise funds for a memorial in Dublin. Delegates included W. B. Yeats, who was elected president, Maude Gonne, and Mark Ryan, who was elected treasurer, and whose presence suggests that this organisation was influenced, if not controlled, by the IRB.<sup>128</sup> There were also three North East representatives present, two of whom, John Harrington and Robert Mason, were elected as two of the seven North of England representatives to the association's central committee.<sup>129</sup> Their election suggests that they too were advanced nationalists, if not actual IRB members.

By early 1898, however, the constitutional nationalists, seeing the growing enthusiasm for the anniversary 'inspired by the heroism, betrayal and martyrdom associated with the 1798 rebellion', and seeking to harness the 'national spirit' for their own purposes, had seized control of the organising committees.<sup>130</sup> John Redmond, the Parnellite leader, in particular, recognised the centennial's potential in facilitating the healing of the nationalist division, and wrote that 'Irishmen of all shades of Nationalist opinion, divided as they are into many sections upon the

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<sup>125</sup> Paseta, '1798', pp. 46-53.

<sup>126</sup> Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, p. 183.

<sup>127</sup> M. J. Kelly, *The Fenian Ideal and Irish Nationalism, 1882-1916* (Woodbridge, 2006), p. 93.

<sup>128</sup> *FJ*, 4 October 1897.

<sup>129</sup> The third representative was Peter Fanning. *FJ*, 4 October 1897.

<sup>130</sup> Paseta, '1798', p. 51.

politics of that day, are uniting as one man to celebrate its centenary'.<sup>131</sup> Thus on 'Wolfe Tone Day', 15 August 1898, the IRB's president had to share a platform in Dublin with the leaders of both the pro- and anti-Parnellite factions, John Redmond and John Dillon.<sup>132</sup> Many supporters of the '98 Association from Britain took part in the Dublin procession, including representatives from Liverpool, Preston, Wigan, and Scotland, though none from the North East apparently accompanied them.<sup>133</sup> By that day, however, Newcastle's '98 dinner had already been eaten, bringing together, as Redmond had hoped, the leaders of Tyneside's rival nationalists, but there appears to have been no room at the dinner table for the advanced nationalists Harrington and Mason.

Following the constitutional nationalists' appropriation of the '98 commemoration, the advanced nationalists on Tyneside withdraw from public sight, though there are a few tantalising glimpses of their activities in the years before 1914. About 1905, some members of Jarrow's Ancient Order of Hibernians, including Daniel Branniff, were expelled for holding 'advanced separatist opinions' (they were reading Arthur Griffith's *United Irishman* newspaper) and formed their own Dungannon Club in Newcastle, the objects of which were 'industrial revival, Gaelic culture and complete freedom'.<sup>134</sup> In 1905, the Dungannon Club organised a public meeting attended by 'all the old Fenians in the North of England' to hear O'Donovan Rossa speak, but how long the club remained active after that date is not known.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Quoted in Paseta, '1798', p. 48.

<sup>132</sup> *FJ*, 2, 10, and 16 August 1898.

<sup>133</sup> Possibly 1,000 Irish travelled from Britain to Dublin. Ryan, *Fenian Memories*, pp. 187-188; Peter Fanning, however, donated a guinea to the '98 memorial. *FJ*, 5 November 1898.

<sup>134</sup> Born in County Down, Branniff moved from Tyneside to Glasgow in 1907 and only then joined the IRB. Witness Statement, Daniel Branniff (BMH, WS 222), pp. 1-2

<sup>135</sup> Dungannon Clubs were the precursors of Sinn Féin clubs. Bulmer Hobson, *Ireland: Yesterday and*



In the years before 1914, the IRB was in steep decline, and Peter Hart has estimated that on the eve of war there remained only 1,660 paid-up members in Ireland, and only 117 in England.<sup>136</sup> How many of these were active in the North East is unknown, but the health of the organisation in the region was probably not good, as twice external organisers were sent to Tyneside – Thomas Barry in 1910, and Patrick McCormack, the IRB's organiser in Scotland, in 1912.<sup>137</sup> McCormack stayed in South Shields with Anthony Walsh, the son of John Walsh, late member of the Supreme Council, and started new IRB circles at Consett, Jarrow, and Tyne Dock, whilst closing one in North Shields.<sup>138</sup> There was, however, another circle, unmentioned by McCormack, in South Shields. Gilbert Barrington later remembered this enfeebled circle as being 'virtually dead' before the Great War, and entirely composed of 'old Fenians', who even advertised their existence with notices 'in the window of their meeting place'.<sup>139</sup> It was not until after 1918 that advanced nationalism once again found support in the North East.

## **The United Irish League of Great Britain, 1900**

In February 1897, *The Nation* reported a wedding at Langley Moor in the heart of the Durham coalfield. The groom, Thomas Kane, a native of Roscommon, and described as an 'active and zealous Nationalist', had been secretary of the INLGB's Brandon, Browney, and Boyle branch. His best man, P. Carroll, a native of County Louth, had been secretary of the Sleetburn branch. But, according to the newspaper, both men's

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*Tomorrow* (Tralee, 1968), pp. 8-9, 12, 21, 26; Hobson, co-founder of the first Dungannon Club in Belfast, attended the Rossa meeting in Newcastle. Witness Statement, Bulmer Hobson (BMH, WS 82), p. 6.

<sup>136</sup> Peter Hart, *The I.R.A. at War 1916-1923* (Oxford, 2003), p. 145.

<sup>137</sup> Barry Statement, p. 2; Witness Statement, Patrick McCormack (BMH, WS 339), p. 3 - henceforth McCormack Statement.

<sup>138</sup> Jarrow's circle soon collapsed, and Tyne Dock's circle only comprised Bill Heron and his five sons. McCormack Statement, p. 3; also see Fitzpatrick, 'Irish in Britain', p. 675.

<sup>139</sup> Mary A. Barrington (compiler), *The Irish Independence Movement on Tyneside 1919-1921* (Dun Laoghaire, 1999), pp. 4, 9-10.

enthusiasm for politics ‘had been chilled by the rabid intolerance displayed by the representatives and supporters of the Bosses. Like so many others they remain inactive, because they see no opening for useful work whilst the present condition of Irish affairs subsists’.<sup>140</sup>

In the closing years of the nineteenth century, the ‘sheer misery’ of disunited nationalist politics, highlighted by ‘the resurgence of national feeling’ surrounding the ’98 celebrations, persuaded leading Parnellites that reunion was essential if the movement was not to be fatally damaged.<sup>141</sup> The medium for reunification proved to be the United Irish League, an agrarian movement founded in the west of Ireland by the journalist and ex-MP, William O’Brien, and lauded by Fergus Campbell as ‘one of the most influential and popular political organisations in modern Irish history’.<sup>142</sup> Even though the path to reunification was smoothed by the resignation of the anti-Parnellite John Dillon from the IPP’s leadership in early 1899, not everyone favoured reunion.<sup>143</sup> At the INLGB’s convention in Bradford in May 1899, a name change to the ‘United Irish League of Great Britain’ was proposed to attract those ‘men who had insisted on standing aloof’, however, some delegates, including Councillor Finn from Gateshead, argued against any such change, and the motion was withdrawn.<sup>144</sup> The following year, after long months of argument and an ‘exceptionally confused’ election, the IPP reunited under the leadership of the Parnellite John Redmond, even

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<sup>140</sup> *TN*, 20 February 1897.

<sup>141</sup> Paul Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation in Ireland 1890-1910: Parnellites and Radical Agrarians* (Oxford, 1987), p. 33; F. S. L. Lyons, *The Irish Parliamentary Party 1890-1910* (London, 1960), p. 89.

<sup>142</sup> Fergus Campbell, *Land and Revolution: Nationalist Politics in the West of Ireland 1891-1921* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 28-41; Philip Bull, ‘The United Irish League and the reunion of the Irish Parliamentary Party, 1898-1900’, *Irish Historical Studies*, 26.101 (1988), pp. 51-78.

<sup>143</sup> *NWC*, 11 February 1899.

<sup>144</sup> Bradford’s INLGB convention included delegates from Bedlington, Gateshead (Councillor Finn), Hartlepool, Newcastle’s ‘No. 1’ and ‘O’Connell’, and Wallsend (John O’Hanlon). *FJ*, 22 May 1899; *TCN*, 27 May 1899.

though he led only a dozen Parnellite MPs.<sup>145</sup> At the INLGB's last convention held in Dublin in June 1900, the delegates unanimously agreed to rename their organisation the 'United Irish League of Great Britain', and to affirm, once again, T. P. O'Connor as their leader.<sup>146</sup> Although some rivalries festered, especially in Liverpool, but also on Tyneside, and took several years to subside, Fitzpatrick has argued that the re-unification in 1900 marked the 'reinvigoration of the British movement'.<sup>147</sup> O'Day concurs with this argument, noting the 'improved morale and enrolment in the branches' after 1900, with the UILGB's membership growing from 7,800 in 1900 to 24,800 in 1908, and finally to 47,000 in 1914.<sup>148</sup>

In the North East, change was signalled in a letter to William O'Brien from Owen Kiernan, INLGB organiser in Newcastle, enclosing a donation of five guineas from John Lavery.<sup>149</sup> Kiernan wrote, though with more enthusiasm than accuracy:

From '86 to the Parnell split there was probably no young Irishman in the city who worked harder or more successfully for the Irish National cause than did Mr John Lavery. At the fatal hour in our history... Mr Lavery with a few other equally earnest spirits took the side of Mr Parnell. They have taken no part in any organisation since... like many more of our friends who supported Mr Parnell after his deposition they have long since grown sick and weary of the further dividing elements since introduced into Irish politics... In the United Irish League they recognise the first indication of encouragement to renew the fight for National liberty which Ireland has given since the General Election of 1895, and Mr John Lavery, as a practical Parnellite Nationalist, believes in giving it a chance.

After so many years of division, there was an initial, uneasy relationship between former rivals, even at the highest level of the organisation, and this was made evident

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<sup>145</sup> Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, p. 67; Lyons, *Irish Parliamentary Party*, p. 313.

<sup>146</sup> Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, p. 40; Dublin's INLGB convention included delegates from six Bradford branches (including a ladies' branch); five from Leeds; three from Liverpool; and two from the North East (Bedlington and Grangetown). *FJ*, 22 June 1900.

<sup>147</sup> Fitzpatrick, 'Irish in Britain', p. 679; for continuing rivalries in Liverpool, see Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, pp. 146-147; and P. J. Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism. A political and social history of Liverpool 1868-1939* (Liverpool, 1981), pp. 186-187; as for Tyneside, there was no room in the 'Who's Who of the Tyneside Irish Movement' for Fanning, Harrington, and Mason. Lavery, *Irish Heroes*, pp. 321-336.

<sup>148</sup> O'Day, 'Irish Diaspora Politics', p. 225.

<sup>149</sup> *FJ*, 28 December 1899.

in the advice offered to Irish voters before the general election in October 1900. Thus, whilst O'Connor, seeking to muster Irish votes in the support of the Liberals, even suggested that Liberal candidates should not be questioned 'too closely on the question of Home Rule', Redmond, ever the Parnellite and wishing to exert his newly-acquired leadership of the re-united nationalist movement, favoured 'independent opposition'.<sup>150</sup> In Newcastle, therefore, at a meeting in the Irish Institute chaired by the prodigal John Lavery, 'for the purpose of deciding on their course of action at the ensuing Parliamentary election', Peter Bradley, supported by John Edward Scanlan, called on 'Nationalist electors... to remain absolutely unpledged' and then, true to his Parnellite past, 'cast a solid vote in obedience to the manifesto' issued by John Redmond.<sup>151</sup>

## **The Challenge of the Catholic Church, 1900-1914**

At the UILGB's first annual convention, held in Bristol in May 1901, 'the supreme purpose of the organisation' was re-affirmed as 'the self-government of Ireland', but, whilst Home Rule might dominate the nationalists' agenda in Irish Institutes and League rooms, not all the Irish in Britain were ardent nationalists.<sup>152</sup> For many, probably the majority, of Irish voters, who were less politically active and less wedded to the cause of Ireland, two issues that had first emerged in the 1890s began to dominate their political agenda. These tests of the UILGB's supremacy of purpose arose over the issues of social and economic progress, and Catholic education, though, on one occasion in 1908 in Newcastle, the conflicting interests of the League and Catholic Church coincided, producing a significant electoral result.

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<sup>150</sup> O'Connor, September 1900, quoted in Brady, *O'Connor*, pp. 153-154.

<sup>151</sup> *FJ*, 25 September 1900; Councillor Finn moved an amendment favouring Liberal candidates, but only three votes were cast against Bradley's resolution. *London Catholic Herald (LCH)*, 28 September 1900.

<sup>152</sup> *The Times (TT)*, 27 May 1901.

In October 1900, though John Redmond warned Irish voters that ‘the National question overshadows all others’, the general election saw the authority of the newly-formed UILGB in the North East challenged by the continuing question of Catholic education.<sup>153</sup> In Stockton, Catholic voters were handed bills after Sunday mass that claimed that the Liberal candidate, Alderman Samuel, was ‘in favour of destroying the Voluntary Schools in the country’.<sup>154</sup> In spite of denials, in spite of the Irish nationalist tradition in the town, and in spite of a letter of endorsement from T. P. O’Connor himself, Samuel, the sitting Liberal MP, was defeated by his Conservative rival by 389 votes.<sup>155</sup> The *Northern Echo* lamented that ‘the transference of a part of the Irish vote was the main factor in the defeat of Mr Samuel’.<sup>156</sup> Elsewhere across the region, the UILGB was rebuffed by Irish voters, and the Liberals suffered widespread electoral defeat.<sup>157</sup> In Newcastle, where there were an estimated 3,000 to 4,000 Irish voters, the Radical candidate, Samuel Storey was defeated, whilst in Middlesbrough, the two UILGB branches agreed to support Havelock Wilson, only to see him defeated by just 55 votes.<sup>158</sup> Other Liberal candidates, however, in constituencies with a significant Irish presence fared better. In Hartlepool, Gateshead, and South Shields, Liberal victories were achieved, as in North West Durham, where the Liberal candidate, Atherley Jones, received the combined support of the ‘Irish party’ and the local Miners’ Lodges; and in Morpeth, where Thomas Burt, the Radical MP and miners’ leader, was re-elected, though with

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<sup>153</sup> *LCH*, 27 October 1900; Supple has even suggested that ‘many Irish had grown tired of Home Rule’ by October 1900. Supple, ‘Yorkshire Catholics’, p. 248.

<sup>154</sup> *NE*, 2 October 1900.

<sup>155</sup> *NE*, 27 September 1900.

<sup>156</sup> *NE*, 10 October 1900.

<sup>157</sup> The only Labour Representation Committee candidate in the North East in 1900 was Alexander Wilkie in Sunderland. He was defeated by a Unionist. Purdue, ‘ILP in the North East’, p. 28.

<sup>158</sup> *NE*, 1 October 1900; Havelock Wilson, after being elected as a Labour MP in 1892, had switched to the Liberals before the 1895 election to secure the Irish vote. Supple, ‘Yorkshire Catholics’, pp. 247-248.

a greatly reduced majority.<sup>159</sup>

The problem of Irish voters ignoring the UILGB's advice became more acute, when, in 1902, the Conservative government's Education Act, enthusiastically supported by the English Catholic hierarchy, replaced the old School Boards with Local Education Authorities and absorbed the staffing and running costs of voluntary schools, in spite of considerable opposition from the Liberals and their Nonconformist supporters, who denounced this financial support as 'Rome on the Rates'.<sup>160</sup> When the Liberals returned to government in December 1905, this favourable settlement was threatened, and the Catholic bishops urged their flocks to oppose any change. Within days of Campbell-Bannerman assuming the premiership, a letter from the Archbishop of Westminster and the bishops of England and Wales was ordered to be read in all Catholic churches. After claiming that it was 'no part of the pastoral duty of the Bishops to interfere in what are generally called politics', the letter then declared that there were, however, questions 'so intimately bound up with religious principles that they cannot be passed over by the authorities of the Church', and that one such question was 'that of religious education'. The bishops then suggested that a single question should be put to all candidates in the forthcoming election: 'Will you... resist any interference with the right of Catholic parents... to have their children educated in elementary schools?' The answer enabling Catholics, so the bishops asserted, 'to distinguish with greater or less sureness the friends of Catholic education from its opponents'.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Burt's majority was reduced from 2,169 to 410 votes. *NE*, 5 October 1900; in Gateshead, the sitting Liberal MP, William Allan, actually increased his majority after winning the Irish vote. F. W. D. Manders, *A History of Gateshead* (Gateshead, 1973), p. 276.

<sup>160</sup> Morris and Gooch, *Down Your Aisles*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>161</sup> *Irish Independent (II)*, 26 December 1905; Father Mackin of St. Bede's, Jarrow, argued that a Catholic child had 'just as much right to a good education at the expense of the State as the child of any other citizen'. *Northern Catholic Calendar*, 1905, pp. 81-88.

The following week, the UILGB's national executive met in London to discuss this challenge to its authority. The hierarchy, they asserted, had placed 'the education issue above all issues at the ballot box'.<sup>162</sup> Obedience to this directive would mean Irish Catholics in England voting against the Liberal Party, thereby disregarding the Home Rule question, in contradiction of the clear instructions of the UILGB, and would, thus, force Irish voters to choose between their religion and their nationalism. This dilemma caused the UILGB severe difficulties in parliament and in the country; sapped support from Catholic clergy and laity, amongst whom the Catholic Truth Society vigorously campaigned in the directive's favour; and threatened to dominate the League's business at both national and branch level.<sup>163</sup>

In the North East, the scale of working-class Catholic anger over the education issue was revealed during the summer of 1906 in a series of demonstrations. The first was held on Windmill Hill in Gateshead, when an estimated 6,000 people agreed a resolution opposing the Liberal government's Education Bill that would 'convert Catholic schools to Council schools', and demanding 'Catholic schools, Catholic control and Catholic teachers for Catholic children'.<sup>164</sup> At about the same time, a circular from the Catholic miners of Eden Lodge of the Durham Miners' Union called on Catholic representatives from all Durham collieries to form a 'Catholic Schools Defence League'. The Defence League, with John Holmes as secretary, was formed at a meeting in St. Godric's school in Durham, and, by November 1906, each Catholic parish in County Durham had its own 'School Defence League', forming the 'Durham Catholic Education

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<sup>162</sup> Kester Aspden, *Fortress Church. The English Roman Catholic Bishops and Politics, 1903-63* (Leominster, 2002), p. 28.

<sup>163</sup> In 1904, the Archbishop of Westminster's prohibition on using Catholic schools for meetings caused the UILGB problems, even though many priests held branch office. This compounded the UILGB's endemic problem of meetings being held on licensed premises. *TT*, 24 November 1904.

<sup>164</sup> *TCN*, 16 June 1906.

Federation'.<sup>165</sup> At the inaugural meeting, a mass demonstration was planned, and this was held in Durham on Saturday 14 July 1906, just a week after a similar demonstration of 50,000 Catholics in Newcastle.<sup>166</sup> Carrying banners bearing the slogans 'Catholic schools for our bairns', 'Catholic schools – Catholic teachers', and 'Catholic rates for Catholic schools', some 20,000 Catholics marched to Wharton Park, where they heard speeches echoing the banners' sentiments from Auxiliary Bishop Collins and Dean Magill, and pledged themselves 'to the defence of the Catholic schools'.<sup>167</sup> Though nationalist leaders, including John O'Hanlon and Peter Bradley, featured prominently in these demonstrations, and the Ancient Order of Hibernians were out in force, no nationalist demonstrations in the North East, even in the depths of the Anglo-Irish War in 1920, would ever attract such numbers.

The dilemma facing the UILGB over Catholic education was most acutely visible during parliamentary by-elections, and, even before the intervention of the Catholic hierarchy, a by-election in January 1904 in Gateshead witnessed an acrimonious 'tussle between the priests and the emissaries of the United Irish League'.<sup>168</sup> This dispute followed the selection of John Johnson as Liberal candidate for Gateshead.<sup>169</sup> Johnson, as a supporter of Home Rule, probably expected to receive the enthusiastic backing of the UILGB and of all Irish voters in the town, but Johnson was an 'avowed opponent' of the Education Act, and immediately incurred

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<sup>165</sup> The Durham Catholic Education Federation also planned to secure the election of 'friendly representatives' to local education committees and Durham County Council. *Northern Catholic Calendar*, 1912, pp. 112-125.

<sup>166</sup> *TCN*, 14 July 1906.

<sup>167</sup> *DC*, 20 July 1906.

<sup>168</sup> *TT*, 20 January 1904.

<sup>169</sup> As there was no local candidate, Gateshead's Liberals had been 'pressed' by the Durham Miners' Association to adopt their financial secretary, John Johnson, as a Lib-Lab candidate. Johnson, who was an Independent Labour Party member, agreed, though his candidature was initially opposed by Gateshead's labour organisations. Manders, *Gateshead*, pp. 276-277.



the wrath of Canon Greene and the local clergy.<sup>170</sup> Parishioners at St. Joseph's were instructed during mass to vote for the Unionist candidate, Lord Morpeth, whilst Canon Greene sent an open letter to his parishioners arguing that Johnson 'would banish religion from their schools', and that the cause of Home Rule would not suffer if this Liberal candidate was rejected.<sup>171</sup> Not all Catholic voters, however, heeded the advice from the pulpit, and when Father Foxall held a meeting in Dunston to call for support for Lord Morpeth, an amendment was carried in support of Johnson.<sup>172</sup>

The challenge to the UILGB's authority in Gateshead prompted the League's national leadership to appeal for discipline and unity, stating that any declaration of support for the Unionist candidate by the League would 'destroy the independence of our party', and make their organisation 'a mockery and a sham', and insisting that the 'interests of Catholic schools depend entirely on the strength and unity of the Irish Party in Parliament'.<sup>173</sup> Whilst Redmond declared that 'every vote for Johnson was a vote for Home Rule', and O'Connor challenged voters with the direct question 'Are you for Ireland or against Ireland?', Joseph Devlin, the Belfast Nationalist MP, who had been appointed UILGB general secretary in May 1903, was assigned the task of commanding the Irish votes that, in Keating's memorable phrase, were massed 'along Tyneside like a row of rifles over a trench parapet ready for any attack'.<sup>174</sup> Concentrating exclusively on Home Rule, and chaperoned by Councillors Finn and Costelloe, Devlin threw himself into a series of meetings 'in public halls, streets, squares, and outside ship-building yards, ironworks and factories' that

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<sup>170</sup> *TT*, 4 January 1904; this anger was channelled through the Gateshead Catholic Registration Association meeting in St. Joseph's Catholic Young Men's Society rooms. *TCN*, 9 January 1904.

<sup>171</sup> *TT*, 18 and 19 January 1904.

<sup>172</sup> *TT*, 18 January 1904.

<sup>173</sup> *TT*, 20 January 1904.

<sup>174</sup> Keating, 'Tyneside Irish', p. 69; Brady, *O'Connor*, p. 163; *TCN*, 16 and 23 January 1904; for Devlin's role in the campaign, see A. C. Hepburn, *Catholic Belfast and Nationalist Ireland in the Era of Joe Devlin, 1871-1934* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 99-100.

culminated in an eve of poll meeting of 2,000 Irish voters in Gateshead's town hall.<sup>175</sup> There Devlin said that 'they were not fighting for a Liberal or a Tory Party, but for Ireland', and warned the Liberal candidate that if he swerved:

From his pledge to support Home Rule, the Irish would use all their formidable political machinery to oppose him at the next election. As they could send a friend to the House of Commons, so could they drive an enemy out of it.

The Unionist candidate's subsequent defeat was praised by Devlin as 'the greatest Home Rule triumph in fifteen years', and he boasted that 1,800 out of 2,000 Irish voters in the town had voted for Johnson.<sup>176</sup> London's UILGB branches sent their congratulations to the 'Irish Nationalists of Gateshead' on their victory, and condemned 'any attempt to stir up strife among our people at home or in Great Britain'.<sup>177</sup> Though the Catholic education question remained unresolved, at the UILGB's gala in Durham in August 1909, John Johnson MP was able to share the platform with ten priests, including Dean Magill of Brooms, who told his audience that education was 'the final issue of the Catholic cause in England'. Perhaps wisely, Johnson restricted his speech to reaffirming his support for Home Rule.<sup>178</sup>

Before the UILGB's annual convention in Leeds in May 1908, the League's executive issued a manifesto concerning incidents at parliamentary by-elections in Manchester and Wolverhampton, where Irish voters had been advised to vote for Conservative candidates.<sup>179</sup> These incidents, asserted the manifesto, 'strike at the roots of the existence of our organisation, of the Irish Party, and even of the Irish National movement', and that the choice for Irish voters had been simply between

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<sup>175</sup> Keating 'Tyneside Irish', pp. 69-70; *TCN*, 23 January 1904.

<sup>176</sup> Johnson, Liberal, 8,220 votes, Morpeth, Unionist, 7,015 votes. *TT*, 21 January 1904; Keating 'Tyneside Irish', p. 71; Devlin returned to Durham in August to remind the Irish gala audience that it was 'their duty... to drive out of power the present Tory government'. *DC*, 5 August 1904.

<sup>177</sup> *TT*, 20 January 1904.

<sup>178</sup> *DC*, 6 August 1909.

<sup>179</sup> It was claimed that the education question halved the UILGB's support in England. *TT*, 14 May 1908.

‘the avowed supporter of Irish self-government’, and ‘an avowed supporter of Coercion in Ireland’. The manifesto stressed that the IPP alone was the best defender of Catholic schools, and that, in future, anyone who ‘abandons, or advises others to abandon the cause of Ireland’ would lose their League membership. This was not a fight between ‘Faith and Fatherland’, the manifesto concluded, ‘to us they are not rival causes, but the same cause, equally dear to Irish hearts, equally safe and secure in Irish hands’.<sup>180</sup>

Within months of the Leeds convention, the UILGB was presented with the opportunity to demonstrate both its Catholic credentials, and to send a firm message to Asquith’s Liberal government that Irish support should not be taken for granted. In September 1908, the International Eucharistic Congress was held, for the first time in a Protestant country, in London.<sup>181</sup> The climax of this congress, that attracted clerics and laity from around the Catholic world, was to have been a procession of the Eucharist through the streets of London, the first such procession since the reign of Queen Mary in the mid-sixteenth century. The government, however, under pressure from the Protestant Alliance, effectively banned the procession.<sup>182</sup> Uproar ensued, with the Catholic press demanding to know ‘How long are Catholic voters to remain quiescent under the insults levelled at their religion and themselves?’, whilst ‘atheists and anarchists may demonstrate’, and Christianity’s ‘most sacred belief may be parodied and insulted in the public streets’.<sup>183</sup> Inopportunistly for Asquith, the ban coincided with a vacancy in a Liberal-held seat in Newcastle.

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<sup>180</sup> One of the signatories was P. McKenna from Brandon. *II*, 11 May 1908; Patrick McKenna pleaded for unity at Durham’s Irish gala in 1909: ‘If the Irish were united they would be feared and respected, if they were disunited they would be ignored and despised’. *DC*, 6 August 1909.

<sup>181</sup> Carol A. Devlin, ‘The Eucharistic Procession of 1908: The Dilemma of the Liberal Government’, *Church History*, 63.03 (1994), pp. 407-425.

<sup>182</sup> The Protestant Alliance ‘protested on any occasion against anything Roman Catholic’. Devlin, ‘Eucharistic Procession’, p. 415.

<sup>183</sup> *TCN*, 19 September 1908.

On 20 September 1908, Peter Bradley chaired a meeting of Irish voters in the Palace Theatre, supported by Felix Lavery, John O'Hanlon, and Patrick O'Rorke, to discuss a 'Mandate to Irish electors' to be issued by a committee composed of representatives of all five UILGB branches in Newcastle, with the support of Frederick Crilly, the League's general secretary.<sup>184</sup> The mandate bluntly advised all Newcastle's Irish voters to vote for the Unionist candidate, George Renwick, 'as a practical protest against the intolerant and unjustifiable action' of the Prime Minister 'in preventing Catholics from exercising their civil rights in connection with the Eucharistic procession'.<sup>185</sup> Faced with the combined opposition in Newcastle of the UILGB and the Catholic Church, the Liberal candidate, Edward Shortt, was defeated.<sup>186</sup> Before the election, the *Tyneside Catholic News* had declared that 'on this occasion the Catholic vote in Newcastle will be solid', but Irish Catholic unity at the ballot box was an illusion.<sup>187</sup> Whilst the UILGB leadership claimed that 5,000 Irish votes had gone to the Unionist victor, *The Times* estimated that no more than 1,500 Irish voters had supported Renwick, and public opposition to that support had been heard at the meeting on 20 September from UILGB branches in Byker and Newcastle.<sup>188</sup> Moreover there had been a Labour candidate in the election, and the growing appeal of Labour to working-class Irish voters on Tyneside had been clearly demonstrated in Jarrow the previous year (see following section).

In the years before the Great War, the question of Catholic education remained unresolved, and, though diminishing in vigour nationally, continued to divert attention from the goal of Irish self-government, especially at a local level,

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<sup>184</sup> Unable to contact Redmond or O'Connor, both of whom were abroad, Crilly telegraphed O'Rorke that the local UILGB 'must decide how the Irish vote is to go'. *TT*, 22 September 1908.

<sup>185</sup> *FJ*, 21 September 1908.

<sup>186</sup> Renwick, Unionist, 13,863 votes; Shortt, Liberal, 11,720; Harley, Labour, 2,971. *II*, 28 September 1908.

<sup>187</sup> *TCN*, 19 September 1908.

<sup>188</sup> *II*, 28 September 1908; *TT*, 26 September 1908; *TCN*, 26 September 1908.

where many Irish Catholics saw both the Liberals and Labour as ‘tarred with a secularist brush’.<sup>189</sup> Thus, at the UILGB’s gala in Durham in 1910, John Holmes from Quebec, County Durham, and latterly secretary of the Catholic Schools Defence League, launched an attack on Labour councillors over the issue of Catholic education, saying that ‘the biggest enemies the Irish party had on Durham County Council were the Labour representatives, the very men they had sent there’. Holmes then accused these councillors of failing to appoint ‘a single Irish representative in the Education Committee’, and he asked if Irishmen were going to let these ‘Lilliputian, gingerbread warriors... take the priceless gift of faith from them’.<sup>190</sup>

## **The Jarrow By-Election and the Challenge of Labour**

In spite of almost two decades of escalating tension between the working-class membership of the Irish nationalist organisations in Britain and the leadership over support for the labour movement, nationalist policy towards that movement did not change with the UILGB’s formation in 1900. Some change, however, proved irresistible, and in his New Year manifesto of 1906, T. P. O’Connor, whilst not rejecting his favoured Liberal alliance, argued that, as workers had never been ‘fairly represented’ in parliament, there was now ‘a great opportunity... to increase the representation of British Labour in the House’, and advised Irish voters in Britain to give preferential support to Labour candidates, provided that these candidates were ‘sound’ on Home Rule, were not standing against ‘an old and trusted friend of the Irish cause’, and, crucially, could win.<sup>191</sup> The *Irish Independent* commented that the very suggestion of a ‘working alliance’ with Kier Hardie and British Labour ‘has

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<sup>189</sup> Brady has argued that the ‘Catholic interest’ played no part in the January 1910 election, and the focus on Home Rule was greeted ‘with enthusiasm by Irish voters in Britain’. Brady, *O’Connor*, p. 204; Hutchinson, ‘Diaspora Dilemmas’, p. 113.

<sup>190</sup> *DC*, 5 August 1910.

<sup>191</sup> *II*, 1 January 1906; also Fitzpatrick, ‘Irish in Britain’, p. 683.

already created quite a panic amongst those unfriendly or backsliding Liberals who have been so prone to affect contempt for the Irish vote', and inducing panic amongst 'backsliding Liberals' may have been O'Connor's true motive behind this nod in Labour's direction.

Following the UILGB's failure to mobilise the Irish vote in the North East in the 1900 general election, the organisation had sought to strengthen itself. Though the League had been successful in the Gateshead by-election, Owen Kiernan, the League's organiser, was instructed in July 1904 to organise the North East's Irish vote.<sup>192</sup> In three months, Kiernan held 37 meetings in towns and villages across Northumberland and Durham; spoke at a number of 'ladies' branches'; and held 'special meetings' for workers in 'constituencies where the Irish vote is sufficiently powerful to influence the issue, in order to secure the registration of all duly qualified Irish electors'; and it was claimed that, when the general election came, the Irish 'will be found not only ready, but thoroughly equipped for battle'.<sup>193</sup> It has been argued, however, that not only did the UILGB fail in its task of registering voters, but that, contemporary claims to the contrary, 'there is little evidence to suggest that the League was influential in swaying [Irish] voters or getting them to the polls', and the inadequacy of the League's organisation, and the League's failure to appreciate the depth of that inadequacy, was painfully demonstrated in Jarrow in 1907.<sup>194</sup>

On 4 June 1907 the sudden death of the Liberal MP for Jarrow, Sir Charles

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<sup>192</sup> During the Gateshead by-election, the UILGB had opened a campaign office co-managed by John Lavery from Newcastle. *TCN*, 23 January 1904.

<sup>193</sup> In three months, Kiernan held meetings in Annitsford, Ashington, Banktop, Bedlington, Bishop Auckland, Byker, Catchgate, Chester le Street, Consett, Cornsay, Coundon, Cowpen, Crook, Durham City, Framwellgate Moor, Gateshead, Hebburn, Hetton, Houghton le Spring, Jarrow, Lanchester, Langley Moor, Morpeth, New Silksworth, North Shields, Old Shildon, Ryhope, Seaham Harbour, Shotton Colliery, Sunderland, Teams, Thornley, Walker, West Stanley, Willington, and Westwood. *Anglo-Celt*, 5 November 1904.

<sup>194</sup> O'Day, 'Irish Diaspora Politics', pp. 223-227.

Palmer, who had held the division since its formation in 1885, prompted one of the most fiercely contested parliamentary by-elections in Britain before the Great War, and the first in England, since O'Connor's victory in Liverpool in 1885, to be contested by an Irish Nationalist candidate.<sup>195</sup> The background to the contest lay in the Liberals' overwhelming general election victory in January 1906.<sup>196</sup> Whilst welcoming the return of a Liberal government, the Irish party leaders appreciated that, with the magnitude of their majority, this government had no need for Nationalist support at Westminster, and, therefore, no need to pursue Home Rule.<sup>197</sup> The Jarrow by-election, therefore, presented the UILGB with the opportunity both to demonstrate the strength of its influence with Irish voters, and to pressure a government that was proving unwilling to discuss even the possibility of Irish self-government.<sup>198</sup> That the Jarrow by-election would jeopardise the UILGB's new-found 'working alliance' with the labour movement was clearly of lesser importance than persuading a reluctant Liberal government to act.

The crucial decision to field a Nationalist candidate in Jarrow was not taken locally, but in London at a meeting of the UILGB's standing committee. This meeting had followed the United Irish League's convention in Dublin on 21 May 1907, attended by Irish, American, and British delegates, that had met to consider, and then reject, the Liberal government's Irish Council Bill that offered limited Irish control over local government and education, as part of a gradual move to self-

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<sup>195</sup> For the Jarrow by-election see A.W. Purdue, 'Jarrow Politics, 1885-1914: The Challenge to Liberal Hegemony', *Northern History*, 18.1 (1982), pp. 182-198; D. A. J. MacPherson and David Renton, 'Immigrant Politics and North-East Identity, 1907-1973', in Adrian Green and A. J. Pollard (eds), *Regional Identities in North-East England, 1300-2000* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 163-171; Henry Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (London, 1979), pp. 130-146.

<sup>196</sup> In 1906, Liberals won 399 seats; Conservative and Liberal Unionists 156; IPP 83; Labour 29; and others 3. O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, p. 207.

<sup>197</sup> Brady, *O'Connor*, pp. 175-176.

<sup>198</sup> Brady, *O'Connor*, pp. 172, 181-182.

government.<sup>199</sup> O'Connor, who had spoken at the convention, had initially supported the bill and the gradualist strategy that lay behind it, and its rejection, his biographer suggests, compelled him to adopt a more forceful policy towards the Liberals in order to bolster his own position within the nationalist movement.<sup>200</sup>

Following the standing committee's meeting in London, Frederick Crilly sent a telegram inviting:

The Irishmen of the Jarrow division, in view of the inadequate representation of the Irish people of Great Britain in the House of Commons, to nominate a candidate, and to choose an Irish National candidate of genuine Labour and democratic sympathies, and to provide to such candidate the full support of the organisation.<sup>201</sup>

This invitation was 'received with great enthusiasm' in Jarrow's Irish Institute on 9 June 1907 by local Irish councillors and the League's branch president.<sup>202</sup> Fully appreciating the significance of the by-election, the group then agreed not just to nominate their own candidate but to form a committee drawn from across Tyneside. This selection committee with representatives from each branch on Tyneside of the UILGB, Hibernians, and Irish National Foresters, worked quickly, and, on 12 June, T. P. O'Connor himself chaired the meeting in Jarrow at which Alderman John O'Hanlon was officially, and unanimously, adopted as the Nationalist candidate.<sup>203</sup> At the subsequent public meeting, with T. P. O'Connor, Crilly, and leading Tyneside nationalists on the platform, Councillor William O'Connor described O'Hanlon as 'a working man who was prepared to fight for the working people of the town', whilst

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<sup>199</sup> For the Irish Council Bill, see O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, pp. 214-218.

<sup>200</sup> Brady, *O'Connor*, pp. 180-182.

<sup>201</sup> *TCN*, 15 June 1907.

<sup>202</sup> This meeting included C. Canning, president of Jarrow's UILGB; and Councillors Patrick Bennett, Felling; Bernard Kelly, Hebburn; John Casey, Jarrow; and William O'Connor, Jarrow, Chairman of the South Shields Board of Guardians. *TCN*, 15 June 1907; a 'Catholic party' possibly existed in Jarrow from the 1880s, and successfully contested local elections. MacPherson and Renton, 'Immigrant Politics and North-East Identity', p. 169.

<sup>203</sup> John O'Hanlon was 'the most prominent Irish man in the mid-Tyne region'. MacPherson and Renton, 'Immigrant Politics and North-East Identity', p. 168.



Councillor Terence O'Connor said that the time had come when Jarrow should be represented by 'an Irish Nationalist', and throughout the campaign O'Hanlon was presented to the electorate not only as a Nationalist but also as a home-grown working-class man.<sup>204</sup> T. P. O'Connor then told the audience that they were at 'an epoch-making moment in the cause of Ireland' and that the return of O'Hanlon to parliament would be 'a momentous historical event... the beginning of a greater, a stronger movement in favour of Home Rule than they had ever had before', and added, so that no one would be unclear as to the reasons for O'Hanlon's candidacy, that 'it would bring back British Liberalism from the temporary aberrations and humiliating compromise to the older and nobler Liberal traditions'.<sup>205</sup> This message was reinforced the same day by the release of an IPP statement asserting that self-government would only be won by a 'vigorous and well-sustained agitation in Ireland, by a disciplined Party in the Commons, by thorough organisation of the Irish vote in Great Britain, and its use independent of English party interests'. To co-ordinate the campaign, and to ensure national control, Frederick Crilly established an office in O'Hanlon's headquarters in Jarrow.<sup>206</sup>

The Irish vote in Jarrow had been estimated at 3,000 to 4,000, about 20 per cent of the electorate, and the UILGB hoped that their well-known and respected local candidate would combine the Irish working-class vote with that of the Irish 'commercial classes in the town', and, therefore, that O'Hanlon had 'a good

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<sup>204</sup> Those present included Councillors Terence O'Connor, John O'Connor, and John Casey from Jarrow; Councillor Treanor from Hebburn; Peter Bradley, James Courtney Doyle, Felix Lavery, and Patrick O'Rorke from Newcastle; H. Nolan, J. Waters, and M. Murray from Wallsend; Patrick Bennett, J. Kane, E. Kenefick, and G. Geddie from Felling; J. Kennedy from Tyne Dock; B. Cowan from South Shields; H. McGuinness from Gateshead; and C. Canning, president Jarrow UILGB. *TCN*, 22 June 1907; O'Hanlon was the first 'working man' to be elected a councillor in Wallsend. William Richardson *History of the Parish of Wallsend* (Newcastle, 1923), p. 457.

<sup>205</sup> *II*, 13 June 1907.

<sup>206</sup> *II*, 13 and 20 June 1907; campaign rooms were also opened at Boldon, Felling, Hebburn, Wardley, and Whitburn. *TCN*, 29 June 1907.

chance'.<sup>207</sup> There also appears to have been an expectation in O'Hanlon's camp of receiving some support from British working-class voters, and, at his first public meeting in the Co-operative Hall in Hebburn, with Councillor Bernard Kelly in the chair, and Stephen Gwynn, Nationalist MP, in support, O'Hanlon directly appealed to this group, saying that:

The Nationalist Party was to Ireland, exactly what the Labour Party was to England. If the English workmen knew what they owed to the Nationalist Party, if they knew of the years of strife and struggle on behalf of British workers, they would regard the Jarrow contest as a splendid opportunity of giving practical proof of their gratitude by sending to Parliament a representative who was in touch with them, one whom they could trust because he was allied to a Party which had been their friend throughout.<sup>208</sup>

News that the UILGB would 'run an Irish candidate' in the Jarrow by-election was welcomed by the *Irish Independent*, as an indication of 'a more forward policy'.<sup>209</sup> In the North East, support for O'Hanlon's candidature came not only from nationalist organisations, but also from the Seamen's Union in South Shields, and, significantly, from Bishop Collins, who met O'Hanlon to offer his support.<sup>210</sup> From further afield, the Liverpool Nationalist Councillor, Austin Harford, telegraphed his congratulations to the Jarrow Irish on their decision to field a local candidate, whilst the United Irish League's National Directory in Ireland passed a resolution approving of O'Hanlon's candidature and the UILGB's efforts 'on behalf of the Irish national cause, especially among the working-class, whose claims have been so consistently supported by the Irish Party in the past'.<sup>211</sup> The importance of the Jarrow by-election to the nationalist cause was demonstrated by John Redmond's presence in the town on Sunday 30 June at the final campaign meeting. At this meeting, chaired by Terence O'Connor, Redmond predicted that O'Hanlon's election would have 'a

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<sup>207</sup> Pelling, *Popular Politics*, p. 134; *II*, 11 and 13 June 1907.

<sup>208</sup> *TCN*, 22 June 1907.

<sup>209</sup> *II*, 11 June 1907.

<sup>210</sup> *II*, 20 June 1907; *TCN*, 22 June 1907.

<sup>211</sup> *II*, 20 June 1907; *TCN*, 29 June 1907.

dramatic and sensational effect on the cause of Home Rule' and that O'Hanlon would then join 'the oldest and largest Labour Party in Parliament'.<sup>212</sup>

O'Hanlon's candidature, however, outraged the labour movement in Britain and Ireland. In 1902, Pete Curran, general organiser of the Gassworkers' Union, had been selected as the Labour Representation Committee's prospective candidate in Jarrow.<sup>213</sup> In the 1906 general election, Curran, after nurturing the division for four years, challenged the ailing Sir Charles Palmer, and believed that he had failed simply because Jarrow's Irish voters had been instructed by the UILGB to vote for Palmer, a long-time advocate of Home Rule.<sup>214</sup> Thus on Palmer's death, Labour did not expect any further challenge from Jarrow's Irish nationalists, especially as Labour believed that there was 'an unwritten pact' that the nationalists would not oppose 'the workers' candidates'.<sup>215</sup> Frederick Crilly responded, however, by claiming, though with some exaggeration, that the UILGB had supported 40 Labour candidates across Britain in the 1906 general election, of whom 25 were elected, and that those MPs 'owed their seats directly to the Irish vote'.<sup>216</sup> The outrage even spread as far as Dublin, where the Trades Council declared its support for Curran, who, with his Irish Catholic origins and trade union credentials, was described as 'a better Nationalist than many of the Irish members who were always mouthing Nationality', and 'a life-long friend of the Irish cause'. The Dublin Trades Council also expressed regret at the decision of the Jarrow nationalists, describing it as 'the

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<sup>212</sup> *TCN*, 6 July 1907.

<sup>213</sup> Purdue, 'Jarrow Politics', p. 189; Glasgow-born of Irish Catholic parents, Pete Curran, a blacksmith by trade, fought five elections, and was Labour MP for Jarrow from 1907 until 1910. See Clayton, 'Irish Catholics and the British Labour Movement', pp. 284-294.

<sup>214</sup> In the 1906 Jarrow election, Curran received 5,093 votes to Palmer's 8,047. Frank Bealey and Henry Pelling, *Labour and Politics 1900-1906: A History of the Labour Representation Committee* (London, 1958), p. 272; also see Purdue, 'Jarrow Politics', p. 194.

<sup>215</sup> *II*, 11 June 1907.

<sup>216</sup> *TT*, 27 June 1907; Brady claims that the UILGB only supported 20 Labour candidates in 1906 and 13 of these were straight fights with Unionists. Brady, *O'Connor*, p. 175.

greatest muddle ever they made’, and ‘respectfully’ asked Jarrow’s Irish voters to vote for Curran. O’Hanlon, meanwhile, was dismissed as ‘a semi-labour man’, the dupe of a plot devised by Redmond and the Liberal Prime Minister ‘to split the Labour vote in Jarrow’.<sup>217</sup>

In spite of the effort and money expended by the UILGB on O’Hanlon’s campaign, the by-election was won by Curran, who thus became Jarrow’s first Labour MP.<sup>218</sup> A stunned editorial in the *Tyneside Catholic News* stated that ‘not even the strongest opponent of the Nationalist candidate would have predicted the bottom of the poll for Alderman John O’Hanlon’, and calculated that, whilst there were some 3,500 Irish voters in Jarrow, O’Hanlon had received only 60 per cent of that vote, and ‘not a small proportion of this was given by our English and Scottish friends’.<sup>219</sup> The editorial then squarely placed the blame for this failure on the UILGB’s organisation, disclosing the surprisingly poor returns of income to the executive that year from membership cards on Tyneside, and praying that ‘these amounts do not represent the Irish national spirit on Tyneside’.<sup>220</sup> The only solution, so the editorial argued, was the appointment of a ‘permanent and energetic organiser’ in the North East to organise and register Irish voters – ‘Let our watchword be organise! Organise!! Organise!!!’

After the humiliating result was announced, Jeremiah McVeigh, Nationalist MP, told a meeting in Jarrow that the Liberals would never again win the town ‘until they played fair’, thus implying that O’Hanlon’s candidature had been little more

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<sup>217</sup> *II*, 3 July 1907.

<sup>218</sup> Jarrow by-election: Curran, Labour, 4,698; Rose Innes, Unionist, 3,930; Leigh-Hughes, Liberal, 3,474; John O’Hanlon, Irish Nationalist, 2,122. *II*, 6 July 1907; miners were ‘the backbone of Curran’s support’ in the by-election, and during the poll his colours were displayed at Boldon Colliery. Pelling, *Popular Politics*, p. 135.

<sup>219</sup> *TCN*, 13 July 1907.

<sup>220</sup> The returns for 1906-07 were Jarrow £11 (Jarrow £7, Hebburn £3, Felling £1), and the mid-Tyneside towns £3.10 (Wallsend £2, Walker £1.10, Willington Quay £0). *TCN*, 13 July 1907.

than a gesture, an anti-Liberal protest, and that that the election had proved ‘conclusively that the Irish were the dominant force in the Division’.<sup>221</sup> This declaration of Irish solidarity did not, however, go unchallenged. In Jarrow, Curran, whilst acknowledging that O’Hanlon’s candidature had ‘lost me a few votes’, questioned the wisdom of the nationalists’ strategy ‘from the standpoint of securing a solid working-class vote for Home Rule in Great Britain’.<sup>222</sup> More damning still was an analysis of the election by an anonymous ‘Meath Nationalist’:

As for the Irish vote in England, Jarrow disposes of it in all its absurdity. Jarrow the most Irish constituency, unless and with the possible exception of the Scotland division of Liverpool, could not muster more than one-fifth of the total polling strength for the National ‘local’ candidate. And the man he fought hardest during the campaign – the labour man – was returned top of the poll.<sup>223</sup>

Brady has described the Jarrow by-election as ‘a not inconsiderable demonstration of the continuing effectiveness of the Irish vote’.<sup>224</sup> It was not, however, a demonstration that the UILGB repeated, in spite of the defiance displayed at the League’s gala that August in Durham, when O’Hanlon ascribed his candidature to ‘a lack of fidelity on the part of the Liberal party to the principles of Mr Gladstone’, and asserted that:

The Liberal party had had one lesson, the Labour party nearly another, and until the Labour party realised what the Irish party had done for the working men of England in the past and they were prepared to show some gratitude, they would have to remember that the Irish party were on their guard and on the watch, and they would have to tread more carefully lest they found the Irish party in opposition in more places than Jarrow.<sup>225</sup>

Sustained by such defiant rhetoric, however ill-founded, the competition between Irish nationalism and Labour for the votes of the Irish working-class in

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<sup>221</sup> Father Mackin from St. Bede’s told the meeting that, though he had not joined the campaign ‘because of the clerical influence claim’, the diocesan priests were ‘heart and soul with the Irish people’. *TCN*, 13 July 1907.

<sup>222</sup> *II*, 6 July 1907.

<sup>223</sup> *Meath Chronicle*, 13 July 1907.

<sup>224</sup> Brady, *O’Connor*, p. 182.

<sup>225</sup> *DC*, 9 August 1907.

Britain did not diminish after Jarrow, though O'Connor appeared to offer reconciliation, when he fondly described at the UILGB's Durham gala in 1908 how the labour and nationalist movements 'went side by side, step by step', and when, during his speech to the Durham Miners' gala in 1909, he thanked the labour leadership for 'the aid and the assistance, sympathy and hope they had given to him and his countrymen in their struggle on behalf of Ireland'.<sup>226</sup> The competition for Irish votes, returned, however, before the end of 1909, when, in response to the UILGB's call to canvas every Irish voter in every constituency for the forthcoming general election, Keir Hardie declared that the League was 'resented by large sections of Irish workingmen', and that 'the claims of the Irish people could only be won by the working classes of Great Britain rallying to their support'.<sup>227</sup> For many Irish in Britain, the Labour leader's assertions were confirmed by the UILGB's failure to support the Dublin strikers in 1913.<sup>228</sup> Ignored by their nationalist leadership, Irish workers in Britain joined British trade unionists to protest against police brutality in Dublin and to contribute to the relief fund.<sup>229</sup> It was not, however, until the enfeebled remnants of the UILGB met in Leeds in June 1919 that 'co-operation' with the Labour Party was finally admitted by the septuagenarian T. P. O'Connor, but by then it was far too late.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> *DC*, 7 August 1908, 30 July 1909.

<sup>227</sup> *Sunday Independent (SI)*, 19 December 1909, 10 February 1910.

<sup>228</sup> See James McConnel, 'The Irish parliamentary party, industrial relations and the 1913 Dublin Lockout', *Saothar: Journal of the Irish Labour History Society*, 28 (2003), pp. 25-36.

<sup>229</sup> For example, Durham Miners sent £150 to the Dublin strike fund. Durham Miners' Association, Council Minutes, 18 October 1913, p. 212 (DCRO, D/DMA 30); smaller associations sent lesser sums for 'our suffering comrades in Dublin'. Durham County Colliery Enginemen's, Boiler-Minders' and Firemen's Association, Committee Minutes, 14 October 1913 (DCRO, D/EBF 3).

<sup>230</sup> *II*, 9 June 1919.

## Home Rule Revived, 1907-1914

In September 1907, John Redmond declared that only Home Rule could satisfy Ireland's needs: 'We demand this self-government as a right... Resistance to the Act of Union will always remain for us, so long as that Act lasts, a sacred duty' and that:

No ameliorative reforms, no number of Land Acts, or Labourers' Acts or Education Acts, no redress of financial grievances, no material improvements or industrial development can ever satisfy Ireland until Irish laws are made and administered upon Irish soil by Irishmen.<sup>231</sup>

When Hebert Asquith replaced Campbell-Bannerman as Liberal Prime Minister in April 1908, the prospects for the introduction of a new Home Rule Bill in parliament at last seemed brighter. Though the UILGB's membership had fallen, the result, claimed O'Connor, of 'the widespread depression of trade', there were some signs of recovery.<sup>232</sup> In August 1909 at the annual gala in Durham, though Catholic schools still dominated the agenda, 'thousands of loyal sons of Erin', heard J. G. Swift MacNeill, the Protestant Irish Nationalist MP, ask why the recently rebellious Boer states in South Africa had been given 'a full and complete system of representative government', whilst Ireland was still denied 'her own government?'<sup>233</sup> Then, in December 1909, Asquith, in a major speech in the Albert Hall finally 'pledged the Liberals to Home Rule'.<sup>234</sup> In response, the UILGB's executive met in Dublin, with John Redmond in the chair, and announced that the forthcoming general election would be the first since 1892, where Home Rule had been the 'leading issue', and that all Liberal candidates, who supported Asquith's declaration, should receive 'the hearty support of the Irish voters'. In addition, all League branches were instructed that 'no effort should be spared to keep the Irish vote unbroken in this supremely

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<sup>231</sup> Quoted in O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, p. 221.

<sup>232</sup> O'Connor's report to the Manchester UILGB convention. *II*, 31 May 1909.

<sup>233</sup> *DC*, 6 August 1909; *FJ*, 3 August 1909.

<sup>234</sup> Brady, *O'Connor*, p. 198; O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, pp. 230-231.

critical hour'.<sup>235</sup> During the January 1910 general election, however, in two North East constituencies where there were three-cornered contests, the UILGB bowed to local pressure from Irish voters and agreed to support Labour candidates, rather than Liberal. Thus John Johnson, Gateshead's sitting Labour MP, and Patrick Walls, Labour's Catholic candidate in Middlesbrough, where an estimated 15 per cent of the electorate was Irish, received the UILGB's blessing. Yet, in spite of the League's endorsement, both lost to Liberal candidates.<sup>236</sup>

The Liberal vote collapsed in the January 1910 election from the heights of the 1906 landslide, and left the party dependent on either Labour or the IPP to remain in power, providing John Redmond with 'a stronger tactical position than Parnell had enjoyed'.<sup>237</sup> In March 1910, Redmond visited Newcastle for St. Patrick's Day and told an audience of 4,000 that the Liberals would 'stand or fall by the Albert Hall policy'. At a later reception, Peter Bradley, who had also chaired the main meeting, presented Redmond with a cheque for £100 for the Irish Parliamentary Fund.<sup>238</sup> With Home Rule once more a Liberal priority, if only by necessity, O'Connor delivered an optimistic report to the UILGB's convention in Belfast announcing that the decline was over; that the League had had its 'most successful year' since its foundation in 1900; and that its receipts of £5,067 were the highest ever attained.<sup>239</sup>

During the second election campaign of 1910, which left the balance of power unchanged in Redmond's hands, Swift MacNeill toured the North East and

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<sup>235</sup> *III*, 19 December 1909.

<sup>236</sup> Neal Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People: The General Elections of 1910* (London, 1972), pp. 350-352; Gateshead miners voted for the Liberals in 1910 because Johnson supported the eight hour day, which went against local working practices. Manders, *Gateshead*, p. 279.

<sup>237</sup> In January 1910, the Liberals won 275 seats, Unionists 273, Labour 40, Home Rulers 83 (including 71 IPP), and Irish Unionists 21. O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, p. 231; Brady, *O'Connor*, p. 199; for an exhaustive study of the 1910 elections, see Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People*.

<sup>238</sup> *II*, 17 March 1910.

<sup>239</sup> *FJ*, 16 May 1910.



wrote of his experiences in the *Freeman's Journal*.<sup>240</sup> These experiences provide an insight into the condition of the Irish in the region prior to the Great War. Visiting Hartlepool on the day before the poll returned the Liberal, Stephen Furness, with a majority of just 48 votes, Swift MacNeill observed that 'it was hard to believe that one was in England, and not in Ireland', and commented that the Liberal victory in Hartlepool, where he met John O'Hanlon, 'proved [the] power of a solid and united Irish vote'. Swift MacNeill also visited Felling, Jarrow, North Shields, Sunderland, and Newcastle, where he saw Asquith address a meeting of Irish voters, chaired by the ubiquitous Peter Bradley, and heard Edward Shortt, the Liberal candidate, 'pledging himself heart and soul to Home Rule'. After leaving the North East, Swift MacNeill wrote that 'the union of the Irishry of Great Britain into one homogenous body, acting together... was the dream of Isaac Butt', and that 'the project, after a generation, has succeeded beyond his wildest flights of imagination'. In spite of all the setbacks, that unity, however incomplete, and perseverance was about to be rewarded.

In April 1912, some 20 years after the failure of the second Home Rule Bill, a third bill was introduced by the Liberal government.<sup>241</sup> Whilst the bill followed its tortuous course through parliament, the UILGB's work continued, and, at the League's convention in Dublin in May 1913, O'Connor confidently predicted that 'this may be the last convention in its present shape and for its present purpose'.<sup>242</sup> Six months later, in November 1913, during a speech in Newcastle arranged by the Newcastle Liberal and Radical Association, John Redmond, whose rhetoric epitomised the IPP's 'policy of eternal optimism', lyrically described 'the full blaze

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<sup>240</sup> O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, p. 235; *FJ*, 23 December 1910.

<sup>241</sup> For the 3<sup>rd</sup> Home Rule Bill, see O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, pp. 240-266.

<sup>242</sup> *SII*, 11 May 1913.

and glory of the coming sunrise of Ireland’, and asserted that ‘in a few short months... the Irish question, which had distracted not only Ireland but Great Britain for over a century would have been laid to rest’.<sup>243</sup> Only then, Redmond argued, would the Irish in Britain be able to apply all their efforts to the promotion of ‘social and political reform’ in Britain for the benefit of the ‘great masses of the people’.<sup>244</sup>

## Conclusion

During the 1880s, Irish nationalist organisations had thrived in the North East of England from the ‘Home Rule hotbed’ of Newcastle to the colliery villages at the heart of the Durham coalfield, but, in the years following Parnell’s fall, organised nationalism, riven by division, went into sharp decline in the North East, as across the rest of Britain.<sup>245</sup> By 1898, the membership of the largest organisation, the anti-Parnellite INLGB, had collapsed to 15,000, and Fielding has suggested that many Irish in Britain during the 1890s simply abandoned nationalism ‘in despair’, as exemplified by the attitude of the once-zealous nationalist miners in Langley Park in 1897.<sup>246</sup> Yet, by the end of 1913, a confident United Irish League of Great Britain was about to enter its most successful year, and Home Rule had become, in spite of unresolved difficulties in parliament and Ireland, a very real possibility rather than just an optimist’s dream. In the North East, Parnellite and anti-Parnellite rivalries were forgotten, and the Fenians and their supporters, who had flourished on Tyneside and Teesside during the years of division, had been reduced to a mere handful of aging revolutionaries.

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<sup>243</sup> *II*, 15 November 1913; Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, p. 211.

<sup>244</sup> Redmond, on this his last visit to Newcastle, was presented with a loyal address from Tyneside’s UILGB by Peter Bradley. *FJ*, 14 November 1913.

<sup>245</sup> Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism*, p. 59.

<sup>246</sup> Fitzpatrick, ‘Irish in Britain’, p. 679; Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity*, p. 81; *TN*, 20 February 1897.

Nevertheless, for the vast majority of Irish people living in Britain before the Great War, for whom economic survival was the overriding motivation, and their children's education the most emotive issue, Irish nationalist organisations were of little consequence, and the ineffectiveness of these organisations, and especially the UILGB, has been fully discussed by Fielding, Fitzpatrick, O'Day, and Swift.<sup>247</sup> However, whilst it is true that the membership of these organisations was only a fraction of the total Irish population of Britain, and that the nationalist leaders consistently overstated their claim to influence the Irish vote in Britain, and the outcome of elections, these organisations did have a beneficial, and lasting, effect on the Irish in Britain by introducing them to politics, and particularly to local British politics.

Thus in the years before the Great War, the nationalist organisations both encouraged and enabled hundreds of men, and increasingly women, within the Irish community in Britain to become politically active, and demonstrated to them the importance of committees and resolutions, of demonstrations and concerted action, and presented to them, on platforms across Britain, Irish political figures of the highest standing from Parnell to John Redmond and from Michael Davitt to Joseph Devlin. The nationalist organisations also facilitated the development of a committed, local leadership, and introduced that leadership to British municipal politics.<sup>248</sup> This was graphically demonstrated during the Jarrow by-election in 1907, when John Redmond and T. P. O'Connor willingly shared platforms with local Irish councillors from across Tyneside; and by 1914 an increasing number of Irish county, municipal, and urban district councillors, who, together with Poor Law guardians,

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<sup>247</sup> Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity*, p. 81; Fitzpatrick, 'Irish in Britain', pp. 679-680; O'Day, 'Irish Diaspora Politics', p. 236; Swift, *Irish Migrants in Britain*, p. 178.

<sup>248</sup> For the emergence of Irish Catholics in local politics in Liverpool and Manchester, see Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, p. 156; and Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity*, pp. 90-91.

held, in parallel with their nationalist activities, elected office, usually as independents, across the North East.<sup>249</sup> This was in spite of the nationalist organisations' discouragement of participation in local British politics, as being a distraction from the central issue of Irish self-government, and in spite of those elected being derided as 'John Bull Irishmen', who aped English ways.<sup>250</sup> Thus by 1914, Durham County Council had three elected Irish councillors, Patrick Bennett from Felling, Bernard Kelly from Hebburn, and Terence O'Connor from Jarrow; whilst municipal councillors included John O'Hanlon in Wallsend, William Costelloe and John Brennan in Gateshead, and Michael Hoey in Sunderland; district councillors included John Farnon in Gosforth, Frank Gilfoyle in Hebburn, and Patrick Duffy in Stanley, and guardians included James Courtney Doyle in Newcastle Westgate, John Edward Scanlan in Newcastle Byker, and Francis Jones in Hartlepool. Then, in August 1914, the Irish nationalist organisations in the North East were presented with the opportunity of reaching out beyond their ethnic confines, beyond their own people, and influencing the local host community. It was an opportunity that was not missed, as will be discussed in the next chapter, and it was to be these locally-elected, politically-experienced Irish nationalist leaders, who were to play such an important role in the events of 1914.

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<sup>249</sup> See the annual *Northern Catholic Calendars* for lists of Catholics holding elected office in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle between 1890 and 1914.

<sup>250</sup> O'Day, 'Irish Diaspora Politics', p. 224; after a letter attacked Tyneside's 'John Bull Irishmen', Thomas Finlay replied defending those who held elected office as 'all Irish, all true to their country'. *Tyneside and Wearside Catholic News (TWCN)*, 15 January 1910.

## Chapter 2

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### **‘Irishmen to Arms’: Irish Nationalist Organisations in the North East, 1914-1916**

#### **Introduction**

On Bank Holiday Monday 3 August 1914, innocent of the impending transformation of Irish – and world – politics, crowds of Irish men and women from across the North East processed from Durham’s Market Place to Wharton Park to take part in the twelfth – and last – annual gala of the County Durham branches of the United Irish League of Great Britain. The platform party comprised the customary representatives of the nationalist establishment from across County Durham and Tyneside, together with the leadership of the Ancient Order of Hibernians and Irish National Foresters: John O’Hanlon, Mayor of Wallsend; John Mulcahy from Birtley, gala and UILGB Northern organiser; Councillor Patrick Duffy from West Stanley, AOH English Provincial director; James McLarney from Newcastle, AOH District secretary; plus municipal councillors from Bedlington, South Shields, Washington, and Willington Quay.<sup>1</sup>

As in previous years, loyalty was re-pledged to John Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party, though some of the optimism of those previous years was absent. In August 1912, the gala crowds had been told ‘to celebrate the coming of Home Rule’, whilst in August 1913, with a parliament in Dublin confidently expected before the next gala was held, the ‘education question’ had been to the

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<sup>1</sup> DC, 7 August 1914.

forefront.<sup>2</sup> At this gala, however, with Home Rule still undelivered, and just days after British soldiers had shot and bayoneted unarmed civilians in Dublin, speakers railed against the ‘storm of abuse’ that was assaulting the IPP ‘from the enemies of Ireland and especially the Orange rebels led by Carson’, and condemned the ‘recent military outrage in Dublin’, demanding ‘the most impartial enquiry into the circumstances of the crime’.<sup>3</sup> There was also much speculation on the ominous reports emanating from Europe’s capitals, for this was the day before Britain declared war on Germany, and the day that John Redmond, in offering Irish solidarity with Britain, transformed Irish politics.

This chapter opens with a detailed assessment of the health of the UILGB, Ancient Order of Hibernians, and Irish National Foresters in the North East in the months prior to the outbreak of war in August 1914, before casting new light on the under-researched Irish Volunteer movement on Tyneside. The discussion then explains how, with the coming of war, nationalist organisations across Britain, following Redmond’s lead, seized the opportunity to prove both their loyalty to Britain, and Ireland’s fitness for self-government, through the mobilisation of the Irish living in Britain in support of the war. This culminated in the North East with the raising, through the combined efforts of the nationalist organisations, of the Tyneside Irish Brigade for the British Army, as disciplined, khaki-clad proof of that loyalty and fitness. Finally, it explores how the energies of the Irish nationalist organisations in the North East were ultimately exhausted by that mobilisation,

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<sup>2</sup> DC, 9 August 1912, 8 August 1913.

<sup>3</sup> For the Bachelor’s Walk incident, see F. X. Martin (ed.), *The Howth Gun-Running and the Kilcoole Gun-Running 1914* (Dublin, 1964), pp. 171-184; also Charles Townshend, *Easter 1916: The Irish Rebellion* (London, 2005), p. 42; in September 1913, an Orange Order rally in Wharton Park had welcomed the Ulster leader, Sir Edward Carson, to the North East. D. M. Jackson and D. M. MacRaid, ‘The Conserving Crowd: Mass Unionist Demonstrations in Liverpool and Tyneside, 1912-13’, in D. George Boyce and Alan O’Day (eds), *The Ulster Crisis 1885-1921* (Basingstoke, 2006), pp. 238-239.

leaving them unable to respond to the re-emergence of advanced nationalist politics in Ireland after 1916.

## **The United Irish League of Great Britain**

By May 1914, unlike its Irish counterpart that was ‘significantly in decline’ in the face of competition from the AOH, the UILGB had grown to 47,000 members in 550 branches.<sup>4</sup> This growth was reflected in the North East, where, for example, the South Shields branch reported an increase in membership from 78 to 330 since its foundation, and was planning ‘one of the finest workmen’s clubs in the North of England’. The branch also confidently expected to initiate ‘free scholarships to be competed for by the children of the members’.<sup>5</sup> Organisationally, the UILGB in the North East remained strong in 1914 (Appendix 1). After the debacle of the Jarrow by-election, and the subsequent demand for a ‘permanent and energetic’ regional organiser, John Mulcahy from Birtley had been appointed in late 1909 as Northern organiser to oversee:

The interests of the Irish cause, assisting the branches of the organization as much as possible in their efforts to secure the return of those candidates who are faithful to the Home Rule pledge given by the Premier, and to keep them posted at headquarters with all the information necessary to assist them in coming to a decision as to the best policy to be pursued in any three-cornered contest that may arise.<sup>6</sup>

Mulcahy’s first major test was a by-election in North West Durham in January 1914, where, it was estimated, Irish voters comprised 15 per cent of the electorate.<sup>7</sup> On 9 January, the UILGB’s executive urged Irish voters to support the new Liberal

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<sup>4</sup> The UILGB’s record membership of 1914, however, only translated into an average of 85 members per branch. See *FJ*, 1 June 1914; O’Day, ‘Irish Diaspora Politics’, p. 225; Michael Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party: Provincial Ireland 1910-1916* (Oxford, 2005), p. 48.

<sup>5</sup> *TCN*, 28 February 1914.

<sup>6</sup> *TCN*, 13 July 1907; letter to John Mulcahy from Frederick Crilly. *TWCN*, 1 January 1910; also see *TT*, 17 December 1909.

<sup>7</sup> This by-election was necessitated by the appointment of Atherley-Jones, Liberal MP since 1885, as a judge. *TT*, 1 January 1914; there were an estimated 3,000 Irish voters from the total of 20,233 voters registered. *TT*, 31 January 1914.

candidate, Aneurin Williams, to ‘render nugatory the hopes entertained by the Tories of capturing the seat’.<sup>8</sup> Organising the Irish vote was not helped by its being scattered across the numerous small iron towns and colliery villages of North West Durham.<sup>9</sup> Mulcahy, however, swiftly set up a ‘Central Committee’ formed of delegates from each local League branch; election offices were opened; voters canvassed; and speeches arranged in support of the Liberal candidate.<sup>10</sup>

Previous parliamentary elections in North West Durham had been straight contests between Liberals and Unionists, but in January 1914 Labour decided to put up its own candidate, George Henry Stuart. This decision was promptly condemned by the Hibernian’s Provincial organiser, John McGoldrick, who had previously been the UILGB’s secretary in Durham.<sup>11</sup> McGoldrick argued that Labour ‘should let us have a straight fight and, when Home Rule is out of the way, they would have a claim to our votes’.<sup>12</sup> With both the Liberal and Labour candidates speaking in favour of Home Rule, Councillor Patrick Duffy admitted that ‘he saw no difference between the Liberal and Labour position’ [on Home Rule], but still confidently predicted that ‘Irishmen would vote solid [for the Liberal candidate] and make their influence felt so as to prevent the Tory from stepping in’.<sup>13</sup> Many Irish voters, however, openly defied the UILGB’s urgings and supported the Labour candidate, and *The Times* argued that the fact that four of Stuart’s nomination papers had been signed ‘wholly by Irishmen’ was ‘proof of the statement, which has frequently been

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<sup>8</sup> *TT*, 10 January 1914; *TCN*, 17 January 1914.

<sup>9</sup> Possibly 75% of voters in North West Durham were miners. *TT*, 29 January 1914.

<sup>10</sup> Speakers included two IPP MPs, Thomas Scanlan and J. P. Boland. *TCN*, 24 January 1914.

<sup>11</sup> *TCN*, 17 January 1914; the interchange of UILGB and AOH members in the North East mirrored the situation in Ireland. In Ireland that interchange reflected the AOH’s growth at the UIL’s expense, and was a source of tension. See Wheatley, *Nationalism*, pp. 50-52.

<sup>12</sup> *TCN*, 17 January 1914.

<sup>13</sup> *TT*, 5 January 1914.



made, that Mr Williams will not secure the solid nationalist vote'.<sup>14</sup> The close fought, three-cornered election was won by the Liberal candidate, though with a much reduced majority.<sup>15</sup> Ignoring the desertion to Labour of erstwhile nationalist voters, the UILGB celebrated victory over the 'bullyings and threats' of Sir Edward Carson, who had telegraphed his support to the Unionist candidate, and congratulated John Mulcahy on his effective organisation.<sup>16</sup> Mulcahy's organisational talents were further tested in October 1914, when he was appointed joint secretary of the Tyneside Irish committee.

During the North West Durham campaign, a meeting of Byker's UILGB's branch, chaired by John Scanlan, and attended by John Mulcahy, called for a meeting of all Newcastle branches to discuss 'local representation on the City Council'.<sup>17</sup> This was broadened by Mulcahy into a general conference that was held at the end of April 1914 in Newcastle's National Club.<sup>18</sup> Under discussion, however, was not just voter registration and municipal representation, but how the League should respond to the Durham Miners' Association's decision to run Labour candidates across County Durham. James Cahill, from South Shields, argued that the miners' decision had created a 'new situation', and that, 'whilst loyalty to the Central [UILGB] Authority should always be maintained, local opinion should be consulted before a mandate is issued'.<sup>19</sup> As demonstrated in the North West Durham by-election in 1914, the long-standing alliance of nationalists and Liberals was coming under

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<sup>14</sup> *TT*, 24 January 1914.

<sup>15</sup> North West Durham election: Liberal, 7,241 votes; Unionist, 5,564; Labour, 5,026. The Liberal majority was 1,677 (4,171 in December 1910). *TT*, 2 February 1914.

<sup>16</sup> *FJ*, 2 February 1914; *TT*, 27 January 1914.

<sup>17</sup> *TCN*, 24 January 1914.

<sup>18</sup> UILGB branches attending: Bedlington, Birtley, Byker, Cowpen, Dipton, Gateshead, Hartlepool, Houghton le Spring, Newcastle, South Shields, Southwick, Spennymoor, Thornley, Trimdon, Tyne Dock, West Stanley, and Wingate. *TCN*, 2 May 1914.

<sup>19</sup> *Catholic Times and Catholic Opinion (CTCO)*, 1 May 1914; James Cahill was secretary of South Shields' AOH branch. *BNW*, 22 June 1914.

increasing pressure from Irish working-class voters anxious to support the burgeoning, and increasingly confident, Labour Party in the North East.

Away from parliamentary elections, St. Patrick's Day was the traditional annual focus of nationalist enthusiasm in the region, and 'in that dangerous spring of 1914', against a backdrop of continuing opposition to the Home Rule Bill and mounting militancy in Ulster, committees were formed in Newcastle and Gateshead to organise the events.<sup>20</sup> Leading the demonstrations were two Nationalist MPs, John Dillon, on his first visit to Tyneside for 22 years, and P. J. Brady.<sup>21</sup> At Newcastle town hall on 14 March, with the veteran Peter Bradley in the chair, Dillon addressed the deteriorating situation at the Curragh, where some 50 officers were demanding that the British Army should not be used to enforce Home Rule on Ulster, warning his audience that:

If the officers could refuse to go against Ulstermen, the rank and file could refuse to go against their countrymen on strike. Revolution and mutiny were being talked about in every drawing room and at every dinner table, as though it were a fashionable doctrine, but, if Home Rule were defeated by such means as that, they would be preparing an avalanche of misfortune such as had not overtaken the aristocracy or any class since the days of the French Revolution.<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile at Hebburn, Brady, choosing a target no doubt popular with his audience, argued that 'if the people of England had had their way, Ireland would have been enjoying Home Rule since 1893, but the House of Lords stood in the way'.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> F. S. L. Lyons, 'The developing crisis, 1907-14', in Vaughan (ed.), *New History of Ireland*, p. 140; John Edward Scanlan was chairman of Newcastle's organising committee. *TCN*, 31 January 1914; a similar committee was formed in Gateshead chaired by James Doyle. *TCN*, 14 February 1914.

<sup>21</sup> Dillon spoke at Newcastle, Consett, and West Stanley, whilst Brady spoke at Darlington and Hebburn *TCN*, 7 March 1914.

<sup>22</sup> *Newcastle Daily Chronicle (NDC)*, 16 March 1914; for the 'Curragh Mutiny', see Lyons, 'The developing crisis', pp. 141-142.

<sup>23</sup> *TCN*, 28 March 1914.

## The Ancient Order of Hibernians

The UILGB was not, however, the only Irish nationalist organisation active in the North East in 1914. Though officially an ‘approved society’ under the National Insurance Act of 1911, and whose ‘primary purpose was working-class welfare’, the Ancient Order of Hibernians (Board of Erin) did not shy away from political activity, and was thriving both in Ireland and Britain in 1914.<sup>24</sup> Thus whilst Michael Wheatley has shown that the AOH in Ireland was growing ‘in stark contrast’ to the United Irish League, and Fitzpatrick has argued that, in West Cork at least, the Hibernians had supplanted the UIL as the IPP’s ‘most active provincial organ’, the Hibernians on Tyneside too had grown from seven to 40 divisions ‘in about seven years’ (though, to date, only 24 AOH divisions have been positively located in the North East in 1914 – Appendix 1), and, in recognition of their strength, held four of the nine places on the Provincial Board of England.<sup>25</sup>

In 1913 in Newcastle, at the organisation’s first convention to be held in England, the AOH was acclaimed by Daniel Boyle, MP for North Mayo, as ‘a truly ideal society and one which every Catholic should be associated with’.<sup>26</sup> Later historians have not been so generous, with one describing the AOH, in its Irish context, as the IPP’s ‘own strong-arm organisation... dedicated not so much to opposing loyalists as to crushing dissent within the nationalist movement’.<sup>27</sup> Whilst no evidence has, however, been found of such activity in the North East, there is

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<sup>24</sup> By 1915, the AOH in Ireland had swollen to 1,800 branches with 100,000 members. Much of this success had been ascribed to the presidency from 1905 of Joseph Devlin. Hepburn, *Joe Devlin*, pp. 90-99.

<sup>25</sup> Wheatley, *Nationalism*, pp. 48-49; David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life, 1913-1921: Provincial Experience of War and Revolution* (Cork, 1998), p. 82; *TCN*, 21 February 1914; in 1913, the North East’s members of the AOH’s English Provincial Board were Patrick Duffy, director; James McLarney, secretary; John McGoldrick, organiser; and John O’Hanlon, local president. The AOH also grew in Liverpool from one division in 1912 to nine in 1913. *TCN*, 3 May 1913.

<sup>26</sup> *TCN*, 9 August 1913.

<sup>27</sup> Townshend, *Easter 1916*, p. 42.

evidence to suggest that the AOH divisions were attracting more members in the region than any branch of the UILGB. Many of these new members were women or youths, and new divisions continued to be formed in the summer of 1914.<sup>28</sup> An example of the AOH's success immediately prior to the Great War may be seen in the mining villages of Trimdon in County Durham. In February 1914, the Trimdon '607' Division claimed a membership of 768 men and 368 women (22 of whom had made maternity claims during the previous twelve months), and a social event the preceding month had attracted 85 couples.<sup>29</sup> There was also a UILGB branch in Trimdon, and, whilst no evidence of membership numbers has been found, it was unlikely to have matched the AOH division's impressive total, though it was likely that many local Irish Catholics held dual membership.<sup>30</sup>

In Britain, as in Ireland, the Hibernians, unlike the UILGB, were unashamedly Catholic.<sup>31</sup> This sectarianism, springing from the AOH's origins in the old Ribbon societies, was both a source of strength and vitality to the movement in the North East, as was demonstrated in two public displays in County Durham in the early summer of 1914 that reveal the extent of Hibernian support in the region. In May, to mark the inauguration of a new division in Seaham Harbour, a march was held through the town with representatives, all in their distinctive regalia of green

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<sup>28</sup> By April 1914 there were 15 Ladies' Auxiliary divisions in the North East. *TCN*, 4 April 1914; in 1913, South Shields' AOH formed a 'juvenile branch' for boys aged 14 to 16 years. Notice Book, St. Bede's RC Church, South Shields, 27 April 1913 (TWA, C.SS 29/11/13); AOH divisions were reported in June 1914 as having been formed at Ashington and Thornley, with Ladies' Axillaries at Seaham, South Shields, and Sunderland. *TCN*, 27 June 1914; possibly the last, new AOH Division formed in 1914 was at Blyth. *TCN*, 22 August 1914.

<sup>29</sup> The maternity claims cost £33. *TCN*, 18 April 1914; in Ireland, the AOH supported more social activities than the UIL. Wheatley, *Nationalism*, p. 51.

<sup>30</sup> For example, Thomas Archbold, who presided at Trimdon's Hibernian social, was also vice-president of the local UILGB. *TCN*, 31 January and 18 April 1914.

<sup>31</sup> The AOH in Ulster was a 'Catholic, militant nationalist and largely working and lower class separatist organisation'. Fergal McCluskey, *Fenians and Ribbonmen: The development of republican politics in East Tyrone, 1898-1918* (Manchester, 2011), pp. 4-5; the AOH in Ireland was 'overtly sectarian'. Wheatley, *Nationalism*, p. 51; the AOH in Britain was 'a stridently Catholic society'. Fitzpatrick, 'Irish in Britain', p. 674.

and gold, from divisions across the North East.<sup>32</sup> The following month, a second parade was organised in South Shields by the town's Ladies' Auxiliary.<sup>33</sup> Entertained by the Harton Colliery Band, the marchers, numbering over 2,000, including many women, were headed by the District's 'silken banner' and a local girl dressed as 'Erin Triumphant', escorted by four children dressed as Ireland's four provinces.<sup>34</sup> Before that parade began, Father Joseph Byrne, parish priest at St. Bede's, assured his audience, with total disregard for the Protestant Irish, that 'the prayer of St. Patrick had been answered, the whole Irish nation had remained faithful to the faith of St. Patrick, and she was about to receive her freedom from hands that had ruled with a rod of iron for centuries'.<sup>35</sup> In spite of such confident, even provocative, public displays of Irish Catholicism and the regional presence of the Orange Order, sectarian politics in the North East never reached the levels seen in Liverpool, and these demonstrations passed off without incident.<sup>36</sup>

## The Irish National Foresters

The third element of organised Irish nationalism in the North East in 1914 was the Irish National Foresters. Though dismissed in Scotland in the 1890s as no more than a social organisation, the Foresters in Ireland has been described as both a 'nationalist working-class benevolent society... which espoused a non-sectarian platform'; and as 'a less active, more middle-aged, middle-class version of the

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<sup>32</sup> AOH divisions present: Consett, Dipton, Easington, Felling, Hebburn, Horden, Newcastle, Ryhope, South Shields, Stanley, Sunderland, Thornley, Trimdon Grange, Tyne Dock, Ushaw Moor, and Wallsend. *TCN*, 9 May 1914.

<sup>33</sup> AOH divisions present: Ashington, Bedlington, Blyth, Dipton, Easington, Hebburn, Horden, Jarrow, Newcastle, Seaham, Thornley, Wallsend, West Stanley, and Westwood. *TCN*, 27 June 1914.

<sup>34</sup> *BNW*, 22 June 1914.

<sup>35</sup> Father Byrne, a passionate advocate of an Irish Republic, was parish priest at St. Bede's, South Shields, from 1911 to 1942. Morris and Gooch, *Down Your Aisles*, p. 216.

<sup>36</sup> The only serious sectarian friction in the North East between 1912 and 1914 was in Jarrow, where there were two Orange Lodges, when police were called to a pro-Unionist rally in March 1912. In October 1913, the largest indoor anti-Home Rule rally in England was held in Wallsend and passed without incident. Daniel M. Jackson, *Popular Opposition to Irish Home Rule in Edwardian Britain* (Liverpool, 2009), pp. 145, 181.

Hibernians', whose 'main, public, political function seemed to be to march, in regalia' on nationalist holy days.<sup>37</sup> Little evidence has, however, been found of the INF's activities or membership in the North East. In 1908, a report of a conference of Tyneside's INF branches listed 13 branches, though, to date, only eight branches have been positively identified in 1914 (Appendix 1).<sup>38</sup> Despite the paucity of newspaper reports from the North East, the Foresters, however, had more than just a token presence in Britain, and at the 1917 annual convention held at Falkirk, it was reported that there were 756 branches in Britain (down from 788 branches in 1916).<sup>39</sup> The INF also survived on Tyneside long after the last UILGB branch had closed, and a branch, using the name 'Michael Collins', was still meeting in Gateshead in 1924.<sup>40</sup>

Unfortunately, few individual North Eastern Foresters are named in the sparse newspaper reports, but one name is prominent – Austin McNamara, who was secretary of the INF's 'Edward Savage' branch in Newcastle in July 1914, and who was, as will be seen, instrumental in the formation in Newcastle of branches of both the Irish Labour Party and Irish Self-Determination League.<sup>41</sup> Intriguingly, it is also possible that, in the North East at least, the INF had a more advanced nationalist outlook than the AOH or UILGB, as evidenced by its early commitment to the Irish Volunteer movement on Tyneside, as discussed in the next section, and further, more detailed, research on the INF might prove rewarding.

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<sup>37</sup> Fitzpatrick, 'Irish in Britain', p. 679; McCluskey, *Fenians and Ribbonmen*, p. 15; Wheatley, *Nationalism*, p. 53.

<sup>38</sup> 1908 INF conference, branches attending: 'Fr John Murphy' Benwell; 'Dawn of Erin' Lemington; 'John Redmond' Birtley; 'Willie Redmond' Birtley; 'Exiles' Darlington; 'Patrick Bennett' Felling; 'Bernard M'Anulty' Hebburn; 'Harp of Erin' Gateshead; 'St. Anthony of Padua' Walker; and 'Edward Savage' Newcastle. Branches not attending: 'Fr Charles Hayes' Willington Quay; 'James Stephens' Wallsend; and 'Fr O'Hare' Ashington. *TCN*, 19 September 1908; in January 1916, there were only eleven INF branches in the five Irish counties under study. Wheatley, *Nationalism*, p. 53.

<sup>39</sup> *TCN*, 11 August 1917.

<sup>40</sup> *TCN*, 9 February and 18 October 1924.

<sup>41</sup> *TCN*, 11 July 1914.

## The Irish Volunteers on Tyneside

Following the introduction of the third Home Rule Bill in parliament in April 1912, an armed citizens' militia was raised in Ulster 'to resist Home Rule by force of arms', and by the end of the year there were 20 battalions of the Ulster Volunteer Force in Belfast alone.<sup>42</sup> Charles Townshend has asserted that this threat of armed rebellion in Ulster 'transformed and militarised the language of Irish politics', and it was inevitable that Irish nationalists would respond in kind.<sup>43</sup> Initially this response was limited to secret drilling in Dublin organised by the IRB, but, on 25 November 1913, the nationalists' own militia – the Irish Volunteers – was launched at a public meeting in Dublin.<sup>44</sup>

Before the Curragh 'mutiny' in March 1914, recruitment to the Irish Volunteers was slow, with fewer than 20,000 men enrolled.<sup>45</sup> The surrender to the British officers' demands, however, by a Liberal government 'destitute of all backbone', outraged nationalist opinion in Ireland and Britain.<sup>46</sup> Enraged still more by the UVF's unhindered landing of weapons at Larne in April 1914, 'formerly quiescent' nationalists mobilised in defence of Home Rule, and, by the end of July, Irish Volunteer strength on paper in Ireland stood at 150,000 men.<sup>47</sup> With the

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<sup>42</sup> Bulmer Hobson, 'The foundation and growth of the Irish Volunteers, 1913-14', in F. X. Martin (ed.) *The Irish Volunteers 1913-1915: Recollections and Documents* (Dublin, 1963), p. 16; Townshend, *Easter 1916*, p. 33; the UVF reached its maximum strength of 110,000 in July 1914, and, whilst militarily unable to withstand attack by Regular British divisions, it has been suggested that the UVF would have been capable of defeating a combined force of RIC, Irish Volunteers, and British garrison troops in Ulster. Timothy Bowman, *Carson's Army: The Ulster Volunteer Force, 1910-22* (Manchester, 2007), pp. 1, 208-209.

<sup>43</sup> Townshend, *Easter 1916*, p. 30.

<sup>44</sup> Hobson, 'The foundation and growth of the Irish Volunteers', in Martin, *Irish Volunteers*, pp. 23-32; Townshend, *Easter 1916*, pp. 39-42.

<sup>45</sup> This 'sluggish' enrolment has been blamed on the original perception of the IV as 'an offshoot' of the Gaelic League and IRB. David Fitzpatrick, 'Militarism in Ireland, 1900-1922', in Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery (eds), *A Military History of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 385.

<sup>46</sup> Letter from William Burke, Heaton, Newcastle. *North Mail (NM)*, 9 July 1914.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Wheatley, 'Ireland is out for Blood and Murder'; Nationalist Opinion and the Ulster Crisis in Provincial Ireland, 1913-14', in Boyce and O'Day (eds), *Ulster Crisis*, pp. 182-183; IV membership increased from 50,000 in late May, to 100,000 in mid-June, to 150,000 in July 1914.

Volunteer ranks beginning to fill, Redmond and the IPP's leadership finally took notice of what was happening 'in the nationalist movement they were accustomed to directing', and grasped that the Volunteers were not 'just the Irish party dressed up in slouch hats and bandoliers'.<sup>48</sup> Campbell has suggested that this awareness, and resulting policy change, was prompted by the alarming realisation that the Volunteers might 'even supersede the United Irish League' in Ireland, whilst Fitzpatrick has argued that the IPP had finally decided to use the Volunteers 'to reinforce their demand for Home Rule with the latent menace of force'.<sup>49</sup> The change in official policy towards the Irish Volunteers was first seen in late April 1914 in a circular from the AOH's national secretary in Ireland calling on Hibernians to form Volunteer companies, and was followed on 11 May by Redmond's letter to the *Westminster Gazette* giving his public support for the movement for the first time.<sup>50</sup> Redmond then moved to capture control of the Volunteers' IRB-dominated executive, which he achieved on 15 June 1914 by packing the committee with his own supporters, much to the chagrin of the inner circle that included the future leaders of the 1916 rising.<sup>51</sup> In September 1914, this group led by Patrick Pearse renounced Redmond's leadership and seceded, forming a Provisional Committee in Dublin, though the majority of Volunteers remained loyal to Redmond.<sup>52</sup>

It was not only in Ireland, however, where the call to join the Volunteers was heard, and in January 1914 a company was formed in Glasgow, though Máirtín Ó

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Fitzpatrick, 'Militarism in Ireland', p. 386; IV membership peaked in August 1914 at 184,000, making it the largest nationalist organisation in Ireland. Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, p. 196.

<sup>48</sup> Matthew Kelly, 'The Irish Volunteers: A Machiavellian Moment?', in Boyce and O'Day (eds), *Ulster Crisis*, pp. 64, 68; Townshend, *Easter 1916*, p. 61; Wheatley, 'Ireland is out for Blood and Murder', p. 183.

<sup>49</sup> Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, p. 195; Fitzpatrick, 'Militarism in Ireland', p. 385.

<sup>50</sup> Kelly, 'Irish Volunteers', p. 77; Wheatley, *Nationalism*, p. 189.

<sup>51</sup> With AOH numbers 'undermining the influence of the separatist minority in nominal command', Redmond's coup was possibly no more than 'an acknowledgment of this reality'. Kelly, 'Irish Volunteers', p. 195; also Martin, *Irish Volunteers*, pp. 141-144.

<sup>52</sup> Townshend, *Easter 1916*, pp. 65-66.



Catháin has suggested that elsewhere in Britain this call elicited little response until the IPP lent its support to the organisation.<sup>53</sup> In early April 1914, a letter to the *London Catholic Herald* described a meeting of the North London Gaelic Athletic League to form ‘a company of Irish National Volunteers’, and expressed the hope that the movement would ‘spread over the whole of London’. The letter ended with an appeal for Irish ex-Army drill instructors to assist the nascent movement.<sup>54</sup> Just 30 men attended the first drill of the first Irish Volunteer company in England at Highgate on 29 March 1914, but a further 300 Gaelic athletes were expected to join.<sup>55</sup> Of more significance than the original letter, however, was Charles Diamond’s editorial that endorsed Redmond’s emerging policy, and signalled that the Volunteer movement should be encouraged in Britain:

The time has now arrived when the Irish people at home and abroad, who are in sympathy with the national demand for self-government, should take counsel as to whether or not the threats of violence and civil war, and the attempt by the Tory Party to seduce the Army and make it subservient to their purposes, do not require to be met by a determination on the part of the people to crush this treasonable attempt as soon as it takes a specific form.<sup>56</sup>

By the end of April 1914, Irish Volunteers were drilling in Liverpool and Manchester, with the Liverpool company meeting in the Foresters’ and Gaelic League’s rooms, and the Manchester company using the UILGB’s hall in Erskine Street.<sup>57</sup> Diamond then advanced his previous musings into a full-blown demand for recruits that was reprinted in the Volunteer’s own newspaper in Dublin:<sup>58</sup>

Wanted 500,000 Volunteers: We think it the duty of every convinced Nationalist to prepare himself for a struggle... There are between two and three millions of Irish people in Great Britain and upon them a similar duty becomes incumbent... Let the Irish Nationalists in Great Britain be up and doing. There are plenty of Territorials among them, plenty of ex-army men,

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<sup>53</sup> Ó Catháin, *Irish Republicanism in Scotland*, pp. 233-234.

<sup>54</sup> *LCH*, 4 April 1914.

<sup>55</sup> *The Irish Volunteer (IV)*, 1.9 (4 April 1914).

<sup>56</sup> *LCH*, 4 April 1914.

<sup>57</sup> *IV*, 1.12 (25 April 1914); *LCH*, 2 May 1914.

<sup>58</sup> *IV*, 1.13 (2 May 1914).

who will enable them to drill and organise.<sup>59</sup>

The response on Tyneside to Diamond's demand was soon forthcoming. On 9 May 1914, an anonymous letter from Gateshead, signed 'Erin Go Bragh' (Ireland For Ever), appealed 'to the Irish Nationalists of Great Britain to join the Volunteer movement'.<sup>60</sup> The writer, almost certainly Thomas Lavin, described how he was 'the son of an Irish exile, and an Irish ex-soldier of 21 years' experience', who had retired with the rank of Colour Sergeant. Lavin then 'wholeheartedly' offered his services to any scheme that would assist:

In organising and drilling a Tyneside army of Irish Volunteers consisting of one or two battalions with headquarters in Newcastle, and composed of companies at Blaydon, Lemington, Newcastle, Gateshead, Felling, Walker, Hebburn, Wallsend, Jarrow, Howden, Willington Quay, Tyne Dock, North Shields, and South Shields.

Lavin then stated that 'many thousands of ex-soldiers will be found ready to offer their services should occasion arise', and asked to be put in touch 'with any prominent Irishman in accordance with my views with the object of organising a battalion on Tyneside in defence of the land of our fathers'.<sup>61</sup> In the nineteenth century, Bernard McAnulty's initiative, enthusiasm, and organisation had advanced the cause of Irish nationalism on Tyneside, and, once again, an individual was to inspire the movement.

Later that month, Gateshead's National Foresters heard an appeal by Thomas Lavin on 'instituting an Irish National Volunteer Corps'. Lavin told the Foresters that his intention was 'to instruct Irishmen on Tyneside who were prepared to drill to defend their people against the religious bigotry of Orange fanatics', and that 'he had

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<sup>59</sup> *TCN*, 25 April 1914.

<sup>60</sup> *TCN*, 9 May 1914.

<sup>61</sup> Redmond's taking control of the IV 'encouraged many army veterans to join up as drill sergeants'. Fitzpatrick, 'Militarism in Ireland', p. 386.

the promise of 700 men already'.<sup>62</sup> It is unclear, however, if Lavin intended this paramilitary force to defend 'their people' from 'Orange fanatics' in Ireland, or on the streets of Tyneside, though, whilst UVF units were formed outside Ulster, none were raised in the North East, even after a Unionist rally in Newcastle was shown film of the UVF on manoeuvres.<sup>63</sup>

By early June 1914, the *Irish Volunteer* was confidently reporting that 'great progress' had been achieved in Gateshead under 'ex-Colour Sergeant Lavin'; that the town's 'prominent Irishmen' were 'vigorously pushing forward the movement'; that 'branches have also been formed at Jarrow and Walker'; and that Tyneside would 'shortly be teeming with enthusiasm for the movement'.<sup>64</sup> On 17 June 1914, the first 'Irish National Volunteers' company on Tyneside, comprising both 'extreme as well as moderate Nationalists', was formed in Gateshead, during a meeting in the town's Liberal Club, with James Doyle as chairman, W. J. F. Martin as secretary, and Thomas Lavin as district organiser.<sup>65</sup> Later that month, a committee chaired by Doyle was formed to co-ordinate the Volunteer movement on Tyneside.<sup>66</sup> During the meeting, again held in Gateshead's Liberal Club, Lavin, who was introduced as the Volunteers' 'Tyneside and District Organiser', attempted to allay people's fears, when he sought to counter 'the impression abroad that they [Irish Volunteers] were going to buy rifles and maxim guns and go mad through the town' by explaining that the Volunteers was 'a movement similar to the UIL, which had striven for years to secure the rights of Ireland'. Lavin's concluding words, however, appeared to threaten, in spite of his reassurances, the possibility of direct paramilitary action in

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<sup>62</sup> *TCN*, 23 May 1914.

<sup>63</sup> Bowman, *Carson's Army*, pp. 61, 224.

<sup>64</sup> There is no evidence that IV companies in Jarrow or Walker were formed. *IV*, 1.18 (6 June 1914).

<sup>65</sup> There is a photograph of the Gateshead Volunteers' committee, but unfortunately none were wearing military uniform. *Newcastle Illustrated Chronicle (NIC)*, 19 June 1914.

<sup>66</sup> An IV central committee was formed in Manchester to co-ordinate work across all Irish societies and organisations in the city. *IV*, 1.21 (27 June 1914).

England – ‘Our object is to hold what we have gained’.<sup>67</sup>

Meanwhile, the Hibernians had also caught Volunteer fever, and McGoldrick, the Provincial organiser, issued an appeal that ‘every Division... in England should at once form a Corps of National Volunteers’, and that the Ladies’ Auxiliaries should assist.<sup>68</sup> It was not, however, until almost two months later that the UILGB’s leadership finally issued a manifesto concerning the Irish Volunteers. Signed by T. P. O’Connor and Frederick Crilly, the manifesto was not whole-heartedly supportive of Volunteer companies in Britain, focussing rather on the need to raise funds for the Volunteers in Ireland, which was ‘the paramount duty of Irish Nationalists in Great Britain’. O’Connor did, however, acknowledge that, in some parts of Britain, there was ‘a strong local demand for the formation of drilled companies of Volunteers’, though he was clearly troubled that such companies might exercise local independence, ordering that League branches ‘should see that the bodies of Volunteers so formed should work in harmony with the organisation’.<sup>69</sup> O’Connor might also have feared uncontrolled Volunteers precipitating sectarian violence in Britain during the summer of 1914, when war in Ulster seemed certain.<sup>70</sup>

On Teesside, O’Connor’s cautious manifesto was received sympathetically. In late May, a meeting chaired by Councillor Devine from Middlesbrough and attended by the Nationalist MP, Sir Thomas Grattan Esmonde, had initially ‘welcomed the Volunteer movement’.<sup>71</sup> On 19 July, however, a meeting of Teesside’s UILGB branches agreed that ‘there is no necessity for joint action towards establishing a

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<sup>67</sup> *TCN*, 27 June 1914.

<sup>68</sup> *LCH*, 23 May 1914; Cumann na mBan, the Volunteers’ sister organisation, had been formed in Ireland in April 1914, and branches existed in Liverpool, London, and Glasgow by 1915. Cal McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan and the Irish Revolution* (Cork, 2007), pp. 30-31; Cumann na mBan possibly had a branch on Tyneside after 1919.

<sup>69</sup> *TCN*, 18 July 1914.

<sup>70</sup> Jackson, *Popular Opposition*, p. 234.

<sup>71</sup> *LCH*, 23 May 1914.

Corps on Teesside', and that only funds should be raised for the Volunteers in Ireland.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, delegates from UILGB branches in County Durham, meeting on 18 July to discuss the forthcoming annual gala at Wharton Park, heard John Mulcahy speak about the Irish Volunteers, but only agreed to raise funds for the movement in Ireland.<sup>73</sup>

Elsewhere in the North East, the Volunteer movement found more enthusiastic support. In Gateshead, a meeting of the UILGB's 'Central' branch in late June was attended by 'a deputation from the Irish National Volunteers (Gateshead Corps)' and agreed that a combined meeting of the town's two League branches – 'Central' and 'Joseph Biggar' – would hear a presentation by Thomas Lavin.<sup>74</sup> In Newcastle, the Foresters' 'Edward Savage' branch met in their club room in Clayton Street in late June, and agreed 'that arrangements be made for the forming of a Company of Irish National Volunteers'.<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, at Hebburn, a meeting in late July at St. Aloysius's club 'to secure Tyneside recruits for the Irish National Volunteers' resulted not only in the formation of a 'Hebburn Corps' with 200 recruits enrolled, but also, mindful of O'Connor's manifesto, in the creation of an 'executive council', formed from 'the local governing bodies' of the UILGB, INF, and AOH, to oversee the corps.<sup>76</sup> Both Lavin and Martin, from the martially-named 'Sarsfield Corps' of the Irish Volunteers in Gateshead, attended this meeting 'in compliance with instructions from the Dublin headquarters'.

The Volunteer movement on Tyneside, however, was neither as popular nor as successful as elsewhere in Britain. In Manchester, it was reported that 'A' Company,

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<sup>72</sup> *CTCO*, 24 July 1914.

<sup>73</sup> *CTCO*, 24 July 1914.

<sup>74</sup> *TCN*, 4 July 1914; before the Volunteer split in September 1914, the titles 'Irish Volunteers' and 'Irish National Volunteers' were interchangeable. See Townshend, *Easter 1916*, p. 70.

<sup>75</sup> Austin McNamara attended this meeting as INF branch secretary. *TCN*, 11 July 1914.

<sup>76</sup> *NM*, 28 July 1914; *TCN*, 1 August 1914.

Irish National Volunteers, had ‘conferred commissions and decided to procure bandoliers, haversacks, belts, hats, and putties for the Company, and, where possible, rifles’.<sup>77</sup> No evidence has yet been found, however, showing that Tyneside's Irish Volunteers ever drilled in uniform or purchased any military equipment. This apparent lacklustre response prompted criticism in the local press. One anonymous correspondent, who signed himself ‘One of the many in readiness’, asked if the ‘prominent Irishmen of Newcastle’ were ‘afraid or ashamed to be mixed up in such a movement’; whilst another questioned ‘Why the Irishmen on Tyneside stand aloof from the Volunteer movement? In former times they eagerly helped in every Irish movement as fast as they could, but today it would seem as if the old spirit is dying’.<sup>78</sup> There was similar criticism of the response in Liverpool: ‘Wake up Liverpool... With an Irish population larger than that of most of Ireland’s counties, there should be no difficulty in raising 5,000 Volunteers’.<sup>79</sup> The Liverpool Irish did, however, respond, and, before Easter 1916, a small number of Volunteers from Liverpool joined Volunteers from Glasgow, London, and Manchester in Dublin as they trained for the rising.<sup>80</sup> No Volunteers left Tyneside to join them.

A week after the outbreak of the Great War, a meeting of Sunderland Irish pledged £50 as the ‘first instalment to the Irish National Volunteers Fund’, and agreed ‘if the necessity arises’ to ‘form a corps of 1,000 men for home defence from the local Irish citizens’.<sup>81</sup> Whilst this Volunteer unit does not appear to have been formed, in late August 1914 a company, probably the last established on Tyneside until 1920, was raised at Lemington, to the west of Newcastle, where a meeting

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<sup>77</sup> *TCN*, 11 July 1914.

<sup>78</sup> *NM*, 14 July 1914; *TCN*, 1 August 1914.

<sup>79</sup> *IV*, 1.18 (6 June 1914).

<sup>80</sup> Before Easter 1916, 50 Volunteers from Scotland travelled to Dublin to join the IV garrison at Kimmage. Ó Catháin, *Irish Republicanism in Scotland*, p. 238.

<sup>81</sup> *NIC*, 13 August 1914.

heard Gateshead's Volunteer officers, Lavin and Martin, argue that the war in Europe had 'welded Ireland's political parties in a united body in defence of their country' and that 'there was no need to talk about Home Rule for that was practically a fact'.<sup>82</sup> Following the raising of the Lemington company, no further evidence of Irish Volunteers on Tyneside has been found, and in October 1914, when eleven delegates from companies in Glasgow, Liverpool, London, and Manchester, met in Dublin at the first Irish Volunteer convention organised by the breakaway Provisional Committee, there were none from Tyneside, suggesting that either these Volunteers had remained loyal to Redmond, or that the companies no longer existed.<sup>83</sup>

The Irish Volunteers had only a fleeting existence on Tyneside in 1914. Nothing appears to have survived other than for a few reports in the press, and how many young, Irish Catholic men actually enrolled, wore uniform, and attended drill nights between May and August 1914 is open to doubt.<sup>84</sup> The importance of the Irish Volunteers, however, lay in its role as precursor to the Tyneside Irish Brigade of the British Army, even though no evidence has yet been found associating any of the Volunteer officers to the brigade's formation in the autumn of 1914. In Scotland, however, 'fully fifty per cent' of the Redmondite Irish National Volunteers had enlisted in the British Army by May 1915, and it is probable that a similar percentage of the North East's Irish Volunteers also enlisted.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> *TCN*, 29 August 1914. The INF was active in Lemington in 1908, but it is not known if the branch was still active in 1914.

<sup>83</sup> *IV*, 1.35 (3 October); 37 (17 October); 38 (24 October); and 39 (31 October 1914).

<sup>84</sup> There is no mention of the Irish Volunteers on Tyneside in 1914 in Lavery, *Irish Heroes*, nor in John Sheen, *Tyneside Irish: A history of the Tyneside Irish Brigade raised in the North East in World War One* (Barnsley, 1998). The only brief published reference is in Ó Catháin, *Irish Republicanism in Scotland*, p. 234.

<sup>85</sup> *Glasgow Observer*, 8 May 1915, quoted in Elaine McFarland, "'How the Irish Paid Their Debt': Irish Catholics in Scotland and Voluntary Enlistment, August 1914-July 1915", *The Scottish*

## War and the Irish Nationalists, August to September 1914

On Monday afternoon, 3 August 1914, whilst Irish nationalists in Durham were enjoying their annual gala, John Redmond spoke in parliament in reply to a statement on the worsening crisis in Europe made by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Edward Grey.<sup>86</sup> Redmond opened his speech by accepting that in past wars involving Great Britain ‘the sympathy of the Nationalists of Ireland, for reasons to be found deep down in the centuries of history, have been estranged from this country [Britain]’, but ‘what has occurred in recent years has altered the situation completely... and to-day I honestly believe that the democracy of Ireland will turn with the utmost anxiety and sympathy to this country in every trial and every danger that may overtake it’. Redmond then explained how, in the late eighteenth century, when Britain was at war with France, and Ireland was threatened with invasion, ‘a body of 100,000 Irish Volunteers’ had been formed, and how, after initial difficulties, ‘Catholics in the South were armed... as brothers in arms with their fellow countrymen of a different creed in the North’. Redmond then proposed that the Irish and Ulster Volunteers would join forces in the defence of Ireland, enabling Regular British Army units to be withdrawn for active service in Europe, and Redmond concluded by expressing the hope that ‘out of this situation there may spring a result which will be good not merely for the Empire, but good for the future welfare and integrity of the Irish nation’.<sup>87</sup>

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*Historical Review*, 82.214 (2003), p. 279.

<sup>86</sup> Before speaking, Redmond consulted J. P. Hayden and T. P. O'Connor. Gwynn believed that Hayden told Redmond ‘You should certainly speak’, whilst O'Connor ‘thought the risk too great’. Stephen Lucius Gwynn, *John Redmond's Last Years* (London, 1919), pp. 130-131. For the context of Redmond's announcement, see F. S. L. Lyons, ‘The revolution in train, 1914-16’, in Vaughan (ed.), *New History of Ireland*, p. 189; and James R. R. McConnel, ‘The view from the backbench: Irish Nationalist MPs and their work, 1910-1914’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Durham, 2002), p. 102; also James McConnel, ‘Recruiting Sergeants for John Bull? Irish Nationalist MPs and Enlistment during the early months of the Great War’, *War in History*, 14. 4 (2007), pp. 408-428.

<sup>87</sup> *Hansard*, House of Commons Debates, 3 Aug. 1914, vol. 65, cols 1828-30,



O'Day has argued that Redmond's unexpected proposal sprang from his 'conviction and tactical appreciation of the situation', whilst Wheatley has identified in Redmond's actions an amalgam of 'both a genuine, principled support of the war effort, and an array of political calculations'.<sup>88</sup> Other historians more critical of Redmond have described how his 'spontaneous gesture of solidarity became a draining commitment', and 'a major political liability', but that was for the future.<sup>89</sup> In August 1914, with the battles of the Somme and Ypres still to be fought, the majority of nationalists in Ireland and in Britain supported Redmond's stance, but that support would only endure if Redmond's calculation that the war would be short-lived proved correct.

A month later, in parliament, in the press, and at an Irish Volunteer review, Redmond expanded his pledge of nationalist support for a war 'in defence of the sacred rights and liberties of small nations', and to call for a distinctive Irish Brigade within the British Army 'so that Ireland may gain national credit for her deeds'.<sup>90</sup> And this Irish Brigade would not simply serve at home, but on the front line in Europe.<sup>91</sup> Redmond's reward was to be Irish self-government at the end of the war. Ignoring Unionist opposition, the Liberal Cabinet had agreed on 7 September 1914 to pass the Government of Ireland Act, but simultaneously suspend its implementation until the end of the war.<sup>92</sup> This was done on 18 September. After decades of struggle, Irish Home Rule was law, but that independence would only be realised through Ireland sharing Britain's victory on the battlefield, by Irishmen volunteering to fight

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<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1914/aug/03/statement-by-sir-edward-grey> (Accessed 21 November 2012).

<sup>88</sup> O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, p. 267; Wheatley, *Nationalism*, p. 208.

<sup>89</sup> Townshend, *Easter 1916*, p. 73; Lyons, 'Revolution in train', p. 189.

<sup>90</sup> *NDC*, 17 September 1914.

<sup>91</sup> Townshend has suggested that Redmond's purpose was to give post-war Ireland 'a national army with real military experience', even though an Irish Army was excluded under the Government of Ireland Act. Townshend, *Easter 1916*, p. 62; Wheatley, *Nationalism*, p. 208.

<sup>92</sup> O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, p. 261.

in the British Army, and this, Wheatley has argued, would force nationalists to choose between Redmond, and his advanced nationalist critics, headed by Sinn Féin, with support for recruiting as the measure of their loyalty.<sup>93</sup>

During those first few weeks of war, O'Connor, who had counselled against Redmond's parliamentary intervention, remained cautious, and warned England not to betray Ireland:

Ireland is won for the English people, unless she is cast back into the old abyss of suspicion and disappointment by the betrayal of her hopes. Her sons will rush now to the flag as they have done so often before in British history. It is a golden hour; in God's name do not let it pass. This is my appeal to British Tories, as to British Liberals.<sup>94</sup>

O'Connor was surprised, however, by the genuine enthusiasm for the war being shown in Ireland, and by the Irish in Britain, and later wrote:

At every meeting, without even a whisper of dissent and amid scenes of striking enthusiasm, the Irish in Great Britain pledged their support to the just cause of Great Britain and her Allies. For the first time in the history of the race "God Save the King" was sung – because for the first time these Irishmen were ready to regard themselves as free citizens of a free Empire.<sup>95</sup>

Reflecting the enthusiasm of his constituents, O'Connor's attitude to the war became less cautious, even enthusiastic, and O'Connor was later credited as having, probably, 'raised more recruits by his personal appeal than any other man in England'.<sup>96</sup> On 21 September, O'Connor willingly joined a recruiting rally in Liverpool, sharing the platform with Winston Churchill and the arch-Unionist, F. E. Smith, MP for Liverpool Walton, and, by November, O'Connor was publicly arguing in Glasgow that his support for the war was dictated by 'the principles of Irish Nationalism'.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Wheatley, *Nationalism*, p. 109.

<sup>94</sup> *NDC*, 14 August 1914.

<sup>95</sup> T. P. O'Connor, 'The Irish in Great Britain', in Lavery, *Irish Heroes*, p. 33.

<sup>96</sup> Gwynn, *Redmond's Last Years*, p. 90.

<sup>97</sup> Brady, *O'Connor*, pp. 219-220; *FJ*, 9 November 1914.

Following the declaration of war in August 1914, ‘a kind of recruiting fever’ swept through Britain, and ‘no area of Britain answered the call for recruits more enthusiastically than Tyneside’.<sup>98</sup> In the North East that fervour was shared by the Irish, where Redmond’s appeal found its most fertile soil, and the anti-recruitment rhetoric of James Larkin, the Irish labour leader, who had been so enthusiastically received at the Northumberland and Durham Miners’ galas only days before the outbreak of war, was ignored.<sup>99</sup> Why this fever took hold in the North East is not understood, but, as soon as war had been declared, ‘recruiting offices in Newcastle and throughout Northumberland and Durham suddenly overflowed with Irish youths, rushing to get a share in the fighting’.<sup>100</sup> Most of that first flush of recruits came from the ‘outlying towns and villages in mining districts’, rather than from the industrial heartland of Tyneside, and were, Joseph Keating asserted, unused ‘to drink, bad company, and dissipation’. These surprisingly naïve young men were helped by the Hibernian’s district secretary, James McLarney, and others from the Irish community in Newcastle, and found overnight rooms to keep them off the streets, and out of trouble.<sup>101</sup>

In his contribution to *Irish Heroes in the War*, Keating provides a unique insight into Irish nationalism on Tyneside in 1914. With no documentary or other contemporary printed sources, bar newspaper reports, thus far found, it is not possible to corroborate or refute Keating’s account, but, written in December 1915, months before the seismic events of Easter 1916, there is no reason to doubt the veracity of his claims. Of particular value are Keating’s descriptions of private

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<sup>98</sup> Peter Simkins, *Kitchener’s Army: The raising of the New Armies, 1914-16* (Manchester, 1988), pp. 64, 89.

<sup>99</sup> James Larkin ‘assumed an attitude of hostility to recruiting’ from the war’s beginning. *NDC*, 5 December 1914; for Larkin’s reception in Durham, see *NDC*, 13 July 1914, and *DC*, 31 July 1914.

<sup>100</sup> Keating, ‘Tyneside Irish’, p. 76; a similar response was reported in Scotland, especially on Clydeside - see McFarland, ‘How the Irish Paid Their Debt’, pp. 261-262.

<sup>101</sup> Keating, ‘Tyneside Irish’, p. 76.

meetings, almost certainly supplied to him by Felix Lavery, the compiler of *Irish Heroes in the War*, who was present at all, bar one, of the meetings that led to the formation of the Tyneside Irish Brigade.<sup>102</sup>

The first of these meetings was held in Newcastle's National Club in the second week of September 1914, when 'a group of Irishmen, representing both the advanced guard of bygone days and modern political power', met to discuss the war, though, for reasons unknown, no local Irish Volunteer officers appear to have been present at this, or any subsequent, meeting.<sup>103</sup> Without naming the individuals concerned, Keating reported that some of the nationalists attending this first meeting were 'deeply pained... at seeing so many thousands of their young men' joining British regiments, and expressed more concern for the 'spiritual and national ideals' of these recruits, than for their physical well-being on the battlefield, and, if any advocated the advanced nationalist view that these young men were simply 'cannon fodder in exchange for Home Rule', they were not reported.<sup>104</sup> Others, however, more astute and more politically flexible, grasped that the spontaneous and uncontrolled recruiting of North East Irish into the British Army in the first weeks of the war might be used to advance the nationalists' cause:

Ireland ought to get the credit of what our people are doing. Thousands of our fellows going into the new armies, and Ireland losing all the glory of it. When the War is won the country will say that Irishmen did nothing to win it, when the truth is they are doing all they can. But there'll be nothing to prove it if our fellows are mixed up with British regiments.

Reportedly, the same night, a plan was agreed that 'Tyneside Irish soldiers should be banded into a corps of their own', and a letter sent with this proposal to the *Newcastle Chronicle*:

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<sup>102</sup> For the raising of the Tyneside Irish Brigade, see Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, pp. 7-28; see Appendix 2: Membership of the Tyneside Irish Committee, 1914-1917.

<sup>103</sup> Keating, 'Tyneside Irish', pp. 78-79.

<sup>104</sup> Kelly, 'Irish Volunteers', p. 82.

We suggest that an Irish regiment be formed on Tyneside which all Irishmen of all classes and denominations can join. The number of Irishmen resident in this district is a large one and although great numbers of our countrymen have already joined, we believe it is possible to get the necessary number of men, who no doubt, would prefer to enlist in a regiment of a distinctive character in which all would be comrades and friends.<sup>105</sup>

This letter, apparently written without any prior consultation with John Redmond or T. P. O'Connor, ended by appealing to 'every representative Irishman on Tyneside regardless of politics or religion' to attend a meeting the following afternoon at the National Club, and was signed by Tyneside's leading Irish nationalists, including the ever-present Peter Bradley and John O'Hanlon.<sup>106</sup> No other specifically Irish corps was raised in Britain during the Great War. In Scotland and Wales, the majority of Irish recruits joined territorial or service battalions of their local Scottish or Welsh regiments, whilst in London and Liverpool, Irish war-fever in 1914 was focussed on existing territorial battalions – the London Irish Rifles (18<sup>th</sup> Battalion The London Regiment), and the Liverpool Irish (8<sup>th</sup> Battalion King's Liverpool Regiment).<sup>107</sup>

The meeting in the Irish National Club on Sunday 13 September did little more than endorse the earlier proposal, and appoint a committee under the chairmanship of Peter Bradley, with Patrick Bennett, Patrick O'Rorke, and John Gorman as joint secretaries.<sup>108</sup> Amongst the expected list of nationalists, however, was an unexpected name – Nicholas Grattan Doyle, who told the meeting that the German Kaiser was 'a very remarkable man', as he had 'succeeded in doing what no other man in history had done... he had cemented all the different political parties in

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<sup>105</sup> *NEC*, 12 September 1914, quoted in Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, p. 7.

<sup>106</sup> *NEC*, 12 September 1914; Appendix 2: Membership of the Tyneside Irish Committee, 1914-1917.

<sup>107</sup> McFarland, 'How the Irish Paid Their Debt', pp. 261-262; O'Leary, *Immigration and Integration*, p. 280; Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, pp. 253-254.

<sup>108</sup> Appendix 2: Membership of the Tyneside Irish Committee, 1914-1917; *NDC*, 15 September 1914; also *NIC*, 15 September 1914.

this country into one, and had killed religious differences'.<sup>109</sup> Born in County Wexford, Grattan Doyle was the prospective Unionist candidate for a Newcastle constituency, who had proudly told a meeting in the city in June 1914 that he was 'an Irishman, a Catholic, and rejoiced in being a Unionist', and who saw Irish self-government as a 'preposterous measure' that would only bring 'strife, disruption and disaster'.<sup>110</sup> True to the spirit of reconciliation, as advocated by Redmond, all Irishmen 'regardless of politics' had been invited to the meeting, and Grattan Doyle's appointment to the committee was confirmation of that catholic invitation, even though he had been described in 1910 'as little a friend of Ireland as any Orangeman'.<sup>111</sup>

The Tyneside Irish committee immediately set to work. Not only did it recruit 600 men within a week, but it also wrote to the War Office seeking official approval.<sup>112</sup> A reply was soon forthcoming, and, at a meeting on 20 September, Patrick Bennett informed the committee that the War Office had refused 'to approve of a Tyneside Irish Battalion being formed', explaining that sufficient battalions were already being raised on Tyneside, and thanking the committee for 'their patriotic offer'.<sup>113</sup> In Keating's melodramatic words: 'The office doors sadly closed, the recruits were disbanded, and darkness fell upon the Tyneside Irish Battalion'.<sup>114</sup>

T. P. O'Connor, aware that any public criticism of the British Army might be

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<sup>109</sup> *NIC*, 14 September 1914.

<sup>110</sup> *II*, 10 June 1914; Grattan Doyle was co-founder in 1905 of the Tariff Reform League's Northern Federation. He had stood unsuccessfully as a Unionist candidate in Gateshead in 1910, before being elected as Unionist MP for Newcastle North in 1918. He died in 1941. *The Catholic Who's Who and Year-Book* (London, 1936), p. 134; and *II*, 15 July 1941; Grattan Doyle was appointed Deputy Lieutenant of County Durham in 1915 for 'his services to the cause of recruiting'. *II*, 27 July 1915; Grattan Doyle's political views have been described as a 'fearsome blend of imperial unity and protectionism'. Donald M. MacRaild, *Faith, Fraternity and Fighting: The Orange Order and Irish Migrants in Northern England, c.1850-1920* (Liverpool, 2005), p. 271.

<sup>111</sup> *TWCN*, 15 January 1910; also see MacRaild, *Faith, Fraternity and Fighting*, pp. 258-260.

<sup>112</sup> *NDC*, 15 and 19 September 1914.

<sup>113</sup> *NDC*, 21 September 1914; also *NIC*, 21 September 1914.

<sup>114</sup> Keating, 'Tyneside Irish', p. 82.

damaging to the constitutional nationalists' cause, blamed the War Office's rejection on 'the ancient traditions of the old and professional Army'.<sup>115</sup> More serious charges, however, have subsequently been levelled to account for the parallel rejection of Redmond's call for an Irish Brigade composed of Irish Volunteers within the British Army, and elements of these charges might also have played a part in the rejection of the Tyneside Irish. Fitzpatrick, for example, has claimed that the War Office and Kitchener, who was appointed Secretary of State for War on 5 August 1914, were 'sceptical of nationalist motives and contemptuous of nationalist soldiery', and, even after the 16<sup>th</sup> Division was allowed to form in Ireland in September 1914, Lyons has condemned as bigoted Kitchener's refusal to allow any 'separate badges, flags and bands – that would harness the emotions of traditional nationalism to the needs of the British war machine'. Even more damningly, Gwynn believed that Kitchener's actions were motivated by the simple axiom – 'I will not arm enemies'; an opinion endorsed by Kelly, who has argued that the British military and government saw Irish nationalists as 'a fundamentally disloyal population, which Home Rule pieties could not paper over'.<sup>116</sup>

At the meeting of the Tyneside Irish committee on 20 September, two peripheral members, Frederick Corballis and J. H. Edgar, had suggested that, following the War Office's rejection, local Irish recruits should be redirected to Irish regiments in Ireland. This proposal was dismissed by the chairman, Peter Bradley.<sup>117</sup> The mood of the committee was for an Irish corps locally raised, regardless of any initial rejection by the War Office, and regardless of the desire of the UILGB's national leadership that Irish recruits from Britain should join, in accordance with

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<sup>115</sup> O'Connor 'The Irish in Great Britain', p. 27.

<sup>116</sup> Gwynn, *Redmond's Last Years*, p. 139; Kelly, 'Irish Volunteers', p. 82.

<sup>117</sup> *NDC*, 21 September 1914.

Redmond's wishes, Irish regiments 'with a view to their ultimate collection into a distinct Irish Brigade'.<sup>118</sup> The UILGB's executive re-expressed their desire for 'a distinctively Irish army corps' at a meeting on 5 October, and even in late December 1914, after the Tyneside Irish had received War Office approval and had almost recruited its full strength, O'Connor continued, though in vain, to urge the government to send Tyneside's Irish recruits to Ireland in support of Redmond, regardless of the desires of the North East Irish.<sup>119</sup> In a letter to Bonham Carter, the Prime Minister's secretary, O'Connor explained how he was being 'begged' to send 'Irishmen from Great Britain' to the 16<sup>th</sup> Division then forming in Ireland, or 'Ireland will have to submit to the humiliation of filling up Irish regiments with English soldiers because Irish soldiers could not be found'. Boldly claiming that he could 'command 2,000 if not 4,000 Irish soldiers in England, who are not only ready but eager to fill up the vacancies in the Irish battalions', O'Connor highlighted 'the enormous political importance' of Irish soldiers from Great Britain landing in Ireland 'ready to fight on the side of the Allies', the resulting publicity of which would 'demonstrate to the Irish race in America where Ireland stands in the war'.<sup>120</sup>

## **The Tyneside Irish, October 1914 to January 1915**

On 10 October 1914, two weeks after the initial rejection of the Tyneside Irish, Lord Haldane, the Lord Chancellor, visited Newcastle, and told a recruiting meeting in the Tyne Theatre that approval had been given by the War Office for the city to recruit

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<sup>118</sup> *TCN*, 26 September 1914.

<sup>119</sup> *II*, 5 October 1914.

<sup>120</sup> O'Connor followed this appeal with a personal letter to Lloyd George asking him, again with no result, to 'influence the situation'. Letters from T. P. O'Connor to Bonham Carter, 20 December 1914, and Lloyd George, 30 December 1914 (PA, LG/C/10/12). Note: O'Connor was a close friend of Lloyd George in 1914 and had been on holiday with him to Algiers that January. Brady, *O'Connor*, pp. 213-214.



two more local battalions.<sup>121</sup> These battalions, however, were to be raised only from local 'English and Scottish contingents', but, after Haldane met with the Lord Mayor, Johnstone Wallace, agreement was reached that an Irish battalion would also be raised, under the auspices of the Lord Mayor himself, who, as an Ulster Protestant and Unionist, presented a more acceptable face to the War Office.<sup>122</sup> Formal approval was then received from the War Office, permitting the raising by the Lord Mayor of Tyneside Irish, Tyneside Scottish and Tyneside Commercial (English) battalions.<sup>123</sup>

Before plans for a Tyneside Irish battalion could be revived, however, Wallace needed the support of the nationalist leaders, who had been so recently rebuffed, and, once again Joseph Keating provides an insight into these private discussions.<sup>124</sup> According to Keating, Wallace first approached 'his friend', James Courtney Doyle, an Irish Catholic and member of Newcastle's Board of Guardians, to act as intermediary. Doyle's initial reaction had been to reply: 'Raise a Tyneside Irish Battalion, indeed. Don't you know that the War Office would as soon think of giving permission to raise Old Nick?' Doyle, however, agreed and approached Felix Lavery for assistance. Keating then posed his readership the question that many nationalists on Tyneside must have asked in 1914: 'How could a Nationalist go to his people and invite them to be enthusiastic over the chance of co-operating with Unionists, whose mistaken, cruel prejudices had always been the enemy of their countrymen's faith

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<sup>121</sup> *TT*, 12 October 1914.

<sup>122</sup> Johnstone Wallace was born in Maghera, County Derry, in 1861, and moved to Newcastle as a child. A successful businessman, Wallace was first elected to Newcastle council in 1900, and was made Lord Mayor in 1913. As an Ulster Protestant and Unionist, Wallace's motives for championing the Tyneside Irish remain unclear, though Keating has suggested that Wallace believed that 'the honour of his country was being... challenged', and that the Irish on Tyneside would join the Army 'for the good name of Ireland, and the Empire's welfare'. Keating, 'Tyneside Irish', pp. 84-86; also see Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>123</sup> *NDC*, 15 October 1914; Simkins has shown that it was for pragmatic reasons alone that Kitchener dropped his 'cautious attitude to semi-nationalist formations', as it was severely impeding 'the realisation of the full recruiting potential' of Tyneside. Simkins, *Kitchener's Army*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>124</sup> Paragraph based on Keating, 'Tyneside Irish', pp. 87-91.

and nationality?’ On 13 October, Lavery met Wallace, and, ‘for the sake of our cause’, agreed to write to the nationalist leaders inviting them to a meeting with the Lord Mayor, adding in his letter that: ‘It is unnecessary to recapitulate the events in connection with the proposal mooted some little time ago and the War Office veto; these will be fresh in your memory’. The meeting was held in the Lord Mayor’s chambers on 14 October, and included Irish leaders from across Tyneside – ‘Unionists and Nationalists, Protestants and Catholics’, though insufficient notice prevented several nationalists from attending.<sup>125</sup> After much discussion, which Keating, unfortunately, does not describe in any detail (though he ascribed the meeting’s ultimate success to Wallace’s ‘leadership and optimism’), a larger, public meeting was arranged for 17 October in Newcastle’s town hall to form an organising committee for the Tyneside Irish.<sup>126</sup>

Armed with the promise of £10,000 to support the raising of the three new Irish, Scottish, and English battalions from Colonel Joseph Cowen, whose late father Keating lauded as ‘a true friend of every Irish cause’, Johnstone Wallace took the platform in the town hall.<sup>127</sup> Addressing his audience as ‘fellow Irishmen’, and supported by the industrialist and engineer, Sir Charles Parsons, and the Mayor of Wallsend, John O’Hanlon, Wallace argued his case for the Tyneside Irish, insisting that ‘for the moment, at any rate, party views were put to one side’.<sup>128</sup> O’Hanlon confirmed that ‘there were no politics at present’, and reminded his audience that

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<sup>125</sup> Appendix 2: Membership of the Tyneside Irish Committee, 1914-1917.

<sup>126</sup> John Mulcahy compiled the list of ‘representative Irish men in the district’ who were invited to attend. *NDC*, 19 October 1914.

<sup>127</sup> *NDC*, 19 October 1914; Colonel Cowen later gave a further £5,000 to the Tyneside Irish. *NDC*, 3 November 1914; Mulcahy, in his letter of thanks for this additional donation, suggested that the best monument to Cowen’s memory would be ‘the successful formation of the Tyneside Irish Battalion’. Letter from John Mulcahy to Colonel Joseph Cowen, 3 November 1914. (TWA, DF.COW/F/112); Keating, ‘Tyneside Irish’, pp. 92-93.

<sup>128</sup> Born in 1854, Sir Charles Parsons was the youngest son of the Earl of Rosse of Birr Castle, Ireland. His marine engineering works was on Tyneside. *TT*, 13 February 1931.

Redmond had advised all Irish nationalists ‘to stand loyally by the Empire’. O’Hanlon then moved a resolution to form a Tyneside Irish Battalion, which was seconded by Grattan Doyle, who thanked the Lord Mayor for opening the meeting ‘to all creeds’.<sup>129</sup> The meeting concluded with the formation of a new committee, with Sir Charles Parsons as president, Peter Bradley as chairman, Johnstone Wallace as treasurer, and with Gerald Stoney and John Mulcahy as joint secretaries.<sup>130</sup> Before the end of October 1914, the new committee had adopted the recruiting strategy that had become the norm across Britain in the early months of the war.<sup>131</sup> This strategy was based on a press and poster campaign, the widespread opening of recruiting offices, and the organising of indoor and outdoor recruiting meetings and events; and was thus little different to the by-election campaign successfully organised by Mulcahy for the UILGB in North West Durham earlier in the year.

At the committee’s inaugural meeting on 21 October, Wallace informed members that a first recruiting poster was being printed ‘calling upon Irishmen to engage in the fight for liberty, freedom and rights of small nations against military tyranny and despotism’.<sup>132</sup> These posters were supplemented with a press campaign that was facilitated by the personal friendship between Wallace and Colonel Joseph Reed, managing editor of Cowen’s *Newcastle Chronicle* newspapers, and these papers not only printed recruiting posters, but also, to engender local pride and encourage local rivalries, the recruits’ names as they enlisted.<sup>133</sup> Reflecting the catholic origins of the new committee, the press and poster campaign sought to

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<sup>129</sup> Amongst the audience attending the meeting was Dean Magill and Father George McBrearty from St. Mary’s Cathedral, Newcastle. *NDC*, 19 October 1914.

<sup>130</sup> Appendix 2: Membership of the Tyneside Irish Committee, 1914-1917; Keating, ‘Tyneside Irish’, p. 94; *NDC*, 20 October 1914; Gerald Stoney was technical adviser to Sir Charles Parsons at his Tyneside works. Lavery, *Irish Heroes*, p. 316.

<sup>131</sup> See Simkins, *Kitchener’s Army*, pp. 49-78.

<sup>132</sup> *NDC*, 22 October 1914; Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, p. 21.

<sup>133</sup> Keating, ‘Tyneside Irish’, p. 95; for recruiting posters, see *NDC*, 22 and 28 October 1914.

recruit both Irish traditions on Tyneside, so posters simultaneously called on Catholic Irishmen to avenge alleged German atrocities in Catholic Belgium and France, and praised the achievements of Irish Protestant generals.<sup>134</sup> Some were even printed with ‘orange coloured shamrocks’, and the call for harmony between the traditions was heeded, at least in South Shields, where a meeting to support the committee was held ‘not for Catholic Irishmen only, but for all Irishmen of whatever faith’.<sup>135</sup>

On 22 October 1914, the Tyneside Irish committee, courtesy of Grattan Doyle, moved into the offices of the Tariff Reform League in Collingwood Buildings.<sup>136</sup> A few days later, the first recruiting office was opened at Newcastle’s Corn Exchange, and, by the end of the year, a further 15 offices had opened in a diverse mix of locations ranging from Catholic Institutes and Irish Clubs, to Newcastle’s town hall and a café in Blaydon.<sup>137</sup> In a press interview, John Mulcahy explained the difficulties facing the recruiters:

We are handicapped by the very eagerness of the Irishmen to be in this war. Hundreds went away in the first week of the war. Forty four from Brandon and from every village in the counties of Northumberland and Durham they went out. We therefore have to find out a source that only a very great emergency can tap... We shall touch every village from Middlesbrough to Berwick, and we shall get the men.<sup>138</sup>

Thus the committee planned a series of meetings and events across the region that would, it was hoped, persuade potential volunteers through the recruiting office

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<sup>134</sup> *NDC*, 28 October 1914; for alleged German atrocities, see *TCN*, 14 November 1914; John Redmond, in a widely-reported speech, described the German Army as ‘the brutal destroyers of Louvain and Ypres; the violators of shrines and altars of Belgium and France; the brutal murderers of nuns and priests of our faith’. *TCN*, 12 December 1914.

<sup>135</sup> *NDC*, 5 November 1914; Notice Book, St. Bede’s RC Church, South Shields, 1 November 1914 (TWA, C.SS 29/11/13).

<sup>136</sup> Keating, ‘Tyneside Irish’, p. 94; *NDC*, 9 November 1914.

<sup>137</sup> *NDC*, 24 October 1914; TI recruiting offices (with location) established October to December 1914: Ashington (Catholic Institute); Blaydon (Wood’s Café); Blyth (Irish National Club); Consett (Middle Street); Durham City (78 North Road); Gateshead (Labour Exchange, Windmill Hill); Hebburn (Catholic Institute); Jarrow (Grange Road); Newcastle (Town Hall); Newcastle (Corn Exchange); Newcastle (57 Westgate Road); North Shields (Catholic Institute); South Shields (Irish National Club), Spennymoor (4 Whitworth Terrace); Sunderland (High Street); and Wallsend (Catholic Institute). *NDC*, October-December 1914; see Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, p. 22.

<sup>138</sup> *NM*, 24 October 1914.

doors.<sup>139</sup> The first event was held in Newcastle on Saturday 24 October, when a motorcade of 20 cars, decorated with ‘the flags of the British Empire and her Allies’, and with ‘the prominent flag being the Irish green flag with the harp in the centre’, slowly drove around the city accompanied by St. Joseph’s band from Birtley. Short meetings were held during the drive, and speeches made, and at one stop ‘a tremendous crowd’ was ‘augmented by supporters from the football match’.<sup>140</sup> Irishmen in Newcastle, however, appeared to have been far more resistant to such appeals than men from the rest of Tyneside, and, as an initial total of 550 recruits was being reported, the *Daily Chronicle* noted that ‘very few of the men willing to join this Battalion are actually from the City’, but provided no explanation for this reluctance.<sup>141</sup>

Before its inaugural meeting, the Tyneside Irish committee had telegraphed Frederick Crilly requesting the services of T. P. O’Connor at recruiting meetings, and had received a positive reply, even though O’Connor wanted all Irish recruits in Britain to be sent to join Irish regiments.<sup>142</sup> The first major indoor recruiting meeting for the Tyneside Irish was held in Newcastle’s town hall on 31 October, with O’Connor and the Earl of Donoughmore, ‘representing Nationalist and Unionist elements’, as the main speakers.<sup>143</sup> In a hall decorated with green and orange flags,

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<sup>139</sup> Before the end of 1914, TI recruiting meetings were held at Annfield Plain, Ashington, Bedlington, Bishop Auckland, Blaydon, Blyth, Consett, Dipton, Easington, Gateshead, Gosforth, Hebburn, Horden, Houghton le Spring, Jarrow, Langley Moor, Lemington, Newcastle, North Shields, Ryhope, Sacriston, Seaham, Shotton Colliery, South Shields, Sunderland, Trimdon Grange, Walker, Wallsend, Washington, West Hartlepool, West Stanley, Wheatley Hill, Whitehaven, Willington Quay, and Wingate. Several of these locations hosted more than one meeting. *NDC*, October-December 1914; in Middlesbrough, the ‘Irish organisation on Teesside’ met on 24 November 1914 and agreed to support the appeal for TI recruits. William Robertson, *Middlesbrough’s Efforts in the Great War* (London, 1922), p. 12.

<sup>140</sup> The motorcade began at Cowen’s statue in Westgate Road. The speakers at this event were Peter Bradley, John Farnon, John Mulcahy, and Grattan Doyle. *NDC*, 24 and 26 October 1914.

<sup>141</sup> *NDC*, 31 October 1914.

<sup>142</sup> Keating, ‘Tyneside Irish’, p. 96; also Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, p. 22; O’Connor was considered to be ‘one of the most able platform speakers of his day’, Brady, *O’Connor*, p. 221.

<sup>143</sup> Keating, ‘Tyneside Irish’, pp. 96-98; this meeting was advertised with a full-page poster calling

over 1,500 people heard Peter Bradley and Grattan Doyle propose: ‘That as Irishmen we call upon our countrymen to join the Tyneside Irish Battalion, and rally to the defence of the Empire’, then O’Connor described how Germany, through war, ‘had united England, had united Ireland’, and explained how after the war ‘there would be a new England. There would be a new Ireland. Both nations would learn to know and appreciate each other better’.<sup>144</sup>

It has been suggested that, although Irish MPs ‘entered fully into the demonization of the enemy’ on platforms in Britain and Ireland in 1914, most were unable to endorse enlistment in Ireland with any passion, and this has been ascribed to their desire ‘to avoid legitimating widespread fears’ that the Irish Volunteers were to be subsumed within the British Army.<sup>145</sup> These misgivings, however, did not extend to the Irish on Tyneside, and during November 1914, three Nationalist MPs spoke at Tyneside Irish recruiting meetings. Thomas Scanlan, MP for North Sligo, spoke at Consett, Sunderland, and Blyth, whilst, in Bishop Auckland, William O’Malley, MP for Galway Connemara and T. P. O’Connor’s brother-in-law, praised the Irish in Britain, who had ‘for ever been true and faithful to the Nationalist ideal’, then, mindful of the recent split in the Volunteer movement in Ireland, claimed that, at the end of the war, Ireland would have ‘a trained and armed Volunteer force that would maintain and preserve the liberty of Ireland’, whilst dismissing the Sinn Féin ‘coterie’ as ‘allies of Germany’.<sup>146</sup> The most remarkable meeting, however, was held in Gateshead on 19 November, when John Pius Boland, Nationalist MP for South Kerry, and who had already spoken at North Shields and West Hartlepool, shared a

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‘Irishmen to Arms’. *TCN*, 31 October 1914.

<sup>144</sup> *NDC*, 2 November 1914; Keating asserted that O’Connor’s visit ‘put the hall-mark of Nationalism on the scheme and inspired confidence’. Keating, ‘Tyneside Irish’, p. 98; after this meeting, O’Connor wrote that he had sent his ‘chief officials’ to Newcastle ‘to encourage this [Tyneside Irish] movement’. O’Connor to Bonham Carter, 30 December 1914 (PA, LG/C/10/12).

<sup>145</sup> McConnel, ‘View from the Backbench’, pp. 108-115.

<sup>146</sup> *NDC*, 5, 10, 14, and 30 November 1914; *FJ*, 24 November 1914.

platform with Arthur Shirley Benn, Unionist MP for Plymouth. Boland argued that 'if the Allies went down in this war, down would go Ireland to', so 'let them share in the losses and the honours of the British Empire'.<sup>147</sup> At the end of the meeting, Grattan Doyle thanked the two MPs, who 'though sitting on opposite benches, now represented a United Ireland'. The Tyneside Irish Brigade even came to boast its own Nationalist MP, when, in July 1915, Lieutenant John Lymbrick Esmonde was elected MP for North Tipperary, following the death of his father.<sup>148</sup>

Just before the first meeting of the Tyneside Irish committee on 31 October, the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle, Richard Collins, wrote offering his support: 'I am very pleased that an Irish Battalion is being formed on Tyneside. I feel sure that the clergy will willingly co-operate with those who are endeavouring to raise the battalion. I wish them every success'.<sup>149</sup> Johnstone Wallace afterwards met Cardinal Bourne in London to arrange a Catholic chaplain for the battalion, and Father George McBrearty was appointed 'to look after the interest of the Catholic units of the battalion during their stay in the North'.<sup>150</sup> The actual proportion, however, of Catholics, who enlisted in the Tyneside Irish remains unclear. Keating claimed that on Sundays in 1915, when mass was being held in the training camp on Salisbury Plain, the 'rows of empty RC huts on a Sunday morning were the religious statistics of the brigade'.<sup>151</sup> John Sheen, however, only uncovered one documentary source that noted the men's religion and, in this single platoon, 20 per cent of the men were Protestants, whilst, at a meeting in early 1915 in Birtley, Grattan Doyle stated that

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<sup>147</sup> *NDC*, 14 and 20 November 1914.

<sup>148</sup> The cousin of Esmonde's father, Colonel Grattan Esmonde, was then commanding officer of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion TI. *NDC*, 2 July 1915; Lieutenant Esmonde MP later spoke at a recruiting meeting in Consett. *NDC*, 30 November 1915.

<sup>149</sup> *NDC*, 27 October 1914.

<sup>150</sup> *NDC*, 4 November 1914.

<sup>151</sup> Keating, 'Tyneside Irish', p. 121.

only 62 per cent of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Tyneside Irish were Catholics.<sup>152</sup>

Irrespective of the numbers of Catholics joining the Tyneside Irish, several diocesan clergy, armed with their bishop's approval, aided the recruiting campaign. In Jarrow, Father Henry Mackin from St. Bede's chaired meetings supported by Alderman O'Hanlon and Grattan Doyle.<sup>153</sup> At one meeting in the Mechanics Hall, Father Mackin told his audience that 'it was a duty at the time of national crisis such as the present for men to make sacrifices of time, money, labour, and even life itself'.<sup>154</sup> Whilst in Consett, Father John O'Donoghue told a recruiting meeting that 500 men from his parish had already enlisted, with 240 joining the Tyneside Irish, and, at a similar meeting in West Stanley's Hibernian Hall, Father Henry Dix reported that over 400 men from West Stanley and South Moor had enlisted.<sup>155</sup> The most active clergyman on behalf of the Tyneside Irish was, however, Dean Augustine Magill of Brooms, Leadgate, who chaired recruiting meetings across North West Durham.<sup>156</sup>

Not all Catholic clergy on Tyneside, however, were quite such enthusiastic supporters of the Tyneside Irish. Writing in the *Freeman's Journal*, the Nationalist author W. G. Fallon referred to an anonymous elderly priest, who, though his Tyneside parish had been 'stripped bare' by recruiting, said that 'somehow I felt proud seeing them going, and I gave them my blessing', but added that 'I have not

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<sup>152</sup> The Roll Book of 'B' Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion TI lists the religion of the 75 men in No.5 platoon as 35 Catholics, 12 Anglicans, and 3 Nonconformists. From their names, Sheen has suggested that it was 'highly probable' that the remaining 20 men were also Catholics. Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, pp. 27-29.

<sup>153</sup> *NDC*, 31 October 1914.

<sup>154</sup> *NM*, 3 November 1914.

<sup>155</sup> *NDC*, 30 November 1915.

<sup>156</sup> *NDC*, 10 December 1914; Dean Magill, whose father had been a British Army officer, was educated at Ampleforth and Ushaw, and was ordained in 1881. Before retiring to Brooms, he was headmaster of St. Cuthbert's School, Newcastle. *TCN*, 11 September 1915.



thrown my old volume of the *Nation* behind the fire'.<sup>157</sup> Fallon suggested that this was because the priest was distressed by 'the insinuation of a few Tory Catholics into the graces of the warm-hearted Nationalist Tynesiders'.<sup>158</sup> Uncertainty over the war-induced alliance between Catholic nationalists and Catholic Unionists was further highlighted by Fallon in his description of a noisy interruption by an old Fenian, Martin O'Donnell, during a recruiting meeting. O'Donnell, who had, according to Fallon, taken part in the Fenians' abortive raid on Chester Castle, objected to Catholic Unionists sitting on the platform, and, waving 'a battered blackthorn', shouted: 'Sweep them away!' This meeting (probably at Stanley and with Grattan Doyle being the major cause of the offence) was, however, made light of by Fallon: 'Nobody took alarm, not even the offending Tories. Of course it was an inconvenient moment. But the meeting proceeded while immediate neighbours were conciliating old Martin. Then everybody resumed seats'.

Whilst the noisy interruption of an old Fenian might have been dismissed as a mere 'inconvenient moment', one critic of the alliance between Catholic nationalists and Unionists was not to be dismissed so easily. On 21 November 1914, Charles Diamond published a devastating leader in his newspaper. This leader, 'Tyneside Beware', though having no apparent effect at the time, must have reflected the private concerns of many nationalists on Tyneside, and not simply those of the old 'Irish exiles and rebels' found in Newcastle's National Club:<sup>159</sup>

Tyneside Nationalist Irishmen have a history... It rests on a solid basis of achievement ... It has been earned by hard work, by suffering, by fighting... Today the Nationalists of Tyneside are living up to their brilliant past ... The Volunteer movement among them is a reality... but let the Nationalists

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<sup>157</sup> The *Nation* was the newspaper of the Young Ireland movement, published between 1842 and 1897. Peter Gray, 'Nation', in S. J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* (Oxford, 1998), p. 377.

<sup>158</sup> *FJ*, 4 January 1915; also see Keating, 'Tyneside Irish', p. 108.

<sup>159</sup> Keating, 'Tyneside Irish', p. 109.

of the North be careful and wary... they must be on the look-out for political humbugs, tricksters, and weak-kneed brethren.<sup>160</sup>

Diamond then described:

A class of man, who calling himself Irish and Catholic played the political-religious card for all it was worth to thwart, to defeat all the hopes of Ireland. These venomous perverts spent all their force in their efforts to destroy the Irish movement.

Irishmen on Tyneside, warned Diamond, must not to be deceived, and he named James Louis Garvin and Grattan Doyle as the men, who were ‘currying favour with the Irish Volunteers’, but who were, in reality, ‘the sworn allies of the Carsons, of the Orangemen, of the Freemasons and Tory enemies of Ireland... the same Tory and Orange gang’.<sup>161</sup> In spite of Diamond’s stark warnings it was not until early 1917, as will be discussed later, that the uneasy alliance on Tyneside was finally broken.

In November 1914, Patrick O’Rourke had told a meeting in Blyth that it was the intention of the Tyneside Irish committee, ‘unless they were stopped by the War Office, to go to every village in Northumberland, Durham, and Cumberland, wherever there was an Irish colony, and recruit for the brigade’.<sup>162</sup> By mid-January 1915, the Tyneside Irish Brigade was complete, enabling Felix Lavery to telegram the *Freeman’s Journal*:

The completion of this brigade of united Irishmen represents a record of work done that has no parallel in English history. This wonderful work is directly attributable to the prescience and patient attitude of our far-seeing and revered leader, Mr John Redmond.<sup>163</sup>

Four active service battalions had been raised in a just a few months, and, with the

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<sup>160</sup> *TCN*, 21 November 1914.

<sup>161</sup> James Garvin was editor of *The Observer* and a political friend of Winston Churchill. Born in Birkenhead (his father had left Ireland during the Famine), Garvin was an Irish Catholic journalist, who had worked on the *Newcastle Journal* in the early 1890s. *The Observer*, 20 September 2009.

<sup>162</sup> *NDC*, 30 November 1914; a TI recruiting meeting was held at Whitehaven in Cumberland in December 1914. Patrick O’Rourke and Frederick Crilly were amongst the speakers. *NDC*, 19 December 1914; also see Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, p. 30.

<sup>163</sup> Keating, ‘Tyneside Irish’, p. 112.

addition of a reserve battalion formed later in 1915, Sheen calculates that 7,325 men enlisted into the Tyneside Irish Brigade.<sup>164</sup> Though acknowledging that the inspiration for and leadership of the Tyneside Irish came from the nationalist movement on Tyneside, Sheen has, however, cast doubts, though largely unsubstantiated, on the extent of nationalist sentiment within the Tyneside Irish.<sup>165</sup> Martin Middlebrook also found that both the Tyneside Irish and Scottish had ‘accepted men with no Scottish or Irish connexions’, though he concluded that the Tyneside Irish did contain ‘many of their large immigrant community’.<sup>166</sup> Regardless, however, of the religion, political affiliations, and even Irishness, of the rank and file, there can be no doubt, however, that nationalists both in Britain and in Ireland claimed the Tyneside Irish as their own. In Ireland, John Dillon described the Tyneside Irish as ‘our men’ whilst it was still being recruited, when, at the opening of a National Volunteers’ drill hall in November 1914, he stated that 40,000 Irish nationalists had so far joined the British Army in Ireland, with 30,000 more in Great Britain. He continued:

On Tyneside are the headquarters of the most militant nationalists of the Fenian days. I know these men well. In Durham and Newcastle and down the Tyne you have got the old fighting Fenian element still alive, and true to the Irish cause as they have ever been.<sup>167</sup>

Dillon then declared that ‘1,200 of our men have joined the Battalion and 1,200 more are willing to join’.<sup>168</sup> In Britain, the UILGB’s annual report of October 1915

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<sup>164</sup> The Tyneside Irish Brigade comprised the 124<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, with the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> Battalions TI numbered as the 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, and 27<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalions of The Northumberland Fusiliers. The 30<sup>th</sup> (Reserve) Battalion was formed in July 1915 from the TI’s Depot companies, and by additional recruiting. Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, pp. 34-35, 183.

<sup>165</sup> ‘There can be no doubt that the leaders and committee members did belong to that [Irish nationalist] movement, but as to the actual soldiers, I have my doubts’. Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>166</sup> Martin Middlebrook, *The First Day of the Somme* (London, 1984), p. 13.

<sup>167</sup> *FJ*, 19 November 1914; in reality, as has been previously discussed, the IRB was all but defunct in the North East by 1914.

<sup>168</sup> Between August and December 1914, 50,000 men enlisted in Ireland, with a further 25,000 to June 1915: this was (excluding Ulster) ‘about two-thirds of the British rate’. Townshend has suggested that this difference was the result of Ireland being a rural society, with an aging population.

described the formation of the Tyneside Irish Brigade as ‘the outstanding feature of the Irish rush to the Colours’, whilst on Tyneside itself, several of the Irish nationalist leaders were prepared to offer their own sons as testimony, even as sacrifice, to their commitment.<sup>169</sup>

Though the rationale of the Tyneside Irish committee had been achieved by January 1915 with the successful formation of the brigade, the committee remained in existence, reluctant to relinquish its role at the heart of the Irish community, and continued to function, even after the brigade had been handed over to the War Office in August 1915, and the committee relieved of ‘all further responsibility’.<sup>170</sup> Part of the reason for this continuation was, as Keating later explained, the result of the committee being asked in January 1915 by the Earl of Fingall, who had witnessed ‘the miracle of Tyneside recruiting’, to supply 2,000 men to the 16<sup>th</sup> Division in Ireland, and the committee agreed to keep its head office functioning to direct recruits from Tyneside to Ireland.<sup>171</sup> A continuous supply of recruits was also required for the Tyneside Irish Brigade itself to replace those men, who had fallen by the wayside during the long months of training.<sup>172</sup> In addition, the committee acknowledged the importance of sustaining the brigade’s morale and maintaining its bond with the community from which it had sprung. These objectives were, in part, provided for by a ‘committee of Irish ladies’ formed in late October 1914.<sup>173</sup> This

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Townshend, *Easter 1916*, pp. 64-65; also see Fitzpatrick, ‘Militarism in Ireland’, pp. 386-389  
<sup>169</sup> *Southern Star (SS)*, 30 October 1915; Alderman O’Hanlon’s son, Daniel, was wounded; John Edward Scanlan’s son, Thomas, was wounded twice, and awarded the Military Cross and bar; and James Courtney Doyle’s son, Henry, was killed in action in 1917. All three sons served with the Tyneside Irish. See Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, pp. 208, 210-211.

<sup>170</sup> Keating, ‘Tyneside Irish’, p. 119.

<sup>171</sup> It is not known how many, if any, Irish volunteers were recruited as part of this scheme. Keating, ‘Tyneside Irish’, p. 118; also see O’Connor’s letter to Bonham Carter re the TI, 30 December 1914 (PA, LG/C/10/12).

<sup>172</sup> Wastage from the TI had first been reported in December 1914, when some recruits had been ‘dismissed as physically unfit,’ but the report concluded that most recruits were ‘first rate fighting material’. *NDC*, 10 December 1914.

<sup>173</sup> The Irish ladies’ committee included the wives and daughters of TI committee members, including

committee used the established parish network to provide the recruits with ‘necessaries and comforts’, and, as winter approached, to provide clothing, especially overcoats and shoes, until army uniforms were issued to the recruits.<sup>174</sup>

## **Irish Recruiting in Britain, 1914-1915**

The Tyneside Irish Brigade was only one part of a massive recruitment campaign encouraged by the nationalist leadership in Britain in support of John Redmond, during the autumn of 1914 and early 1915. Frederick Crilly, as the UILGB’s general secretary, had a key role in this campaign, and, collating information supplied from parishes and League branches, he had been able to inform his executive in October 1914 that 50,700 men had so far enlisted in the British Army.<sup>175</sup> In January 1915, Crilly’s figures showed that some 15,000 Irishmen from the North East had enlisted, with the colliery towns and villages of County Durham producing the greatest number (Table 1.1).<sup>176</sup> Of this total, just over a third, 5,400 recruits, had joined the Tyneside Irish Brigade. Table 1.2 shows Irish recruits to the British Army from a small number of Catholic parishes on Tyneside in March 1915, with the total of 3,200 approximating Crilly’s total from the ‘Tyneside towns’ of 3,600 seen in Table 1.1.<sup>177</sup>

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Mrs P. Bennett, Miss Lily Farnon, Miss Isabella Fitzgerald, Mrs J. E. Scanlan, Mrs M. J. Sheridan, and Mrs G. Stoney. Keating, ‘Tyneside Irish’, pp. 100, 108.

<sup>174</sup> *NDC*, 31 October 1914; ‘Ladies willing to knit comforts for the Tyneside Irish Brigade are requested to hand in their name at the presbytery... wool will be sent to their homes’. Notice Book, St. Bede’s RC Church, South Shields, 7 March 1915 (TWA, C.SS 29/11/13); *NDC*, 16 November 1914; this appeal was repeated in 1915. *NDC*, 6 November 1915; the ladies’ committee did not, however, confine itself to good works. At a meeting in Pelaw, near Gateshead, a ‘ladies only’ audience heard Edith S. Robinson speak on ‘Women and the War’ and ‘Belgian Atrocities’. *NDC*, 4 November 1915.

<sup>175</sup> *II*, 5 October 1914.

<sup>176</sup> *FJ*, 21 January 1915; Sheen has calculated that of the 3,760 Tyneside Irish recruits with a known home address, 69.3% were from County Durham and 26.7% from Northumberland, with the remaining 4% from elsewhere in Britain and Ireland. Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, p. 34.

<sup>177</sup> *TCN*, 6 March 1915.

**Table 1.1: Irish recruits from the North East, August 1914 to January 1915.**

<b>North East Districts</b>	<b>Irish Recruits</b>
‘Durham colliery district’	5,000 (33%)
‘Tyneside towns’	3,600 (24%)
Sunderland	1,200 (8%)
Hartlepool	500 (3%)
Whitehaven	500 (3%)
Other (area not specified)	4-5,000 (c.30%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>c.15,000</b>

**Table 1.2: Irish recruits from RC parishes on Tyneside, August 1914 to March 1915.**

<b>Tyneside Parishes</b>	<b>Irish Recruits</b>
Jarrow, St. Bede	750
Newcastle, St. Mary’s Cathedral	600
Hebburn, St. Aloysius’s	600
Gateshead, St. Joseph’s	500
South Shields, St. Bede’s	400
Felling, St. Patrick’s	250
Tyne Dock, SS. Peter and Paul’s	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,200</b>

By October 1915, as voluntary enlisting in Britain had all but ceased and conscription threatened, the UILGB’s annual report praised the efforts of its membership over the previous year that had seen an estimated 150,000 Irishmen in Britain join the Colours:

No brighter page will be found in the history of the organisation, or of the Irish people in Great Britain, than this large proportion of Irishmen of Irish birth, or of Irish blood, who have joined in the fight for European liberty.<sup>178</sup>

There was, however, increasing concern amongst the League’s executive over the continuing vitality of the UILGB itself, and every branch was asked to send returns of its members enlisting to the general secretary to monitor the concomitant fall in membership.<sup>179</sup> At a ‘private meeting’ of the UILGB’s executive in London in late 1915, T. P. O’Connor reportedly said that, on examination of the organisation’s

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<sup>178</sup> SS, 30 October 1915.

<sup>179</sup> In Scotland, it was reported that ‘several’ UILGB and AOH branches had ‘ceased to exist’ because of members enlisting. SS, 30 October 1915; Ó Catháin, however, has argued that the AOH ‘did not sustain any great loss or drop in membership, unlike UILGB branches, during the war’. Ó Catháin, *Irish Republicanism in Scotland*, p. 236.

membership and income figures, ‘the affairs of the League had practically come to a standstill’.<sup>180</sup> On Tyneside, similar anxieties drove James McLarney, AOH district secretary, to report that, on average, 26 per cent of Hibernians across the North East had enlisted, though in Dipton, near Stanley, the total was 40 per cent, whilst in Easington in East Durham, out of a pre-war membership of 85, only six Hibernians had not enlisted.<sup>181</sup>

## Conclusion

In February 1915, delegates from Newcastle’s UILGB branches met to discuss the forthcoming St. Patrick’s Day activities, but agreed, under the chairmanship of John Edward Scanlan, a member of the original Tyneside Irish committee, to abandon that year’s demonstration.<sup>182</sup> Thus the focus of St. Patrick’s Day in 1915 became the Tyneside Irish Brigade. Celebrations began the week before on 12 March at a parade of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Tyneside Irish in Eldon Square, Newcastle, when the Lord Mayor, John Fitzgerald, himself an Irish Catholic, took the salute, along with members of the Tyneside Irish committee, and told the soldiers that ‘their fight would be gallant one – for freedom, faith and fatherland’.<sup>183</sup> On St. Patrick’s Day itself, the three battalions then in training were presented with their shamrocks and, at the end of the parade in Eldon Square, the soldiers gave three cheers for the King.<sup>184</sup> For over six months, the Irish nationalist leaders on Tyneside had directed all their energies and expended all their resources, including their fittest young men,

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<sup>180</sup> *TCN*, 11 December 1915.

<sup>181</sup> *TCN*, 8 May 1915; there were 58 TI recruits from Easington/Easington Colliery, and 45 from Dipton. John Sheen, Tyneside Irish Database (unpublished, 2011).

<sup>182</sup> *TCN*, 20 February 1915.

<sup>183</sup> Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, p. 32; Fitzgerald replaced Johnstone Wallace as Lord Mayor in October 1914. Born in Tipperary, Fitzgerald was elected to Newcastle’s Board of Guardians in 1888 and to Newcastle’s council in 1891. *TCN*, 16 October 1915; Fitzgerald’s son, Gerald, was killed on the Somme on 1 July 1916 serving as an officer with the TI. Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, p. 208.

<sup>184</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion paraded at Alnwick; the 2<sup>nd</sup> at Birtley; and the 3<sup>rd</sup> in Eldon Square. Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, p. 36.

in support of Redmond's rallying call 'that Ireland may gain national credit for her deeds', and now they were reaping their reward.<sup>185</sup>

Never before had St. Patrick's Day seen an Irish Brigade in England, and never had the Irish witnessed such a triumph. Tyneside was green in their honour. Four thousand three hundred, all in khaki, were paraded and received sprigs of shamrock... Rain fell, but it could not damp the fire of patriotic enthusiasm.<sup>186</sup>

Twelve months later, in March 1916, in fulfilment of Redmond's vision that 'in fighting for the Empire we are fighting for Ireland', the Tyneside Irish Brigade was on active service on the Western Front, and, once again on Tyneside, the traditional pre-war demonstrations that had concelebrated Irish Catholicism and nationalism were abandoned, though 'the dear little shamrock' was widely on show.<sup>187</sup> Instead an Irish Soldiers' Flag Day was organised by the Tyneside Irish ladies' committee, under the patronage of the Lord Mayors of London, Newcastle, and Durham, to provide 'comforts and necessities... for the brave Irish regiments on active service, for disabled Irish soldiers and sailors, and for Irish prisoners of war'.<sup>188</sup> In Newcastle, the Flag Day was launched at the Cowen Memorial, where the first Tyneside Irish recruiting event had begun in October 1914. There the Lord Mayor of Newcastle, attended by members of the Tyneside Irish committee, told the assembled crowd that 'when the war was over, and the fogs and clouds of war had cleared away, there would be glad sunshine in Ireland – a happier and better day for the country', and the meeting ended with 'cheers for the King'.<sup>189</sup> Little over a month later, there was rebellion in Dublin, and, little over three months later, the Tyneside Irish Brigade had all but been destroyed on the first day of the battle of the Somme.

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<sup>185</sup> *NDC*, 17 September 1914.

<sup>186</sup> Keating, 'Tyneside Irish', p. 119.

<sup>187</sup> John Redmond's St. Patrick's Day message. *NEC*, 17 March 1916; Redmond sent shamrocks to the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion TI in France. Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, p. 73.

<sup>188</sup> *NEC*, 17 March 1916; Irish Soldiers' Flag Day raised £1,338 in the North East with £715 collected in Newcastle, £181 in Gateshead, and £104 in Jarrow. *TCN*, 1 April 1916.

<sup>189</sup> Peter Bradley, James Doyle, John Farnon, Felix Lavery, James McLarney, Patrick O'Rorke, and Grattan Doyle attended the launch. *NEC*, 18 March 1916; Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, pp. 71, 73.



## Chapter 3

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# **‘God rest John Redmond’s soul. And God save Ireland’: Irish Nationalist Organisations in the North East, 1916-1918**

### **Introduction**

In December 1915, Joseph Keating had acclaimed the Government of Ireland Act as ‘the best measure of self-government ever offered to Ireland since the days of Grattan’s Independent Parliament’, and told his readers that:

Erin had regained her freedom. Her Parliament in Dublin would be restored to her, and her supreme ideal had become a reality... Home Rule was law for ever. Between England and Ireland the battle was over... No defeat could follow the victory. It had the immortal element in it... because it had been won by Constitutional liberty which itself is the lasting triumph of human civilisation.<sup>1</sup>

By the end of 1918, however, after four years of war, Irish politics had been transformed and the very words – Home Rule – that had once set the crowds cheering had become ‘a debased expression in the Irish Nationalist vocabulary’.<sup>2</sup> John Redmond was dead, and the IPP, and its associated political organisations in Ireland and Britain, unable to ‘comprehend the magnitude of the change’, had been dismissed by the Irish electorate as ‘relics of the pre-revolutionary past’.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter opens with an assessment of the impact of the rebellion in Dublin in 1916 on Irish nationalist opinion in Britain, and especially in the North East of England. This is followed by an examination of the role of the Tyneside Irish

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<sup>1</sup> Keating, ‘Tyneside Irish’, pp. 71, 73-74.

<sup>2</sup> D. G. Boyce, *Englishmen and Irish Troubles: British Public Opinion and the making of Irish Policy, 1918-22* (London, 1972), p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Brady, *O’Connor*, p. 215; Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, p. 263.

committee, following the near-destruction of the Tyneside Irish Brigade on the Somme battlefield in July 1916, and how the tensions between nationalist and Unionist Catholic members of the committee, suppressed since the truce of September 1914, were finally made public. Set against the background of events in Ireland after 1916, this chapter concludes with an examination of the UILGB's short-lived revival in the North East during the 1918 election, when it is probable that the majority of the region's Irish voters, supported by the local nationalist leadership, abandoned their long-held alliance with the Liberal Party and voted for the Labour Party.

## **The Easter Rising, 1916**

In the House of Commons on Thursday 27 April 1916, as rebellion raged in Dublin, John Redmond spoke of his feelings of 'detestation and horror' at the unfolding events in Ireland, and informed parliament that these sentiments were shared 'by the overwhelming mass of the people of Ireland'.<sup>4</sup> This speech clearly found its mark on Tyneside, prompting the leading nationalists to send Redmond a telegram of support:

Irishmen on Tyneside, who have recruited a purely Irish Brigade for the defence of Ireland, the Empire, and the liberties of Europe, are with you heart and soul in this crisis. We note with gratitude your sentiment in the House of Commons on Thursday. The sentiments expressed therein are those of every Irishman who has the destiny of his country at heart.<sup>5</sup>

A similar telegram followed from the Irish National Foresters in Newcastle, expressing both their 'profound disgust with the Sinn Fein outrage', and their continuing confidence in Redmond's leadership, whilst, at a meeting in West Stanley, a resolution was passed sympathising with Redmond and 'the overwhelming majority of the Irish people on account of the insane disloyal conduct of a section of

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<sup>4</sup> Gwynn, *Redmond's Last Years*, pp. 223-224.

<sup>5</sup> The signatories were Patrick Bennett, John Farnon, John Gorman, Felix Lavery, John Mulcahy, John O'Hanlon, Patrick O'Rourke, and John Edward Scanlan. *NEC*, 29 April 1916.

our countrymen in the present Imperial crisis'.<sup>6</sup> Further public condemnation of the 'Sinn Fein revolt' came from the Irish National Club in South Shields, from Hartlepool, and from Teesside, where a telegram loyally informed Redmond that 'at no time, we are thankful to say, has the crazy movement responsible for the disturbances in Dublin found any support among the Irish on the banks of the Tees'.<sup>7</sup> The sentiments expressed in these telegrams and resolutions, and indeed much of the language, conforms to what Wheatley has identified as 'a distinctive party-political narrative' pursued by the IPP during and immediately after the rebellion. This narrative was exemplified in the personal manifesto issued by Redmond on 3 May 1916, when he described the rebels as 'misguided and insane young men', who had fought for 'an insane anti-patriotic movement', and who dangerously imperiled Home Rule by alienating Britain.<sup>8</sup>

The opinions expressed publicly by nationalists in the North East about the events in Dublin were initially reflected in, and possibly influenced by, the weekly Catholic newspapers, with Charles Diamond, while filling columns with rumours and early reports of the 'grave disturbances in Ireland', dismissing the rebellion as no more than a 'pocket edition of a revolution'.<sup>9</sup> This issue was published on Saturday 29 April, the day Patrick Pearse ordered the rebel forces in Dublin to surrender.<sup>10</sup>

The following Saturday, however, after the executions in Dublin had begun, and the

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<sup>6</sup> The telegram from the INF's Benefit Society, Newcastle District No.14, was signed by Patrick Monaghan, District Chief Ranger, and William Lamb, District Secretary. *NEC*, 1 May 1916; Patrick Duffy chaired the West Stanley meeting. *NEC*, 3 May 1916.

<sup>7</sup> *NDC*, 2 May 1916; *TCN*, 6 May 1916; comparable sentiments were expressed by Austin Harford, the Nationalist leader in Liverpool, who denounced the Rising as being 'insignificant, unrepresentative and irresponsible'. Brady, *O'Connor*, pp. 226-227; also see Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, p. 257.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Wheatley, 'Irreconcilable enemies' or 'Flesh and blood'? The Irish Party and the Easter Rebels, 1914-16', in Gabriel Doherty and Dermot Keogh (eds), *1916: The Long Revolution* (Cork, 2007), pp. 64-65; Gwynn, *Redmond's Last Years*, pp. 223-224.

<sup>9</sup> *TCN*, 29 April 1916; this parallels the situation in Ireland, where Wheatley has argued that the Irish provincial press in 1916 was 'just as much the mirror as the leader of local opinion'. Wheatley, 'The Irish Party and the Easter Rebels', p. 62.

<sup>10</sup> *1916 Rebellion Handbook* (Dublin, 1998, reprinted from *The Weekly Irish Times*, 1916), p. 41.

full extent of the destruction in the heart of the capital city was being revealed, Diamond not only graphically reported ‘the tragedy of Dublin’, but featured detailed biographies of the rebel leaders, and firmly set for his readers this ‘pocket edition’ rebellion in its historical context.<sup>11</sup>

Between 3 May and 12 May 1916, fifteen Irish rebel leaders were executed.<sup>12</sup> Before the last men were shot, the Irish party, whilst continuing to condemn the rising as ‘a dangerous blow at the heart and hope of Ireland’, declared that ‘Ireland has been shocked and horrified by the series of military executions’, and that the executions had been carried out ‘in the face of the incessant and vehement protest of the Irish leaders and these protests will be pressed continually and strongly until the unchecked control of the military authorities in Ireland is abolished’.<sup>13</sup> Whilst the Irish societies in Liverpool met to protest at the shootings ‘of the misguided men in Ireland’, adding, prophetically, that the continuing executions ‘will do more harm than good’, no comparable public protest appears to have been made in the North East.<sup>14</sup> This may have resulted from an awareness amongst the North East’s nationalist leaders that, in order both to retain the support of the local Irish Catholic community and avoid antagonising the host community, it was essential that they should suppress their nationalist instincts, and demonstrate unwavering solidarity with the local Irish soldiers serving on the Western Front, especially as it was being claimed that the Dublin rising had been planned and financed by the German enemy. This claim had been encouraged by Redmond’s manifesto, when he had unambiguously laid the blame for the rising on Germany: ‘Germany plotted it;

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<sup>11</sup> *TCN*, 6 May 1916.

<sup>12</sup> *1916 Rebellion Handbook*, p. 60.

<sup>13</sup> *NDC*, 11 May 1916; the IPP did not speak with only one voice on the Rising and its aftermath. At Westminster on 11 May, John Dillon condemned British repression, in contrast to Redmond’s more restrained response, and it was Dillon’s voice rather than Redmond’s that was heard by constitutional nationalists in 1916. Wheatley, ‘The Irish Party and the Easter Rebels’, pp. 75-79.

<sup>14</sup> *II*, 12 May 1916.

Germany organized it; Germany paid for it'.<sup>15</sup> Not all Irish nationalists in the North East, however, accepted this official line, as was witnessed by a small number of early donations to the Republican Irish National Aid and Volunteers Fund in Dublin.<sup>16</sup>

The reaction of front-line Irish troops to the violence in Dublin was recorded by Stephen Gwynn, the Nationalist MP for Galway, then on active service as a captain in the Connaught Rangers. Gwynn described how, during Easter week 1916, the 48<sup>th</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigades of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division had been subjected to two poison gas attacks in the trenches, and had suffered 'very terrible losses'. Then on 29 April, the 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade, including Gwynn, had moved into the line for 18 days, and, throughout that tour, 'papers came in with the Irish news. I shall never forget the men's indignation. They felt they had been stabbed in the back'.<sup>17</sup> A similar sentiment was expressed by an anonymous Tyneside Irish soldier, who described the angry reaction to German notices being set up in no-man's-land to taunt the Irish soldiers about the events in Dublin:

When the news of the rebellion arrived, it was a big shock to the boys, but they soon realised whose work it was, when Fritz got busy on the line opposite with stories of the Rising. For answer the boys gave him a volley of rapid firing.<sup>18</sup>

Gilbert Barrington, however, remembered that 'there was very little reaction to the 1916 Rising, partly because very little was heard about it, and partly because most of the men were in the Army', though this muted reaction might simply be explained by

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<sup>15</sup> Gwynn, *Redmond's Last Years*, pp. 223-224.

<sup>16</sup> The first North East donation, on 12 June 1916, was from James Doyle of Gateshead, who may have been the 'James Doyle' associated with the Irish Volunteers in 1914. Other donations were received from Jarrow, Newcastle, South Shields, and Stockton. There were, however, far fewer donations from the North East than from Glasgow, Liverpool, London, and Manchester. Irish National Aid Association and Volunteer Dependents' Fund Papers, Cash Returns Books with names and addresses of subscribers, 23 May 1916 – 27 July 1919 (NLI, 23,482 - 23,484).

<sup>17</sup> Gwynn, *Redmond's Last Years*, p. 230.

<sup>18</sup> *TCN*, 27 May 1916; for the German notices erected in no-man's-land, see *TCN*, 13 May 1916.

Barrington's service with the non-combatant Royal Army Medical Corps, rather than with an Irish infantry unit.<sup>19</sup>

## **The Tyneside Irish Committee, 1916-1918**

Whilst battle was raging in Dublin, the British Army was preparing to launch its long-expected offensive on the Western Front. On 1 July 1916, the first day of the battle of the Somme, the Tyneside Irish Brigade, 3,000 men strong, attacked in front of the village of La Boisselle, and lost almost 600 men killed and over 1,500 wounded.<sup>20</sup> Later the 34<sup>th</sup> Divisional commander wrote to the chairman of the Tyneside Irish committee vividly describing the advance of 'my gallant Tynesiders... through the curtain of German fire'.<sup>21</sup> This ill-fated advance, however, marked the end of the Tyneside Irish as a distinct unit, and the close of what the veteran nationalist, Peter Bradley, had called 'a new epoch in the history of the British Army', for, when the brigade was rebuilt, it was with reinforcements indiscriminately drawn, as necessity demanded, from any available Army source.<sup>22</sup>

The resulting loss to the North East's Irish Catholic community may be measured by the number of obituaries and memorial cards printed, and requiem masses offered for the soldiers who fell during the summer and early autumn of 1916.<sup>23</sup> These losses, however, did not appear to undermine that community's support for the war, and, at the opening of a new Catholic Men's Club in Blyth in October 1916, Frederick Corballis signalled his continuing support by stating that

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<sup>19</sup> Mary Barrington, *Irish Independence*, p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Sheen has estimated that on 1 July 1916 the Tyneside Irish lost 22 officers and 574 other ranks killed, and 53 officers and 1,522 other ranks wounded. Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, p. 111; the Tyneside Irish and Tyneside Scottish were both part of the 34<sup>th</sup> Division, which suffered the greatest number of British Army casualties on 1 July. Middlebrook, *First Day on the Somme*, pp. 266-267.

<sup>21</sup> Major General Ingouville-Williams, 34<sup>th</sup> Division, quoted in Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, p. 110.

<sup>22</sup> *NDC*, 16 November 1914; Sheen has described this as 'the beginning of the end' for the TI. Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, pp. 120-121; after the Somme, 'it was months before' the TI was 'again fit for battle'. Middlebrook, *First Day on the Somme*, p. 267.

<sup>23</sup> See Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, pp. 110, 114-116.

the war had given Catholics the opportunity ‘to show a public spirit, to take a part, as Catholics, in the affairs of the country’.<sup>24</sup> Irish Catholic support for the war, therefore, broadly mirrored that of the North East’s indigenous population, rather than taking its cue from nationalist Ireland, where Gwynn argued that, as anger and disaffection spread in the summer of 1916, following the British government’s suppression of the Dublin rising: ‘The deeds of Irish soldiers helped us greatly outside of Ireland; in Ireland, the news was received with mingled feelings. There was passionate resentment against the Government, and the question was asked, for what were their men dying?’<sup>25</sup>

After the Somme, the Tyneside Irish committee’s work was seldom reported, even in the Catholic press. On 20 January 1917, however, the internal tensions between nationalists and Catholic Unionists that had existed from the committee’s inception were made public at a meeting called ‘to consider the present position of the committee’ and its future work.<sup>26</sup> At this meeting in Newcastle’s town hall, with Grattan Doyle in the chair, the secretary, John Mulcahy, reported on the committee’s work in 1916, stating that £3,000 had been raised by the Flag Day in March, and explaining how the soldiers’ dependents were being financially supported. Mulcahy then announced that the Cowen Fund Trustees were refusing to continue to finance the committee’s administration costs. When Grattan Doyle proposed accepting the new situation, Felix Lavery and John Farnon declared that they would speak with Colonel Cowen himself about financing these costs, and, hence, enabling the committee to continue. Sadly, the press reported no more than the observable surface of this meeting, which also saw the Ulster Protestant, Johnstone Wallace, replaced as

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<sup>24</sup> *TCN*, 21 October 1916.

<sup>25</sup> Gwynn, *Redmond’s Last Years*, p. 242; Lyons has argued that Irish enthusiasm for the war was not ‘seriously checked until the Somme offensive’ in 1916. Lyons, ‘Revolution in train’, p. 189.

<sup>26</sup> *TCN*, 27 January 1917.

the committee's treasurer by the Irish Catholic, John Fitzgerald. A second public committee meeting in the town hall on 10 February 1917 saw the struggle for control, masked as procedural wrangling, reach its climax. By the meeting's end, Grattan Doyle, accusing two committee members of 'intrigue', had been 'sacked' by a faction led by the veteran John O'Hanlon, and Matthew Sheridan installed as the new chairman, with John Farnon as treasurer.<sup>27</sup> These machinations, however, whilst demonstrating that the political truce, declared by O'Hanlon in October 1914, was finally over, represented little more than the death throes of the Tyneside Irish committee, though the committee lingered on, attending public events, until the end of the war. Thus the entire committee was present in Eldon Square in March 1918 for the presentation of shamrocks to the Connaught Rangers and Dublin Fusiliers. With Grattan Doyle's removal, the TI committee was also able, for the first time, to demonstrate its nationalist credentials, sending a telegram of sympathy to John Redmond's widow, and being officially represented by John Farnon at Redmond's requiem at Westminster Cathedral, and it is possible that the committee envisaged for itself some post-war function within Irish nationalism on Tyneside.<sup>28</sup>

## **The Decline of the UILGB, 1916-1918**

In 1914, the UILGB had been the most important and largest Irish nationalist organisation in the North East, but by 1918 the League's energies and membership had been consumed by the Great War.<sup>29</sup> Away from the North East, however, a number of UILGB branches argued that the League should seize the opportunity presented by the war to change, and embrace the whole gamut of political, social,

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<sup>27</sup> Appendix 2: Membership of the Tyneside Irish Committee, 1914-1917; *TCN*, 17 February 1917.

<sup>28</sup> *NDC*, 8 and 16 March 1918; at the laying-up of the 2<sup>nd</sup> TI's Colour in Newcastle in June 1919, the newly-elected MP for Newcastle North, Grattan Doyle, was present. Sheen, *Tyneside Irish*, p. 176.

<sup>29</sup> In late 1917, 50% of Newcastle's Irish National Club membership was reportedly on active service. *TCN*, 13 October 1917.



economic, and religious issues facing the Irish in Britain.<sup>30</sup> This need for change had been publicly raised by Charles Diamond, even as the first Irish recruits were being enrolled in 1914. In a leading article, Diamond, after explaining how the UILGB had grown from the old Northern Land League Confederation, asked if the UILGB had a future, as it encompassed ‘only a small fraction of our Irish people in Great Britain’ and ‘in many places the organisation is moribund or merely nominal’.<sup>31</sup> In this article, however, Diamond did not suggest any other replacement for the League, as he was to do so insistently from 1918.

Six months later, in May 1915, Diamond told his readers that ‘the duty of Irish Nationalists in Great Britain is, while preserving their nationalist sympathies and activities, to take a broader and wider view of their duties, obligations and interests’, and repeated this call later in the year.<sup>32</sup> Not all nationalists in Britain, however, demanded change, arguing that the League must continue ‘as usual until the Irish Parliament is firmly established’, especially as ‘the Irish party has still an uphill fight against the enemies of Ireland’.<sup>33</sup> The pressure for change, however, was ignored by T. P. O’Connor, even though by late 1915 he too had recognised that the League was all but moribund.<sup>34</sup> Thus the UILGB, clinging to the belief that Irish self-government had been won in 1914, but without the reinvigoration of a new purpose, and increasingly supported by ‘an aging core of enthusiasts’, ‘virtually disappeared’ in Britain during the Great War.<sup>35</sup> This decline was underscored by O’Connor leaving office as the UILGB’s president in July 1917 for a year-long, fund-raising trip to the

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<sup>30</sup> O’Day, ‘Irish Diaspora Politics’, p. 227.

<sup>31</sup> *TCN*, 21 November 1914.

<sup>32</sup> *TCN*, 15 May and 11 December 1915.

<sup>33</sup> Letter from Patrick McDermott, Cornsay Colliery. *TCN*, 6 February 1915.

<sup>34</sup> In 1915, O’Connor acknowledged the UILGB’s decline, but argued that the League should be maintained to deal with ‘the question of our Catholic schools’. *TCN*, 11 December 1915.

<sup>35</sup> David Fitzpatrick, ‘A curious middle place: the Irish in Britain, 1871-1921’, in Swift and Gilley (eds), *Irish in Britain, 1815-1939*, pp. 35-46; O’Day, ‘Irish Diaspora Politics’, p. 227.

United States in support of the ailing *Freeman's Journal*.<sup>36</sup>

The UILGB's decline during the later war years was not, however, simply the product of events in Britain or on the Western Front. Just as the rise and success of the League had been directly dependent on events in Ireland, so too was its decline, and the League's position in Britain was undermined by a succession of catastrophic events far outside its control. Firstly, in 1916, as the executions in Dublin, indiscriminate arrests and deportations across Ireland, were followed by John Redmond's humiliating acceptance of the partition of Ireland as the price of self-government; and then, in 1917, when the magnitude of nationalist Ireland's discontent was made palpable in four by-election defeats for the IPP, the most traumatic being Sinn Féin's victory in East Clare, following the death on the Western Front of Major Willie Redmond, John Redmond's brother.<sup>37</sup>

When John Redmond himself died in March 1918, nationalists from across the North East expressed both their sympathy and their fears for the future, echoing the words of Charles Diamond: 'God rest John Redmond's soul. And God save Ireland'.<sup>38</sup> Thus, whilst the Hibernians described Redmond as 'a gifted and trusted leader', in Gateshead, the UILGB's 'Joseph Biggar' branch regretted the 'deplorable loss sustained by the Irish Parliamentary party in the death of their great leader'.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile in Newcastle, last visited by Redmond in 1913, the National Club, under its president, John O'Hanlon, met to express its sympathy at the 'loss to Ireland at this critical hour of such a brilliant statesman', and O'Hanlon and John Scanlan,

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<sup>36</sup> This trip was at the Redmond's behest, as the *Freeman's Journal* was the IPP's mouthpiece. Brady, *O'Connor*, pp. 240-243.

<sup>37</sup> Eamon de Valera won East Clare for Sinn Féin with a majority of almost 3,000 votes. F. S. L. Lyons, 'The new nationalism, 1916-18', in Vaughan (ed.), *New History of Ireland*, pp. 225-228; also O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, pp. 274-275.

<sup>38</sup> *Wearside Catholic News (WCN)*, 9 March 1918.

<sup>39</sup> *NDC*, 8 March 1918.

representing 'North of England Irishmen', attended the funeral in Ireland, bearing a wreath inscribed: 'Our dead leader leads us still'.<sup>40</sup> On 11 March, Tyneside's leading constitutional Irish nationalists attended a requiem mass for John Redmond in St. Mary's Cathedral.<sup>41</sup> It was, however, as much a requiem for their own nationalist tradition, which, before the end of the year, was also all but dead. In late March 1918, nationalists met in Newcastle to welcome the election of John Dillon to the IPP's leadership, stating that:

The Irishmen on Tyneside and the Northern Counties conceded the right of judgement to the Irish Party and the people of Ireland in deciding the policy to be adopted to obtain these lawful rights, and they trusted that the new leader would be given the undivided support of his Party and the whole Irish race in such a manner as would make the demand for the operation of the Home Rule Act irresistible.<sup>42</sup>

Redmond's death prompted a remarkable, though ultimately futile, attempt to influence events, when Colonel Cowen, the Tyneside Irish Brigade's benefactor, called for Redmond's memorial to be 'a lasting settlement of the Irish question on the ashes of old feuds and prejudices', and asked all Irishmen living in Britain to sign a petition to be sent to the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, 'entreating him... to compose the grievances under which Ireland has too long suffered'.<sup>43</sup> The next day, Felix Lavery responded by writing that 'an immediate settlement of the Irish problem will, I am sure, commend itself to every man and woman of Irish nationality who places love of country before political considerations'.<sup>44</sup> The petition, initially signed by 'men and women of eminence in industry, science, art, literature, journalism, the professions, the religious life of the country, and trade and business in all its forms', was then opened to all 'Irishmen and all those of Irish extraction', and a number of

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<sup>40</sup> *NEC*, 6, 9, and 12 March 1918.

<sup>41</sup> The congregation included Patrick Bennett, Frederick Corballis, James Courtney Doyle, John Fitzgerald, John Gorman, Felix Lavery, James McLarney, John Mulcahy, John O'Hanlon, Patrick O'Rourke, and Matthew Sheridan. *NEC*, 11 March 1918.

<sup>42</sup> The meeting in Newcastle's National Club was chaired by John Scanlan. *NDC*, 28 March 1918.

<sup>43</sup> *NEC*, 8 April 1918.

<sup>44</sup> *NDC*, 9 April 1918.

collecting points were established across the North East.<sup>45</sup> The list of the signature collecting agents printed in the *Evening Chronicle* contains many familiar names, for example John O'Hanlon and Terence O'Connor, and may, to some extent, represent the surviving elements of organised nationalism's branch structure in the North East (Appendix 3). It is also interesting to note that 13 of the 59 agents were women, echoing their role in the Hibernians, and presaging their importance in the IrLP and ISDL in the succeeding years. Signed by over 50,000 people, the petition, with an accompanying letter from Thomas Burt MP, was forwarded to Lloyd George in late April 1918, who, whilst declaring that he had 'nothing more closely to my heart' than ending 'this ancient controversy', promptly dismissed it, citing the failure of the Irish Convention and the growing conscription crisis in Ireland, that had prompted John Dillon's withdrawal of the Irish party from Westminster.<sup>46</sup>

## **The Irish Vote and the 1918 General Election**

On the morning of Saturday 14 December 1918, polling day for the first general election in Britain and Ireland since December 1910, the *Catholic Times and Catholic Opinion* printed the following leader:

Vote for Labour... Labour has now put itself forward as the one party of hope in British politics... every vote for Labour is a vote for Ireland and for decent treatment of Catholic Irishmen... Do not trust Mr George. Do not trust Mr Asquith. Both of them betrayed Ireland. Trust Labour alone. Cast your votes for Labour and for justice to the working classes.<sup>47</sup>

Throughout the election campaign, this same appeal had dominated the pages of Charles Diamond's newspapers, as Diamond had finally determined that Labour

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<sup>45</sup> *NEC*, 11 and 28 April 1918.

<sup>46</sup> *NEC*, 28 April 1918; for the Irish Convention, see O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, pp. 276-285; Eamon de Valera described the Conscription Bill in April 1918 as 'a declaration of war on the Irish nation'. Dorothy MacArdle, *The Irish Republic* (New York, 1965), p. 250; for the IPP's withdrawal from parliament, see Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland*, p. 288.

<sup>47</sup> *CTCO*, 14 December 1918. This newspaper, originally edited in Liverpool by John Denvir, described itself as 'The Organ of the Catholic Body' in Britain.

alone was worthy of Irish votes in Britain, and had reinforced this message with a series of ‘Irish-Labour’ meetings in South Wales and County Durham to raise funds for Labour’s campaign.<sup>48</sup> These Catholic newspapers, however, were not initiating this change, but were, instead, reflecting the growing realisation amongst the working-class Irish in Britain in 1918 that the cause of Ireland had been betrayed not only by the Liberal Party, forever tarnished by its membership of a Coalition government that had overseen the executions in Dublin in 1916, but also by the Irish Parliamentary Party, and that the Labour Party alone was ‘the one party who will see justice done in Ireland’.<sup>49</sup> In the North East, this fundamental shift of allegiance had been vocalised as early as May 1918, when a correspondent to the *Wearside Catholic News* called for ‘the Catholics of this country... to give the Labour Party more support in the future than they have done in the past’, though the correspondent also bemoaned the fact that ‘in Northumberland and Durham, there is not one Catholic who has any hold in the Labour movement’.<sup>50</sup>

As the general election approached, however, the UILGB’s national leadership, still the most important Irish nationalist organisation in Britain, stubbornly failed to respond to or even acknowledge the move towards Labour amongst its core membership, and this was clearly demonstrated at a UILGB meeting in Manchester’s Free Trade Hall on 26 October 1918.<sup>51</sup> Brady has suggested that John Dillon and T. P. O’Connor, who had only returned from the United States in

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<sup>48</sup> In County Durham, Charles Diamond spoke at events in Annfield Plain, Blaydon, Boldon Colliery, Chopwell, Consett, Crawcrook, Dunston, Houghton, Leadgate, Silksworth, South Shields, and Stanley. *WCN*, 5, 12, and 19 October 1918.

<sup>49</sup> In his letter, Luke Hannon, later a leading member of both the IrLP and ISDL, not only called on the Irish in Britain to vote for Labour, but also appealed on behalf of the Irish political prisoners, ‘who seem to have no friends in the Irish Parliamentary Party’. *Teesside Catholic News (TSCN)*, 16 November 1918.

<sup>50</sup> The author, ‘J. McKay’ from Ryton, was, possibly, John McKay, a miner at Montagu colliery, Scotswood, who was later active in Tyneside’s IrLP. *WCN*, 4 May 1918.

<sup>51</sup> *TT*, 28 October 1918.

July 1918, hoped to use this meeting to create the nucleus of a new political organisation that would weather the anticipated electoral storm in Ireland.<sup>52</sup> Both leaders considered that independence from any British political party was vital if the League was to survive, and so Dillon used a resolution urging the IPP ‘to sever their alliance with the Liberal Party’ to assert that there had been no such alliance since 1916, and that: ‘We are no more in alliance with the Liberal Party than with the German Emperor. We stand absolutely independent’.<sup>53</sup> Resisting all pressure from the floor, Dillon then insisted that this independence must also be from the British Labour Party. Whilst delivering little of substance, the meeting, however, graphically demonstrated both that ‘the Irish in Great Britain no longer regard the [Irish] party as infallible’, and that the UILGB, once so dominant, faced a major challenge for the allegiance of the Irish in Great Britain.<sup>54</sup> On 10 December 1918, O’Connor and Frederick Crilly issued the UILGB’s customary pre-election manifesto advising Irish voters which candidates, regardless of party affiliation, were worthy of their support. This manifesto, however, was limited to constituencies in the North West, which Brady has suggested revealed the extent to which the League’s leadership could no longer rely on ‘a spread of voters throughout Britain’ affecting key constituencies held by small majorities.<sup>55</sup>

Across the North East, in the weeks before the general election, Irish men and women met to discuss how they would cast their votes. Several of these meetings were held under the auspices of re-animated UILGB branches acting independently of national headquarters. In Gateshead, John McEnaney chaired a meeting in the

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<sup>52</sup> Brady, *O’Connor*, pp. 242-245.

<sup>53</sup> *TT*, 28 October 1918; also see *NDC*, 28 October 1918.

<sup>54</sup> *II*, 28 October 1918.

<sup>55</sup> The UILGB manifesto supported 38 Labour, 12 Liberal, and 3 Independent candidates in the 1918 general election. Brady, *O’Connor*, p. 246.

Catholic Young Men's Society rooms to determine which candidate was most likely to defeat the official Coalition candidate, and, after much discussion, it was agreed that the Irish vote would be given to Labour's candidate, John Brotherton.<sup>56</sup> At a meeting in Hebburn, John Hill, Labour's candidate in Jarrow, was informed that he would receive the Irish vote not only because Lloyd George's government had reneged on Home Rule, but also because 'the Labour Party had always been favourable to Ireland's cause'.<sup>57</sup> Whilst John Mulcahy, still the UILGB's North East organiser, argued in favour of Labour's candidate in Morpeth, John Cairns.<sup>58</sup>

The decision to support Labour candidates was repeated across the North East, though in Wallsend John O'Hanlon, still smarting from his electoral defeat in Jarrow, threatened to divide the town's Irish vote by publicly supporting the Liberal candidate.<sup>59</sup> At a meeting, however, at which Home Rule was discussed by both John Gorman, the veteran nationalist, and the Labour candidate, Councillor John Chapman, a resolution proposed by Austin McNamara pledged Wallsend's Irish vote to Labour.<sup>60</sup> This unanimity was, however, challenged in Consett, where, as North West Durham, a by-election had been held in January 1914. Then the Irish vote had been promised to the Liberals, but in December 1918, local Irish support was pledged to Labour's George Stuart-Bunning.<sup>61</sup> On election day, however, for unknown reasons, a telegram from the UILGB's headquarters gave Irish voters in Consett 'freedom of choice', and an appeal was immediately issued locally urging Irish support for the Liberal candidate, and sitting MP, Aneurin Williams.<sup>62</sup> Williams emerged victorious, though the defeated Labour candidate claimed that the majority

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<sup>56</sup> *NEC*, 9 December 1918.

<sup>57</sup> *Jarrow Express and Tyneside Advertiser*, 13 December 1918.

<sup>58</sup> *NDC*, 3 December 1918.

<sup>59</sup> *NDC*, 13 December 1918.

<sup>60</sup> *NDC*, 12 December 1918.

<sup>61</sup> *NEC*, 9 December 1918.

<sup>62</sup> *NDC*, 16 December 1918.

of Consett Irish had voted for him ‘notwithstanding the attempts to split the Irish vote’.

The key electoral battles on Tyneside in 1918 were, however, taking place in Newcastle, where Irish voters had already faced a by-election in May 1918, when Edward Shortt, Liberal MP for Newcastle, was appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland. Following a meeting in the National Club, Shortt’s views ‘on the question of Home Rule’ had been sought.<sup>63</sup> Shortt, in the event, was returned unopposed, and it is not known if the questioning took place, though, this may have been favourable, as Shortt had recently voted against the extension of conscription to Ireland, and was in receipt of nominations from both Thomas Burt and Colonel Cowen.<sup>64</sup> Irish support for Shortt in Newcastle, if support it was, however, was short-lived. On 17 November, a first meeting of Irish representatives was held in Newcastle ‘to consider the election situation in the city’, but a decision was postponed, pending instructions from UILGB headquarters, though an election sub-committee was formed.<sup>65</sup> A second meeting held a week later in the National Club, at which the sub-committee reported that the four Labour candidates for Newcastle had all ‘satisfactorily’ answered a series of questions, resulted in a resolution recommending that Irish voters in Newcastle support only Labour candidates, and that this recommendation had ‘the sanction and support’ of the UILGB’s standing committee.<sup>66</sup> The *Daily Chronicle*, in spite of its owner’s personal support for Edward Shortt, then suggested that the Irish in Newcastle would ‘concentrate’ against the Liberal candidate, and this prediction proved correct, when Shortt was subjected to ‘a good deal of heckling...

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<sup>63</sup> *NDC*, 9 May 1918.

<sup>64</sup> *TT*, 11 May 1918; *NDC*, 14 May 1918.

<sup>65</sup> *NDC*, 18 November 1918.

<sup>66</sup> *NDC*, 25 November 1918.



by Irish critics'.<sup>67</sup>

In contrast to Clydeside, where the 1918 general election 'found the Irish political machine in unprecedented disorder as a result of the war and the experience of the Easter Rising', the election brought new life to Newcastle's nationalist organisations.<sup>68</sup> In the National Club, an 'Irish Election' committee opened an 'information bureau' every evening until the ballot, and was soon urging Irish voters to secure the return of the Labour candidates 'by canvassing and working for them to the fullest extent of their power'.<sup>69</sup> The degree of support being given in Newcastle to Labour candidates by the local nationalist leaders was revealed, when the candidates' nomination papers were published, with the *Daily Chronicle* noting the names of 'well known Irishmen in the city' – Felix Lavery, Patrick O'Rourke, James Courtney Doyle, and John Scanlan.<sup>70</sup> The newly-enfranchised women were not forgotten in this drive for votes, when Mrs Laverick appealed at the National Club on 8 December for all Irish women to vote for Labour.<sup>71</sup> Interestingly, no name of any leading nationalist appeared on the nomination papers of the fourth Labour candidate, Robert Wilson, who was standing not only against the Lord Mayor of Newcastle and Liberal candidate, Sir George Lunn, but also against Nicholas Grattan Doyle, the eventual Coalition Conservative victor, and erstwhile Catholic Unionist ally of the nationalists on the Tyneside Irish committee.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *NDC*, 25 November 1918; *TT*, 5 December 1918; Shortt's Irish policy was condemned at a public meeting in Newcastle chaired by John Gorman. *NDC*, 11 December 1918.

<sup>68</sup> Alan McKinlay, "'Doubtful wisdom and uncertain promise": strategy, ideology and organisation, 1918-22', in Alan McKinlay and R. J. Morris (eds), *The ILP on Clydeside, 1893-1932: from foundation to disintegration* (Manchester, 1991), p. 132.

<sup>69</sup> *NDC*, 29 November and 9 December 1918.

<sup>70</sup> James Smith was proposed by Felix Lavery, with Patrick O'Rourke as seconder; David Adams, standing against Edward Shortt, was proposed by James Courtney Doyle; and Walter Hudson was proposed by John Scanlan. *NDC*, 5 December 1918.

<sup>71</sup> *NDC*, 9 December 1918.

<sup>72</sup> *NDC*, 5 December 1918.

On Sunday 1 December 1918, a demonstration in the Grainger Picture House, Newcastle, had featured not only the Labour candidates, but also Charles Diamond, who asserted that he was proud to be both a member of ‘the party of the future’ and a Catholic, and ‘challenged any one, whether layman or cleric, to say that a Catholic could not be a member of the Labour Party’.<sup>73</sup> Diamond ended his speech by calling on all workers ‘without distinction of nationality or creed’ to stand together ‘in one solid mass’ and vote for Labour. When the general election results were declared, however, there was disappointment for many of the North East’s Irish voters. Labour had won seats in the mining-dominated constituencies in Northumberland and Durham – once Liberal strongholds – where so many Irish lived and worked, but in Gateshead, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, South Shields, and Sunderland Labour failed to win a single seat.<sup>74</sup> At a post-election meeting in Newcastle, the four defeated Labour candidates thanked the Irish for their support, and David Adams attempted to rally his downcast audience by optimistically forecasting that, given ‘sound organisation and the necessary propaganda’, Labour’s electoral victory would inevitably come.<sup>75</sup>

## Conclusion

In spite of the losses and depredations of the Great War, the UILGB in the North East of England, no longer burdened with the Tyneside Irish Brigade, was revitalised by the general election of December 1918, the first since 1910, and the first to be held under the Representation of the People Act that had extended the franchise to all

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<sup>73</sup> NDC, 2 December 1918.

<sup>74</sup> Purdue, ‘ILP in the North East’, p. 35; in South Shields, George Rowe was defeated by 13,089 votes by the Liberal, Havelock Wilson. *Shields Daily Gazette (SDG)*, 28 December 1918; in Gateshead, John Brotherton was defeated by 10,003 votes by a Coalition Conservative. Manders, *Gateshead*, p. 279.

<sup>75</sup> NDC, 30 December 1918.

men aged over 21 and women over 30.<sup>76</sup> In the general elections of 1910, the North East's nationalist leadership, in response to the instructions emanating from the UILGB's leadership in London, had urged Irish voters to support the Liberal Party to sustain an alliance that had survived, despite occasional difficulties, since the 1880s. In 1918, however, many of those same North East leaders clearly believed, like Charles Diamond, that the Labour Party, untarnished by the Coalition's unpopular post-1916 policies in Ireland, and offering 'an ill-defined but attractive policy of self-determination' had assumed the role of nationalist Ireland's chief political ally in Britain, and, hence, urged Irish voters to support Labour.<sup>77</sup>

The revival of the UILGB in the North East in 1918, however, was short-lived. In Britain, the Coalition government, with Lloyd George as Prime Minister, was returned to power, whilst in Ireland the political landscape was transformed with the overwhelming rejection of the Irish Parliamentary Party, the party of Parnell and Redmond, at the polls, and the victory of Sinn Féin.<sup>78</sup> Without the Irish Parliamentary Party at Westminster, the UILGB no longer had a purpose. The nationalist organisations that were formed in Britain to fill the void left by the UILGB's collapse, the Irish Self-Determination League and the Irish Labour Party, are the subjects of the final two chapters.

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<sup>76</sup> See Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party 1916-1923* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 151.

<sup>77</sup> Dan McDermott, 'Labour and Ireland', in K. D. Brown (ed.) *The First Labour Party, 1906-1914* (Beckenham, 1985), p. 265.

<sup>78</sup> For Sinn Féin's victory in 1918, see Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland*, pp. 162-168.

## Chapter 4

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### **‘An Irish garrison in England’: The Irish Self-Determination League in the North East, 1919-1925**

#### **Introduction**

During the summer of 1920, the limited war in Ireland that had begun in January 1919 with an IRA ambush in County Tipperary flared into a ‘widespread, brutal and ruthless’ conflict.<sup>1</sup> In Tuam, County Galway, police ran amok in retaliation for the shooting of two colleagues; in Cork, military patrols drove through the streets ‘firing indiscriminately’ in revenge for the killing of the RIC District Commissioner, Colonel Smyth; and, in Ulster, Smyth’s death and the subsequent refusal by railway workers to transport his coffin north unleashed anti-Catholic rioting on a scale not seen in Ireland for a hundred years.<sup>2</sup>

Against this background of escalating violence, ‘10,000 Irish people’ gathered in Wharton Park on 2 August 1920 for the first Irish gala in Durham since 1914.<sup>3</sup> This gala, however, was no Home Rule demonstration; instead, it was an open and voluble meeting in support of an Irish Republic. In August 1908, the gala crowds had cheered T. P. O’Connor, when he had insisted that ‘the battle of Ireland should be fought in the heart of the British Empire... the House of Commons’, and had dismissed as insignificant the ‘very small band’ of nationalists who urged that ‘the

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence* (Dublin, 2002), p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> *TT*, 21 July 1920; *SS*, 17 July 1920; Hopkinson, *Irish War*, pp. 85, 155-156.

<sup>3</sup> *DC*, 6 August 1920; in May 1920, the IrLP was reportedly organising the gala. It is not known when the ISDL usurped this role. *TCN*, 15 May 1920.

battle of Ireland should be fought in Ireland'.<sup>4</sup> Twelve years later, in August 1920, the gala crowds were cheering for Sean Milroy, Sinn Féin's Director of Organisation, when he predicted victory in the war in Ireland, and vowed that even if the war cost 'a million casualties they won't be all Irish corpses'.

In August 1920, however, it was not only the platform rhetoric that had changed, so too had the main actors, as the familiar faces of the old UILGB and Hibernian establishment of County Durham and Tyneside had been replaced by the leadership of a new, confident, and rapidly-growing Irish nationalist organisation in the North East: the Irish Self-Determination League of Great Britain. As the ISDL's leaders, Richard Purcell from Newcastle, Gilbert Barrington from South Shields, and Terence O'Connor and Joseph Patrick Connolly from Jarrow, took their seats against a background of republican tricolours, the crowds sang the *Song of the Irish Volunteers*. The gala's purpose, declared Terence O'Connor, was 'to express their confidence in and loyalty to the Irish Republic' – a republic established 'by the will of the people of Ireland', and that it was the duty of all the Irish in Britain 'to stand as one body behind those at home'. Reinforcing O'Connor's message, Richard Purcell called on 'Irish exiles in the north of England' to support the Irish at home 'in this, the greatest and last fight for Irish freedom'. Then to cheers, Purcell, who by the end of 1920 was to combine his presidency of the ISDL in Newcastle with command of the IRA on Tyneside, warned the British government that:

The Irish throughout the world were rallying to the call of their motherland... If the English Government boasted of having an English garrison in Ireland, well, there was an Irish garrison in England, and they would hold the fort for Ireland and keep the orange, green, and white colours flying.<sup>5</sup>

After the Great War, and the crushing rejection of the Irish Parliamentary Party

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<sup>4</sup> DC, 7 August 1908.

<sup>5</sup> *Durham County Advertiser*, 6 August 1920; DC, 6 August 1920.

by the Irish electorate, Sinn Féin established a new nationalist organisation in Britain to further its political objectives in Ireland by making Irish self-determination the sole political focus of the Irish in Britain, and that strategy would be advanced by seeking to isolate the Irish in Britain by emphasising their racial, religious, and cultural differences from the host population, and by using the Irish-Ireland movement, and particularly the Irish language, to attain ethnic and cultural purity. Entirely a product of the Irish Revolution, the Irish Self-Determination League was the last Irish nationalist organisation in Britain to attract mass support, and this chapter presents a detailed examination of the League's rise and fall in the North East from its genesis in 1919 to its disintegration following the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December 1921, exploring not only the political and structural aspects of this organisation, but also its religious and cultural dimensions, and its key relationships on Tyneside with both the Irish Labour Party and the IRA.<sup>6</sup>

## **The Origins of the Irish Self-Determination League, 1919**

On 18 January 1919, as the newly-elected assembly of the Irish Republic, Dáil Éireann, was about to meet in Dublin for the first time, Charles Diamond offered Irish Catholics living in Britain an alternative to the UILGB:

The formation everywhere of clubs and organisations to further Ireland's demand for self-determination... The associations should be of men and women... The object should be to support Ireland's right to the fullest freedom – the Republic for instance. The means to be used should be debates, lectures, demonstrations, propaganda. And, when the time comes, the polling booth.<sup>7</sup>

Rejecting both the isolationism of the 'Irish Ghetto' and the separatism of Sinn Féin, Diamond insisted that these new 'organisations should not be confined to Irish men

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<sup>6</sup> For a detailed examination of the rise and fall of the ISDL in Britain, including Tyneside, see Inoue, 'Political Activity of the Irish in Britain, 1919-1925'.

<sup>7</sup> *TCN*, 18 January 1919.

and women only', but rather open to 'all those willing to support the policy' of self-determination, including British sympathisers. Some Irish Catholics, however, had no need of Diamond's advice, for, in the same edition, the *Tyneside Catholic News* reported a meeting in Manchester that not only protested 'against the imprisonment of Irish men and women deported from Ireland to England without trial or charge', but also cautioned the Irish in Britain to 'take up the good work, unless they are ready to condone the infamy'. A similar meeting in Liverpool heard Councillor Patrick J. Kelly demand the unconditional release of all Irish political prisoners 'because they dared to declare for self-determination'.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile in Dublin, as the political situation in Ireland deteriorated, Sinn Féin's leadership, conscious of the growing anger of the Irish in Britain, sought ways of harnessing that anger to its own advantage. Fitzpatrick has argued that Sinn Féin's British strategy, after its electoral victory in 1918, was not to launch a military campaign that would alienate support, but rather 'to win public support by propaganda against unjust and oppressive government', and this strategy embraced the Irish in Britain, whose mobilisation would 'demonstrate that in Britain, as in Ireland, Home Rulers had been converted en masse to self-determination'.<sup>9</sup>

In early 1919, Sinn Féin already controlled a small network of republican clubs in England and Wales, with a more extensive network in Scotland.<sup>10</sup> In Ireland, however, the party was coming under increasing pressure from the British authorities

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<sup>8</sup> *TCN*, 25 January 1919; see Sam Davies, 'A stormy political career: P. J. Kelly and Irish Nationalist and Labour Politics in Liverpool, 1891-1936', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 148 (1999), pp. 147-189.

<sup>9</sup> Fitzpatrick, 'A curious middle place', p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> There was a Sinn Féin club in Liverpool by 1918, but no North East clubs have as yet been confirmed before 1920. Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, p. 266; Gilbert Barrington remembered that 'the Sinn Féin element was negligible in Shields until after 1919'. Mary Barrington, *Irish Independence*, p. 10; in 1917 there was one Sinn Féin club in Scotland, by 1919 there were 75. Stephen Coyle, *High Noon on High Street* (Glasgow, 2008), p. 25.

that was to culminate in Sinn Féin's proscription in Ireland in November 1919.<sup>11</sup> Rather than attempt to increase the network of clubs in Britain, and risk possible suppression, Sinn Féin instead chose to establish an 'auxiliary organisation' that would have its own distinct name, yet be firmly affiliated to party headquarters.<sup>12</sup> Several years later, however, the ISDL's leadership argued that this decision had been necessitated because in 1919 the 'half-dozen... isolated Sinn Féin clubs' in Britain had been incapable of organising the Irish in Britain 'in an efficient manner'.<sup>13</sup>

It has been suggested that the plans for this new organisation were conceived by Eamon de Valera whilst imprisoned in Lincoln, and de Valera certainly wasted little time after his escape and resumption of Sinn Féin's presidency in late February 1919 to order its implementation.<sup>14</sup> On 22 March 1919, de Valera wrote to Art O'Brien, president of the Gaelic League, organiser of the Irish National Relief Fund in London, and Dáil envoy in London, instructing him to organise meetings for the Irish living in London, Liverpool, Manchester, and Newcastle on Sunday 30 March.<sup>15</sup> Speakers and handbills would be sent from Ireland, and, over the succeeding weeks, further meetings would be arranged in Scotland and Wales 'to keep up the pressure and sustain the interest'. De Valera suggested that three resolutions should be put to these meetings, though he refrained from adding any explicit reference to an Irish Republic as being the ultimate goal:

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<sup>11</sup> For Sinn Féin's suppression, see Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland*, pp. 284-288. The ban included the Irish Volunteers, Gaelic League, and Cumann na mBan.

<sup>12</sup> Letter from Harry Boland, Sinn Féin, Dublin, to Art Ó Briain, 5 March 1919 (NLI, MS 8426 /41).

<sup>13</sup> Letter from Art Ó Briain to Sinn Féin, Dublin, 16 January 1925 (NLI, MS 8432 /44).

<sup>14</sup> MacArdle, *Irish Republic*, p. 285; also John Hutchinson and Alan O'Day, 'The Gaelic Revival in London, 1900-22: limits of ethnic identity', in Swift and Gilley (eds), *Irish in Victorian Britain*, p. 271; and Jim Maher, *Harry Boland: A Biography* (Cork, 1998), pp. 76-77.

<sup>15</sup> For O'Brien, see McGee, *Art Ó Briain Papers*, pp. 4-10; and Keiko Inoue, 'Arthur Patrick Donovan O'Brien', *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Dublin, 2009), vol. 7, pp. 10-12.



- (1) That the inhabitants of Ireland are the first and final judges of how their country should be governed.
- (2) That for any Alien government to dictate and to force its will upon the people of Ireland in this matter is a tyranny which it is the duty of lovers of liberty and justice everywhere to assist in dethroning.
- (3) That a League of the Irish in Great Britain be established at once with this object.<sup>16</sup>

Whilst Inoue has argued that the ISDL was ‘neither the subordinate organisation of the Dáil nor the twin brother of Sinn Féin’, and Fitzpatrick has described the League as being ‘autonomous’, Hart bluntly labelled the ISDL as ‘Sinn Féin’s English front’, and O’Brien, however reluctantly, acknowledged that the ISDL had been ‘formed at the express wish of the Irish Republican Govt. and on instructions from Sinn Féin Headquarters’.<sup>17</sup> De Valera’s control of the new organisation even extended to its naming – the Irish Self-Determination League of Great Britain.<sup>18</sup> Whilst the ISDL was conceived and initially directed by Sinn Féin from Dublin, it was organised by the Irish in Britain, until Sinn Féin, and specifically de Valera, grew tired of their creation and withdrew their support.

As de Valera had instructed, the new organisation was launched on 30 March 1919. The venue was a conference in Manchester, chosen, so the audience was informed, because the Manchester Martyrs were their ‘inspiration’.<sup>19</sup> Joining O’Brien on the platform were ‘prominent Sinn Féin leaders from Ireland, Liverpool and London’, including Harry Boland, Lawrence Ginnell, and P. J. Kelly.<sup>20</sup> A provisional executive was appointed, with Kelly as chairman, and a draft constitution was

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Eamon de Valera to Art Ó Briain, 22 March 1919 (NLI, MS 8426 /41).

<sup>17</sup> Keiko Inoue, ‘Dáil Propaganda and the Irish Self-Determination League of Great Britain during the Anglo-Irish War’, *Irish Studies Review*, 6.1 (1998), p. 48; David Fitzpatrick, *Harry Boland’s Irish Revolution* (Cork, 2004), p. 118; Peter Hart, *Mick: The Real Michael Collins* (London, 2005), p. 227; Art Ó Briain to Sinn Féin, 16 January 1925 (NLI, MS 8432 /44).

<sup>18</sup> ‘The name suggested is that of Dev’s choice’. Letter from Sinn Féin Executive, Dublin, to Art Ó Briain, 27 March 1919 (NLI, MS 8426 /41).

<sup>19</sup> *CTCO*, 5 April 1919.

<sup>20</sup> Boland, Sinn Féin’s secretary, distrusted decentralisation and desired close party control of its external organisations. Fitzpatrick, *Harry Boland’s Irish Revolution*, p. 118; Ginnell was the Dáil’s Director of Propaganda until arrested in May 1919. Keiko Inoue, ‘Propaganda of Dáil Éireann, 1919-21’, in Joost Augusteijn (ed.), *The Irish Revolution, 1913-1923* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 88.

accepted, though O'Brien, through his office in London and with Dublin's approval, sought to control the organisation from the beginning.<sup>21</sup>

Fitzpatrick has maintained that the overriding purpose of the pre-1914 Home Rule organisations had been to encourage Irish voters in Britain to participate in British elections and cast their votes in support of the IPP's campaign for self-government.<sup>22</sup> The ISDL, on the other hand, was regarded by Sinn Féin as little more than a means of indoctrinating the Irish in Britain to support Sinn Féin's policies, through the exertions of a small band of dedicated activists in a network of branches, and all under the close control of O'Brien. Not all ISDL members, however, were content to accept such tight control from London and, ultimately, Dublin, and challenged that control. One of the first and most serious challenges arose in South Wales, where the newly-formed ISDL branches, before reluctantly acceding to O'Brien's authority in late 1919, not only established their own executive, but also, in open disregard of the League's isolationist constitution that forbade participation in British politics and restricted membership, affiliated to their local Labour parties and welcomed, as Diamond had advised, members who were neither Irish-born nor of Irish descent.<sup>23</sup>

It had been anticipated by O'Brien, and Dublin, that the ISDL – without any public association with Sinn Féin, by the avoidance of overt displays of republican sentiment, and with a chairman untainted by any prior contact with republicanism – would attract support from across the spectrum of the Irish in Britain, thus proving

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<sup>21</sup> Hutchinson, 'Diaspora Dilemmas', p. 119; Fitzpatrick, 'Irish in Britain', p. 686.

<sup>22</sup> Fitzpatrick, 'A curious middle place', p. 39.

<sup>23</sup> *TCN*, 18 January 1919; Report by Sean McGrath to ISDL Standing Committee, nd (possibly December 1919) (NLI, MS 8435 /12); for the ISDL's constitution, see Inoue, 'Dáil Propaganda', pp. 47-48; for the ISDL in South Wales, see O'Leary, *Immigration and Integration*, pp. 283-289, 292-296.

that self-determination had replaced Home Rule as the goal of the Irish in Britain.<sup>24</sup> In Bradford, surviving UILGB branches transferred their allegiance en masse to the ISDL, but this wholesale conversion was not universal.<sup>25</sup> In Manchester, whereas a few UILGB branches embraced the ISDL, others, Fielding has suggested, remained loyal to the old League, or even rejected 'Nationalism completely and transformed their branches into non-political Irish clubs'.<sup>26</sup> In Liverpool too, in spite of Kelly's reputation, the ISDL found, after some initial successes, little support amongst old or new activists, and failed to dent the authority of Liverpool's Council of Irish Societies.<sup>27</sup> Even more damaging was the ISDL's complete failure to take root in Scotland, and challenge the dominance of the Sinn Féin clubs, though the strength and vitality of Sinn Féin in Scotland obviated the need for the ISDL in the country.<sup>28</sup>

In April 1922, Kelly claimed that 'for unity, loyalty and effective co-operation... our members have eclipsed all previous achievements' and that the ISDL had achieved 'the largest membership of any Irish organisation in the history of the Irish in Britain'.<sup>29</sup> The ISDL, however, was never the largest Irish nationalist organisation in Britain. In 1914, the UILGB had 47,000 members, but even the most inflated ISDL membership of 38,726 recorded in March 1921 fell far short of that total, and it is probable that the ISDL never attained more than 27,000 members scattered across fewer than 300 branches in England and Wales.<sup>30</sup> The ISDL's expansion, after a sluggish start, however, was rapid, and, in the twelve months to

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<sup>24</sup> Elected a Nationalist Councillor in Liverpool in 1914, Kelly had previously been active in the AOH and UILGB. *Liverpool Post*, 2 December 1936; Fitzpatrick, 'A curious middle place', p. 43.

<sup>25</sup> Report on Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom, Home Office Directorate of Intelligence (RORO), 10 June 1920.

<sup>26</sup> *TCN*, 24 May 1919; Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity*, p. 102.

<sup>27</sup> For the ISDL's failure in Liverpool and the Council of Irish Societies, see Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, pp. 284-285.

<sup>28</sup> In February 1922, there were 65 Sinn Féin clubs in Scotland. RORO, 2 February 1922.

<sup>29</sup> Report of 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference, ISDL, 1 April 1922 (NLI, MS 8432 /43).

<sup>30</sup> Report on Organisers by Sean McGrath (not presented) for 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference, ISDL, nd (NLI, MS 8432 /43); according to Fitzpatrick, the ISDL's maximum membership was 20,000. Fitzpatrick, 'Irish in Britain', p. 686.

October 1920, the organisation grew from 54 branches with 3,823 members to 214 branches with 26,972 members.<sup>31</sup>

## **The Origins of the ISDL in the North East, 1919**

In early 1919, as the first angry Irish voices were being raised in Liverpool and Manchester, William Connell from Gateshead called for two petitions to demand ‘self-government for Ireland’; the first from the Irish in Britain, and a second from Irish ex-soldiers, who had ‘fought and bled that small nations might live happy, free from oppression’.<sup>32</sup> Connell’s was not a lone voice on Tyneside, however, for, as a new nationalist organisation for the Irish in Britain was being planned in Dublin, the Irish Labour Party, outside of Sinn Féin’s control, was forming on Tyneside, and it was this organisation that played a key initial role in giving voice to the growing demand for Irish self-determination in the North East. It is probable, however, that men who supported a far older Irish tradition were behind the establishment of the first ISDL branch in South Tyneside.

Though seemingly moribund in 1914, the Irish Republican Brotherhood in South Shields revived at the end of the Great War as a ‘semi-independent movement’, and survived until late 1920, when the circle was reorganised on Dublin’s orders, with Gilbert Barrington as Head Centre.<sup>33</sup> A flurry of correspondence in 1919, between Patrick Martin and Art O’Brien, himself an IRB member, appears to provide additional evidence of the IRB on South Tyneside, and its role in the formation of the ISDL’s first Tyneside branch.<sup>34</sup> This correspondence

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<sup>31</sup> Report on Organisers, 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference (NLI, MS 8432 /43).

<sup>32</sup> *TCN*, 1 February 1919.

<sup>33</sup> Barrington’s father had also been an IRB member, having been sworn into the organisation by his father in Liverpool in 1869. Mary Barrington, *Irish Independence*, pp. 4, 9-10.

<sup>34</sup> O’Brien joined the IRB in London after 1914, and became a ‘close confidant’ of the IRB’s London leaders, Sean McGrath and Michael Collins. McGee, *Art Ó Briain Papers*, p. 4; Patrick Martin to

opened on 30 April 1919, when Martin, ‘an old friend of the cause’, wrote that he had met Laurence Ginnell, TD for Westmeath, on Easter Sunday (20 April) in Newcastle, and was now seeking a copy of the ISDL’s ‘resolution for Self-Determination’. Subsequently, Martin wrote that he was ‘determined’ to start an ISDL branch in South Shields, and was told by O’Brien to contact Manus O’Donnell in Cullercoats, who had been appointed, even before any branches had been formed in the region, as Newcastle’s representative on the ISDL’s provisional executive.<sup>35</sup> On 10 July, Martin reported that the new branch had 40 members.<sup>36</sup> He also explained that he had visited neighbouring Jarrow with O’Donnell to encourage the formation of an ISDL branch there.<sup>37</sup> Then, in a telling postscript that, perhaps, indicates South Tyneside’s support for republicanism rather than simply self-determination, Martin added that the South Shields branch was ‘more SF [Sinn Féin] than ISDL’.<sup>38</sup> In early August, Martin reported that he had met ‘two of the most prominent of those men’ from Jarrow, Michael Connolly and Patrick Costello, and that, in spite of difficulties, a Jarrow branch that ‘will be a credit to the cause’ would soon be formed. Finally, Martin explained that he had ‘overcome the opposition’ in Jarrow led by Alderman John Casey, and that an ISDL branch had been formed in the town on 17 September with Casey as president, Connolly as vice-president, and Costello as treasurer.<sup>39</sup> Jarrow’s new branch was not slow in taking up the cry for

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Art Ó Briain, 30 April and 12 May 1919, and from Art Ó Briain to Patrick Martin, 14 and 23 May 1919 (NLI, MS 8436 /15); Patrick Martin to Art Ó Briain, 10 July, 5 August, and 18 September 1919 (NLI, MS 8433 /50).

<sup>35</sup> Nothing is known about Manus O’Donnell, but it is probable that he too was an IRB member.

<sup>36</sup> South Shields ISDL executive: William Moynihan, chairman; William McNally, vice-chairman; Michael Boyle, treasurer; and Patrick Martin, secretary. *TCN*, 5 July 1919.

<sup>37</sup> Patrick Martin to Art Ó Briain, 10 July 1919 (NLI, MS 8433 /50).

<sup>38</sup> In November 1919, South Shields’ ISDL branch was named after ‘Major McBride’. In July 1920, a ‘Major McBride’ Sinn Féin club was reported, whilst in 1921, a mass for the Manchester Martyrs at St. Bede’s was attended by ‘the members of the Major McBride IRB’. No corroborating evidence has, unfortunately, been found for these reports. *TCN*, 15 November 1919, 17 July 1920, and 3 December 1921.

<sup>39</sup> Alderman Casey’s initial opposition possibly sprang from the desire of Jarrow’s ‘Catholic party’ to retain its independence. Casey, an ‘ardent Irish Nationalist’, died in May 1920, whilst president of

‘the immediate release of all Irish political prisoners’.<sup>40</sup>

Though the North East’s first ISDL branch probably sprang from an enduring Fenian tradition on South Tyneside, the second and third branches were wholly children of the Irish Labour Party.<sup>41</sup> The Newcastle branch of the IrLP had been inaugurated at the National Club on 23 February 1919, but, even before that date, the party’s chairman, Austin McNamara, had chaired a meeting in the club to revive Tyneside’s annual ‘Irish National Festival’.<sup>42</sup> The National Club’s re-discovery of its pre-war nationalist zeal was then confirmed at a meeting, again chaired by McNamara that demanded the release of all Irish political prisoners.<sup>43</sup> During the St. Patrick’s Day demonstration, the first in Newcastle since 1914, Thomas Hayes, from Gateshead’s IrLP, argued that Ireland’s case for self-determination was ‘indisputable and unanswerable’, and was supported by another IrLP activist, Miss Mary McDermott, the first woman ever to speak at a St. Patrick’s Day demonstration in Newcastle, and the pioneer of the enhanced role of women in the North East’s Irish organisations after the Great War. Mary McDermott asserted that the Irish on Tyneside fully endorsed ‘the demand of the Irish people for the right of self-determination’, but complained that they had been ‘too quiet and had not raised a voice in defence of their countrymen who had been done to death in British gaols’.<sup>44</sup>

It was against this background that Art O’Brien set about fulfilling de Valera’s instructions, but Dublin soon acknowledged the difficulties O’Brien faced ‘getting things going properly’, especially in Newcastle, where the initial public

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the ISDL in Jarrow and of the Tyneside District committee. *TCN*, 22 May 1920.

<sup>40</sup> *TCN*, 4 October 1919.

<sup>41</sup> See Chapter 5 for the Irish Labour Party.

<sup>42</sup> *NDC*, 19 and 24 February 1919.

<sup>43</sup> *TCN*, 1 March 1919.

<sup>44</sup> *NDC*, 17 March 1919; *CTCO*, 22 March 1919; an IrLP member, Mary McDermott died in June 1919. In April, she had been elected a guardian in South Shields. *TCN*, 19 April and 5 July 1919.

meeting arranged by the Irish Labour Party had been criticised for its poor organisation.<sup>45</sup> Though the founding of the first ISDL branches on Tyneside required little input from O'Brien, he was not, however, left ignorant of the process. Though only one letter has survived from Luke Hannon to his 'Dear friend', Art O'Brien, its tone suggests it was part of a regular correspondence.<sup>46</sup> Hannon, a founding member of both the IrLP and ISDL on Tyneside, was also personally known to O'Brien via his position as a delegate from the ISDL's Tyneside District committee on the national executive.<sup>47</sup>

The first recorded meeting of Newcastle's ISDL branch was held in the National Club on 11 May 1919, when Austin McNamara, chairman at that point of both Newcastle's IrLP and ISDL branches, told his audience that:

There was a time when their leaders advised them to take a quarter of a loaf, to be satisfied with simply Home Rule, which in effect meant that they would be forever a province of England. But a wonderful spirit has arisen in Ireland, a spirit which denied any other nation the right to govern them.<sup>48</sup>

Then, replicating the previous spread of the IrLP up the River Tyne, an ISDL branch was established at Gateshead on 22 June, with Thomas Hayes and James Gunn, both leading members of the local IrLP, as president and treasurer.<sup>49</sup> In July 1919, the closeness of the relationship between the IrLP and the ISDL on Tyneside was clearly demonstrated, when a telegram was sent to Patrick Pearse's mother from those 'Irish men and women of Newcastle', who were 'upholding the principles the men of Easter Week died for', and was jointly signed by the presidents of the two fraternal

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<sup>45</sup> Letter from Sinn Féin Executive, Dublin, to Art Ó Briain, 29 April 1919 (NLI, MS 8426 /41). William McAnany, IrLP secretary in South Shields, organised the Newcastle meeting. This letter reveals that there was correspondence between Sinn Féin and Tyneside that by-passed O'Brien in London. Sinn Féin's Tyneside informant was William O'Neill, IrLP secretary in Newcastle.

<sup>46</sup> Letter from Luke Hannon to Art Ó Briain, 6 December 1919 (NLI, MS 8433 /50).

<sup>47</sup> *TCN*, 21 February 1920.

<sup>48</sup> *TCN*, 17 May 1919; after Newcastle's ISDL branch formed, McNamara relinquished his chairmanship of Newcastle's IrLP, though retaining his membership. *TCN*, 21 June 1919.

<sup>49</sup> Later records suggest that Gateshead had precedence over Newcastle. *TCN*, 28 June 1919.

organisations in Newcastle.<sup>50</sup>

## **The Expansion of the ISDL in the North East, 1919-1921**

In May 1919, a letter to the *Tyneside Catholic News* called for an ISDL branch to be established ‘without delay in every centre where there is an Irish population’, and asked for a ‘responsible person’ to be sent to ‘where there is no lack of enthusiasm but a great want of organisation’, citing Teesside as one such centre.<sup>51</sup> Publicity, particularly favourable coverage in the Catholic press, would be essential if the ISDL was to progress. Charles Diamond, however, was critical of the new organisation, just as he was critical of the Irish Labour Party in Britain. He was especially scathing of the ‘unknown notoriety hunters’ filling the ISDL’s provisional executive – a taunt that prompted Sinn Féin headquarters to ask O’Brien to write to Diamond to temper his disapproval before the ISDL suffered serious damage.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, on 5 April 1919, in spite of his criticism, Diamond had published de Valera’s call ‘To the Irish in England’. This appeal urged the Irish in England to ‘act together in co-operative unison... in the very heart of the Power that is your country’s enemy’. Until late 1921, Diamond regularly kept his readership informed of the ISDL’s policies and progress, though never uncritically, and he even indulged in some flattery: ‘Little by little the Irish Self-Determination movement is spreading all over Great Britain and attracting to itself all the best elements of Irish life’.<sup>53</sup>

Beyond the IRB and Irish Labour Party strongholds on Tyneside, organisational support would be essential to assist the ISDL’s spread. Surviving UILGB branches might have provided that organisational expertise, but an

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<sup>50</sup> The signatories were Austin McNamara, ISDL, and Thomas Larkin, IrLP. *TCN*, 2 August 1919.

<sup>51</sup> The author, Michael Kelly, was later secretary of Stockton’s ISDL branch. *TCN*, 3 May 1919; List of ISDL Branch Secretaries, July 1922 (NLI, MS 8431 /2).

<sup>52</sup> Letter from Sinn Féin Executive, Dublin, to Art Ó Briain, 9 July 1919 (NLI, MS 8426 /41).

<sup>53</sup> *TCN*, 5 April and 8 November 1919.



anonymous ISDL supporter complained that his local UILGB branch was a ‘most persistent opponent’ and had banned from office anyone ‘holding Sinn Fein views’ – though not ‘from drinking beer at the bar’ – and asked why the UILGB was ‘opposing the mandate issued by the Irish people at home last December’ and was attempting to bar ‘the way of those who heartily accept that message from the homeland?’<sup>54</sup> In spite of this opposition, however, the anonymous writer claimed that:

Self-Determination has got its foot well planted now in this district... The young Irish boys are coming in fine, the right old established Irish exiles are lending willing hands; drink is tabooed; a ladies’ branch is to be formed; and everything points to enthusiasm reaching beyond expectations.

An editorial comment appended to this letter suggested that opposition to the ISDL from surviving UILGB branches was the norm. In the North East, however, UILGB members, together with Hibernians and Foresters, joined the ISDL. Thus, for example, Gilbert Barrington had been active in the UILGB, Luke Hannon in the AOH, and Austin McNamara in the INF; whilst the chairman of Felling’s ISDL branch had been an UILGB organiser, and the ISDL in Stanley met in the local Hibernian Hall.<sup>55</sup> An article in *The Blyth News* indicates the mechanism by which this transfer developed and clearly implies that, in the Northumberland coalfield at least, the ISDL filled the void created by the UILGB’s inactivity:

Under the auspices of the United Irish League of Great Britain, the Irish Electorate in this part of the country have for the past quarter of a century been fairly well organised, but in view of the declension of the Irish National party and the uprising of the Sinn Fein movement, the old organisation fell quite naturally into a state of inactivity. Events in recent times, however, have evoked a quickened interest in organisation; and during the past few months meetings have been held at the big centres of Blyth, Bedlington and Ashington, amongst the local leaders of the Irish people, who evidently by general consent have favoured the policy and principles of the Self Determination League of Great Britain branches of

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<sup>54</sup> It is not known if this letter refers to a North Eastern UILGB branch. *TCN*, 10 May 1919.

<sup>55</sup> *TCN*, 20 November 1920; *Auckland and County Chronicle and Stanley News (ACC)*, 19 August 1920.

which have been formed at these centres.<sup>56</sup>

The evidence above suggests that there was continuity of membership between the pre- and post-1916 nationalist organisations in the North East, though the ISDL also attracted people, particularly women, who possibly lacked previous experience of organised nationalism.<sup>57</sup> This continuity, however, was not to the same degree observed by Fitzpatrick in his study of County Clare, but was greater than that identified by Campbell in his study of County Galway.<sup>58</sup> One group of North East nationalists, however, appears to have shunned ISDL membership. These were the pre-1918 nationalist leaders John Farnon, Felix Lavery, John Mulcahy, John O'Hanlon, and all the other men whose names dominate the first chapters of this study. Between 1919 and 1922, their names all but vanish from the narrative, and only return to public attention on a regular basis, as shall be seen, following the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December 1921, and the creation of the Irish Free State. The fact that many of these nationalists held public office in the North East may have influenced their decision to remain apart from an overtly republican and isolationist organisation, though public office did not prevent their attending en masse Terence MacSwiney's requiem in October 1920, nor retaining their membership of Newcastle's Irish National Cub, which appears to have remained a haven for the older nationalists, whilst also being used for clandestine meetings of the Tyneside IRA's Brigade staff, and, possibly, even as an IRA arsenal.<sup>59</sup>

In August 1919, the ISDL's provisional executive appointed Sean McGrath as

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<sup>56</sup> *Blyth News (BN)*, 3 June 1920.

<sup>57</sup> Before 1914, the new nationalist movements in Ireland were credited as attracting 'the most active and intelligent of the younger nationalists'. The same may have applied in Britain after 1918. Lyons, *Irish Parliamentary Party*, p. 263.

<sup>58</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life, 1913-1921*, pp. 127-28; Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, pp. 167-168.

<sup>59</sup> On 21 May 1921, before the Tyneside IRA carried out 40 incendiary and bombing attacks in the North East, arms, explosives, and other military equipment was issued to IRA company officers after a meeting held in 'the Irish Club, Newcastle'. Barrington Statement, p. 6.

national organiser, and, until his promotion to general secretary in late 1919, he oversaw the opening of 30 new branches in England, and recruited over 2,000 new members.<sup>60</sup> In spite of McGrath's efforts, however, and the deteriorating political situation in Ireland, the ISDL in the North East was slow to take root, and by the end of 1919, whilst a further four branches had been formed at Walker, Jarrow, Hebburn, and Wallsend, in addition to the branches at South Shields, Newcastle, and Gateshead, away from Tyneside, in the Durham and Northumberland coalfields, on Wearside and on Teesside, though there may have been enthusiasm and potential recruits, there were no organised branches.<sup>61</sup>

During 1920 and 1921, however, and particularly during the second half of 1920, when the Anglo-Irish War was at its most brutal, the ISDL's expansion across England and Wales was mirrored in the North East, and by November 1921 there were 66 branches divided between the region's three district committees, with 31 branches on Tyneside, 23 in Mid-Durham and 12 on Teesside.<sup>62</sup> The first of these district committees had been established on Tyneside in October 1919 to co-ordinate the developing branch network, with Alderman Casey as chairman, Patrick Martin as secretary, and delegates from each branch.<sup>63</sup> By September 1920, the Tyneside District had swollen to 42 branches, prompting the branches in County Durham, from Consett in the west to Seaham on the coast, to form their own Mid-Durham District in February 1921, with Patrick McDermott from Crook as chairman.<sup>64</sup> Meanwhile in the south of the region, a Teesside committee had formed in June 1920

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<sup>60</sup> Report on Organisers, 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference (NLI, MS 8432 /43).

<sup>61</sup> Thomas Larkin, Newcastle's IrLP president, presided at the first ISDL meeting in Walker; Wallsend's ISDL sent a member to the Tyneside District in October 1919; and Sean McGrath spoke at the first ISDL meeting in Hebburn. *TCN*, 30 August, 18 October, and 1 November 1919.

<sup>62</sup> Report, 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference, 1 April 1922 (NLI, MS 8432 /43).

<sup>63</sup> *TCN*, 18 October 1919; Newcastle's ISDL elected IrLP stalwarts, Austin McNamara and Sean Cunningham, as delegates to the district committee. *TCN*, 6 September 1919.

<sup>64</sup> *NEC*, 24 September 1920; *TCN*, 19 February and 17 September 1921.

with five branches and Councillor James Hamill from Middlesbrough as chairman.<sup>65</sup>

To date, no complete list of the North East's ISDL branches has been found, though the locations of 56 branches, ranging from Ashington and Blyth in Northumberland to Port Clarence and Redcar on Teesside, have been gleaned from newspaper reports, O'Brien's papers in Dublin, and the ISDL's own journal *The Irish Exile*, published in London between March 1921 and June 1922.<sup>66</sup> Few of these branches, however, could boast large memberships. Newcastle claimed 200 members on formation, and Sunderland 250, though the largest branch may have been on Teesside, where one branch (probably Middlesbrough's) claimed 1,000 members in March 1921. Most branches had no more than 100 members, though Tow Law formed in August 1920 with only 30 members, whilst the Consett branch, which had been established in April 1920, had a mere 20 members in March 1921.<sup>67</sup>

The ISDL's expansion across the North East was credited to Michael McGrath, Sean McGrath's brother, who had been appointed national organiser in February 1920.<sup>68</sup> Just as important to the ISDL's development in the region was the proselytising undertaken by a small number of men and women, and it was these activists who came to dominate the history of the ISDL in the region. The first of

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<sup>65</sup> The branches were at Grangetown, Middlesbrough, Port Clarence, Stockton, and South Bank. *TCN*, 26 June 1920.

<sup>66</sup> Known ISDL branches: Annitsford, Ashington, Backworth, Bedlington, Bishop Auckland, Blackhill, Blyth, Chester le Street, Chopwell, Consett, Cornsay Colliery, Cowpen, Crawcrook, Crook, Dipton, Easington, Esh Winning, Felling, Gateshead, Gosforth/Coxlodge, Grangetown, Hartlepool, Haverton Hill, Hebburn, Horden, Houghton le Spring, Jarrow, Kelloe, Lanchester, Leadgate, Middlesbrough, Newcastle upon Tyne, North Shields, Port Clarence, Redcar, Sacriston, Seaham, Shildon, South Bank, South Shields, Spennymoor, Stanley, Stockton, Sunderland, Thornley, Tow Law, Trimdon, Ushaw Moor, Walker, Wallsend, Washington, Waterhouses, Willington, Willington Quay, Wingate, and Witton Park.

<sup>67</sup> *TCN*, 17 May 1919; 17 April, 15 May, and 28 August 1920; Report re membership to ISDL Central Executive, nd (late December 1921) (NLI, MS 8432 /5).

<sup>68</sup> *TCN*, 10 July 1920; Michael McGrath, until his re-arrest in March 1921, regularly visited the North East, where, as a 1916 veteran, he found an eager audience. *BN*, 21 June 1920; released from prison in December 1921, McGrath returned to the North East as organiser until March 1922. Report on Organisers, 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference (NLI, MS 8432 /43).

these activists were from Newcastle's Irish Labour Party, Austin McNamara and Sean Cunningham, who were elected president and secretary of Newcastle's ISDL branch in July 1919. These appointments were confirmed in September, when both reaffirmed their commitment to the nationalist cause, with McNamara pronouncing that, in spite of what he had seen in Ireland during a recent visit, the 'Irish people would suffer death sooner than surrender'; and Cunningham declaring that a campaign had begun that would 'light up all the Irish forces in England and Wales'.<sup>69</sup>

By early 1920, however, the IrLP's influence within the ISDL had waned, as more advanced nationalists took control of the key offices on Tyneside, with Gilbert Barrington as president in South Shields; Richard Purcell replacing Austin McNamara as president in Newcastle; and Joseph Connolly as the ISDL's first locally-appointed organiser.<sup>70</sup> Between May 1920 and October 1921, when Barrington and Purcell were arrested, these three were regular speakers, either singly or together, on ISDL platforms across the North East.<sup>71</sup> At first, as in Blyth on 31 May 1920, their speeches contained little to indicate the depth of their republican views: Barrington simply reminded his audience that the Irish had voted in 1918 'by a huge majority... in favour of self-government'; Purcell claimed that British public opinion was 'for granting Ireland the fullest possible measure of Home Rule'; whilst Connolly argued that the current unrest in Ireland 'would be immediately ended by the withdrawal of troops and the reins of government handed to the people themselves'.<sup>72</sup> Yet within a few months, their increasing control of the ISDL on

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<sup>69</sup> *TCN*, 5 July and 6 September 1919.

<sup>70</sup> *TCN*, 7 and 14 February, 8 May, and 19 June 1920; Barrington Statement, p. 1; Report on Organisers, 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference (NLI, MS 8432 /43).

<sup>71</sup> For example at Chester le Street (*ACC*, 13 May 1920); Newcastle (*CTCO*, 19 June 1920); Jarrow (*NEC*, 28 August 1920); Seaham (*ACC*, 2 September 1920); Spennymoor (*CTCO*, 23 October 1920); Sunderland (*TCN*, 20 November 1920); Bedlington (*BN*, 31 January 1921); Ashington (*BN*, 17 March 1921); and Hebburn (*IE*, June 1921).

<sup>72</sup> *BN*, 31 May 1920.

Tyneside, and their own growing confidence, together with the worsening violence in Ireland, permitted not only the public expression, and apparent acceptance, of republican ideology, but also the secret formation of the Tyneside Brigade of the IRA.<sup>73</sup>

In his witness statement, Barrington commended a number of people for having given the ISDL ‘unstinting assistance’.<sup>74</sup> One of these was Councillor Terence O’Connor from Jarrow. O’Connor, however, as treasurer of the Tyneside District committee from February 1920, was more than just an assistant, and retained this position after his mentor, Alderman Casey, died in May 1920. O’Connor was also unusual amongst Tyneside’s ISDL leadership in having been a prominent nationalist before 1914, and an elected town councillor, though, like Alderman Casey, he appeared to have played little part in Irish politics outside of the confines of Jarrow until he joined the ISDL’s Tyneside District committee.<sup>75</sup> Barrington also singled out for praise two women, Martha Larkin and Theresa Mason, who, building on the pioneering work of Mary McDermott, assumed leadership roles within the Tyneside ISDL and remained active long after most others had forsaken the organisation.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Purcell took control of the ISDL’s Tyneside District committee after John Casey’s death in May 1920, and was elected president in April 1921, when Barrington became secretary. *TCN*, 10 July 1920, 23 April 1921.

<sup>74</sup> Barrington Statement, p. 11.

<sup>75</sup> Both O’Connor and John Casey had refused the UILGB’s offer to stand as the Nationalist candidate in Jarrow in 1907. *Jarrow Labour Herald*, 8 March 1907; *Northern Catholic Calendar*, 1907, p. 84, and 1909, p. 86; O’Connor, as an elected guardian in South Shields, sat with elected IrLP members, including Gilbert Barrington. *SDG*, 20 March 1919.

<sup>76</sup> Martha Larkin’s husband was Thomas Larkin, Newcastle’s IrLP president. Theresa Mason was married to the advanced nationalist, Robert McDonough Mason. Barrington later claimed that both these women were ‘active members’ of Cumann na mBan, though there is no evidence that this organisation formally existed on Tyneside. In 1920, however, the London branch used the cover name ‘Ladies Distress Committee’, and it is possible that the ISDL’s ladies’ committees provided similar cover in the North East, especially in Jarrow, where the Brennan sisters were also named as Cumann na mBan members. Barrington Statement, p. 8; also McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, pp. 30, 153.

## ISDL Political Activity in the North East, 1920-1921

In early May 1920, a County Durham newspaper reported how ‘the usual quiet of the Sunday evening at Chester le Street’ had been disturbed by the noise of marching and band playing’. The stimulus was the local ISDL branch parading, with ‘Sinn Fein colours’ flying, through the town’s streets to hear speeches by ‘Sinn Fein propagandists’.<sup>77</sup> Regular meetings like this were the mainstay of the ISDL’s work in the North East, and were held, Barrington explained, ‘not only to maintain, but to keep Irish Republican principles constantly in the minds of all supporters’, and to educate the ISDL’s membership ‘in view of the complete absence of a favourable press’.<sup>78</sup> The main business of these meetings was the passing of resolutions calling for the withdrawal of British troops from Ireland; for the release of Irish political prisoners; and, above all, for Irish self-determination. Thus, for example, the Chester le Street meeting protested against ‘the present brutal system of government in Ireland’ and ‘the treatment meted out to their fellow-countrymen in Ireland’, and called on the British government ‘to withdraw the soldiers, tanks and aeroplanes... and restore to Ireland the God-given right of all nations; to rule according to their own national ideals’.<sup>79</sup>

During the second half of 1920, however, two protracted, and interlinked, crises enabled the ISDL to mobilise Irish nationalist opinion in Britain on a scale not previously seen: the British government’s banning of Archbishop Mannix of Melbourne from visiting Ireland; and the hunger strike of Terence MacSwiney, Lord

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<sup>77</sup> The ‘propagandists’ included Richard Purcell, Terence O’Connor, and Theresa Mason. *ACC*, 13 May 1920.

<sup>78</sup> By 1952, Barrington appears to have forgotten *The Irish Exile* and the Catholic press. Barrington Statement, p. 10.

<sup>79</sup> *ACC*, 13 May 1920; resolutions were passed by ISDL branches in Thornley (*ACC*, 30 September 1920) demanding the removal of British troops; in Bedlington (*BN*, 6 March 1922) demanding the release of Irish political prisoners sentenced in Britain; and in Ashington (*BN*, 12 August 1920) and Jarrow (*NEC*, 24 September 1920) in support of self-determination.

Mayor of Cork, who had been transferred from Ireland to Brixton prison.<sup>80</sup> In August 1920, Archbishop Daniel Mannix, ‘a conspicuous advocate of Irish independence’, intended, following his tour of America, to visit Ireland.<sup>81</sup> Alarmed that his speeches would incite violence, the British authorities prevented Mannix from landing in Liverpool, where an ISDL welcoming demonstration had been planned, and then banned him from visiting Ireland altogether, though he was free to tour the rest of England and Scotland.<sup>82</sup> On 19 August 1920, news of a ‘Hands off Mannix’ demonstration in Manchester, and MacSwiney’s hunger strike, were printed in North East newspapers.<sup>83</sup> Two days later, advance notice was published of a pro-Mannix meeting organised by Newcastle’s ISDL.<sup>84</sup> The meeting, on 25 August, was chaired by Richard Purcell, who argued that the Archbishop only ‘wanted to visit his aged mother in Ireland’. Purcell then referred to ‘the martyrdom of the Lord Mayor of Cork’, whose ‘serious condition’ had been reported in the newspapers the previous evening, warning that, if MacSwiney died, ‘it would be the last nail in the coffin of English rule in Ireland’, and declaring, in a conscious echo of MacSwiney’s own message ‘to the Irish people’, that ‘all Irishmen should be ready to offer their lives for Ireland if need be’. At the end of the meeting, Theresa Mason submitted a resolution condemning the ‘malicious treatment’ of Mannix by the ‘English government’. Seconded by Martha Larkin, the resolution was carried.<sup>85</sup>

The same day, 25 August, an ISDL meeting in Gosforth, chaired by Councillor

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<sup>80</sup> The ISDL had a central role in both crises, producing press bulletins, countering negative publicity, and organising demonstrations. Francis J. Costello, *Enduring the Most: The life and death of Terence MacSwiney* (Brandon, 1995), pp. 157, 160; Mannix supported MacSwiney’s hunger strike, visiting him in prison, and administering extreme unction. Aspden, *Fortress Church*, p. 89.

<sup>81</sup> Aspden, *Fortress Church*, p. 88.

<sup>82</sup> Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, p. 283.

<sup>83</sup> *NEC*, 19 August 1920; the hunger strike in Cork was also reported. *BN*, 19 August 1920.

<sup>84</sup> *NEC*, 21 August 1920.

<sup>85</sup> *NEC*, 26 August 1920; MacSwiney had said ‘We must be prepared for casualties in the last battle for Irish independence. Let every man offer his life and the future of the Irish Republic will be safe. God is with us’. *NEC*, 24 August 1920.



James Brennan, called for the lifting of the ban on Mannix for demanding Irish self-determination ‘one of the principles for which the European War is supposed to have been fought’.<sup>86</sup> Whilst, a few days later, an outdoor meeting in Jarrow, featuring the ISDL’s entire Tyneside leadership, Barrington, Connelly, O’Connor, Purcell, and Mrs Mason, passed the following resolution: ‘This meeting of Irishmen and women, and those of the labouring classes and labour organisations demand the immediate removal of the ban which prohibits Dr Mannix from seeing his aged mother and entering his native land’.<sup>87</sup> ‘Horror and indignation’ were also expressed at the ‘atrocious treatment’ of MacSwiney, and O’Connor warned that ‘Irishmen in England would be prepared to stop at nothing in their determination to support the principles for which the Lord Mayor of Cork was prepared to die’. Seizing the opportunity of using the two crises to extend its propaganda campaign beyond its own membership to the wider Irish audience on Tyneside, and, perhaps, even to an English audience, the ISDL organised a public meeting for the following Sunday evening, 29 August, on Town Moor ‘for all friends of freedom’. Purcell opened the meeting by reading a telegram from Archbishop Mannix, and then announced that a telegram was being sent to MacSwiney ‘in the name of the Sinn Feiners and the Irish people of Newcastle offering their lives in order that their motherland might be free’. Barrington followed, hailing the assembly as evidence that ‘the Irishmen of Tyneside along with others all over the world were quite determined that the Irish Republic should carry on its work’, before William Sears, Sinn Féin TD for South Mayo, praised the audience for their loyalty to ‘the old land notwithstanding that they were cut off from the truth about Ireland and were supplied with false calumny’.<sup>88</sup> Protests

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<sup>86</sup> *NEC*, 26 August 1920.

<sup>87</sup> *NEC*, 28 August 1920.

<sup>88</sup> *NEC*, 30 August 1920; the ISDL also organised meetings in Seaham and Middlesbrough. *ACC*, 2 September 1920, and *NDC*, 30 August 1920.

against the ‘slow murder’ of MacSwiney continued to dominate ISDL meetings across the North East until his death on 25 October 1920.<sup>89</sup>

A requiem mass for MacSwiney was held in St. Mary’s Cathedral on Saturday 30 October, and nationalists from ‘all the Irish political, friendly, and social organisations in the city’ were represented, including the National Club, Hibernians, National Foresters, Gaelic League, Irish Literary Society, and ISDL.<sup>90</sup> The next day, masses were said for MacSwiney ‘in almost every parish in the diocese’.<sup>91</sup> Following the requiem, the Tyneside ISDL stage-managed a symbolic funeral, when, in ‘scenes unparalleled in the history of Newcastle’, a procession of 2,000 ‘Catholics and Sinn Feiners’ walked from the Bigg Market to Town Moor. In front of a hearse bearing a coffin draped with a large Irish tricolour was Gateshead’s Irish Labour Party band; alongside were bearers wearing ISDL armbands; and behind was a tricolour ‘draped in black and at half-mast’ and a harp-shaped floral wreath carried by two children. As the hearse passed by onlookers were seen ‘to raise their hats and perform religious devotions’. On Town Moor, an estimated 5,000 people gathered, though Barrington later claimed 15,000 ‘mainly English, who listened attentively and without interruption to the strongly worded discourses addressed to them’.<sup>92</sup> After the hymn, *Hail, Glorious St. Patrick*, so beloved by the Irish Catholic diaspora, Purcell proclaimed that ‘by his death’ MacSwiney had ‘triumphed over his enemies’,

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<sup>89</sup> The emotive description ‘slow murder’ was used in a resolution passed by the ISDL in Jarrow. *NEC*, 24 September 1920.

<sup>90</sup> *CTCO*, 6 November 1920; Father Joseph Newsham celebrated the requiem, and the congregation included Councillors Terence O’Connor, James Brennan, James Courtney Doyle, John Farnon, and Alderman John O’Hanlon, plus John Gorman, James McLarney, Felix Lavery, Patrick O’Rorke, Joseph Connelly, and Richard Purcell. Only the IrLP’s leaders appear to have been absent. *NDC*, 1 November 1920; Newcastle’s National Club telegraphed MacSwiney’s widow on the ‘lamented death of martyr husband’. *NDC*, 28 October 1920.

<sup>91</sup> *CTCO*, 6 November 1920; in September 1920, the Cabinet had been warned that there might be ‘outbursts and rioting’ in Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester, and Newcastle, if MacSwiney died. After his death, the muted reaction was dismissed as no more than ‘a glut of rosary recitations and religious services’. *RORO*, 9 September and 4 October 1920.

<sup>92</sup> Barrington’s ‘English’ were, probably, like himself, second or third generation Irish. Barrington Statement, p. 11.

and that ‘his spirit went on, and the principles for which he had died would live until the republican flag waved over a free Ireland’.<sup>93</sup>

Just weeks after the propaganda bonanza of MacSwiney’s death, the Tyneside ISDL welcomed Archbishop Mannix himself to Newcastle. In a crowded St. James’ Hall, with ‘many hundreds unable to gain admission’, Mannix reaffirmed his nationalist credentials by stating that Ireland’s case for ‘absolute independence’ was ‘just and unassailable’, and then, to cheers, described the recent events in Dublin (Bloody Sunday), as being ‘the inevitable result of the illegal violence to which the Government for months past had turned a blind eye’ and ‘the result of British policy in Ireland for the last 750 years’.<sup>94</sup>

## **The ISDL and the Irish Cultural Revival**

The close relationship between ‘republican politics and the Gaelic revival’ in the aftermath of the Easter Rising has been explored by John Hutchinson and Alan O’Day, and the ISDL used this cultural reawakening to intensify a ‘sense of distinctiveness’ from their British hosts, even naming its own monthly newspaper *The Irish Exile*.<sup>95</sup> Cultural education became, therefore, a mainstay of the ISDL’s political programme and branches were encouraged to provide ‘practical support to the study and use of the Irish language, history and literature’, and to facilitate participation in ‘Irish games and pastimes’.<sup>96</sup> Harnessing Irish culture in the support

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<sup>93</sup> Speakers included Fathers Joseph Byrne, St. Bede’s, South Shields; Richard Vaughan, St. Joseph’s, Benwell; and Patrick Staunton and Michael Walsh, St. Joseph’s, Gateshead; plus Thomas Larkin, Gilbert Barrington, Joseph Connolly, and Terence O’Connor, who wrote the funeral oration. *NDC*, 1 November 1920 and *TCN*, 6 November 1920.

<sup>94</sup> The meeting was chaired by Canon Magill. *NDC*, 1 December 1920, and *TCN*, 4 December 1920; on ‘Bloody Sunday’, 21 November 1920, Gaelic football spectators at Croke Park were fired on by British forces. Hopkinson, *Irish War*, pp. 88-91; before Mannix left Britain in May 1921, he declared that ‘the only person entitled to talk for the whole of Ireland is President de Valera’. *The Irish Exile (IE)*, June 1921.

<sup>95</sup> Hutchinson and O’Day, ‘Gaelic Revival in London’, p. 274.

<sup>96</sup> *IE*, April 1921.

of republican goals was not, however, confined to London, and in April 1922, a Salford correspondent to *The Irish Exile* acknowledged that the ISDL had had ‘a Gaelicising influence on many of its members and on many of those who have come under its influence’, and boasted that nowhere, outside of London, had ‘this healing and unifying influence’ had greater influence than in Manchester.<sup>97</sup>

The cultural reawakening on Tyneside, however, pre-dated the formation of the first ISDL branches with the Irish Labour Party publicising language classes in March 1919.<sup>98</sup> This initiative appears to have foundered, however, after the party lost its Irish-Ireland enthusiasts to the ISDL. The defectors included Austin McNamara, who had told Newcastle’s ISDL branch in July 1919 that he wanted the ISDL to be ‘an intellectual movement’ to educate Irish workers in England, and ‘to revive the Irish songs and Gaelic language’, because, if they did this, they would be ‘helping Ireland’.<sup>99</sup> In London, Hutchinson and O’Day have suggested that the Gaelic revival had little to offer the Irish working-class, appealing instead to the ‘educated, Irish-born minor intelligentsia’, and, indeed, Gaelic classes and other cultural activities did not thrive in the North East until after the ISDL’s membership had plummeted in late 1921, leaving behind only the more active and enthusiastic nationalists.<sup>100</sup> From late 1921, reports of cultural activities appeared regularly in *The Irish Exile*, and the activities in Hebburn were typical of those from ISDL branches on Tyneside and across England and Wales. In Hebburn, the ISDL sponsored a winter lecture programme that included ‘100 Years of the Irish Labour Ideal’, ‘The Fenian Movement’, ‘The Manchester Martyrs’, and ‘The Irish Peasantry’, whilst in February 1922 a branch library was opened ‘stocked with the right assortment of books of the

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<sup>97</sup> *IE*, April 1922.

<sup>98</sup> *TCN*, 29 March 1919.

<sup>99</sup> *TCN*, 5 July 1919.

<sup>100</sup> Hutchinson and O’Day ‘Gaelic Revival in London’, p. 275.

Irish-Ireland movement'. The Gaelic class had also made 'good progress', and, though the weekly ceilidh had ended because of the closure of the usual hall, a new social evening was being held 'in our own room' every Saturday night. Elsewhere, there were Irish language and dancing classes at Felling 'to revive the Irish spirit'; weekly Gaelic classes in Thornley and Willington Quay; in Sunderland, language classes were praised for bringing branch members together; whilst on Teesside, Middlesbrough held a weekly ceilidh, and Grangetown supported the 'Emmett Hurling Club'.<sup>101</sup>

The ISDL's manipulation of Irish culture to strengthen the sense of ethnicity amongst the Irish in Britain, and to maximise their 'sense of distinctiveness', leaving them in no doubt that they were part of an Irish garrison in a hostile country, was supported by two other initiatives.<sup>102</sup> The most important of these was fund raising, which gave branches a meaningful, and quantifiable, activity to pursue.<sup>103</sup> Though the Tyneside District's treasurer sent £2,501.7s.2d to Irish relief funds in 1920, sums raised by some branches were not large, for example only £7.1s was collected in Willington Quay in one month.<sup>104</sup> This was not surprising given the post-war economic hardship facing the industrial heartlands of Britain, where most Irish people still lived and sought work.<sup>105</sup> Whilst unemployment, however, was blamed in South Shields for a disappointing £6.1s, in Grangetown the secretary reported that 'in

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<sup>101</sup> *IE*, December 1921, January, February, and March 1922.

<sup>102</sup> In East Tyrone, McCluskey has shown that Irish-Ireland activities generated a level of 'activism and politicisation' that enabled 'the separatist message, and acceptance of it' to become 'an increasingly natural development within large sections of Irish civil society, engendering the widespread consent for republicanism'. McCluskey, *Fenians and Ribbonmen*, p. 257.

<sup>103</sup> The Irish National Aid Committee of Great Britain was formed by the ISDL's executive in late 1920 to co-ordinate fund raising in Britain. Report by Sean McGrath on ISDL Standing Committee, 5 January 1921 (NLI, MS 8432 /40).

<sup>104</sup> *CTCO*, 7 May 1921; *IE*, January 1922.

<sup>105</sup> In December 1919, there were over 7,000 unemployed in Newcastle. In May 1920, unemployment was decreasing, but inflation was causing widespread discontent. In March 1921, unemployment was increasing on Tyneside, and trade in Sunderland was at its worst since 1907, whilst on Teesside there were 10,000 unemployed, as against 500 in September 1920. RORO, 4 December 1919, 20 May 1920, and 3 March 1921.

spite of the fact that most of our members are among the unemployed, the church door and other collections are quite satisfactory'.<sup>106</sup> Fund raising was, however, always more than just about the money raised, as this activity focussed members' and non-members' attentions on emotive issues; for example Irish railway workers striking to prevent the movement of British munitions; Belfast Catholic workers driven from their jobs and burned out of their homes; and the deprivations faced by Irish political prisoners and their dependents in Britain and Ireland.<sup>107</sup> The raw emotional impact of these issues could also be exploited via fund-raising to increase membership, as Sean McGrath explained in January 1921:

As a means of getting new members... a personal canvas of Irish residents will produce the best results. A list of names and addresses should be compiled and tactful canvassers appointed, who will approach Irish people with an appeal to support the Distress Fund and ultimately join the League. This method would give canvassers an excuse for calling repeatedly and leaving suitable literature and handbills.<sup>108</sup>

The second initiative urged ISDL members to support Irish industries.<sup>109</sup> Press advertisements proclaimed the merits of Irish-Ireland products; *The Irish Exile's* readership was reassured that it was 'printed on Irish paper'; and in Hebburn the 'Committee of Irish Products League' sold Irish-made goods at branch meetings.<sup>110</sup>

## **The ISDL and the Catholic Church**

The majority of the English Catholic hierarchy, led by Cardinal Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster, showed little sympathy for or understanding of the Irish nationalist

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<sup>106</sup> *IE*, February and March 1922.

<sup>107</sup> For example, South Shields raised £5 for striking Irish workers. *TCN*, 10 July 1920; the Belfast Fund for Expelled Workers received contributions from ISDL branches in Chester le Street and Lanchester. *CTCO*, 22 January 1921; Middlesbrough raised £5 for the Irish White Cross. *IE*, December 1921; Theresa Mason asked the 'ladies of the branch' at Willington Quay to establish a 'Prisoners' Comforts Fund'. *IE*, November 1921.

<sup>108</sup> Report, 5 January 1921 (NLI, MS 8432 /40).

<sup>109</sup> *IE*, April 1921.

<sup>110</sup> *IE*, November 1921, and January 1922; the sale of Irish goods at branch meetings was widespread, e.g. 'Irish lace, music, household goods, etc.' were offered in Walthamstow, whilst in Pontypridd the ISDL asked shopkeepers to stock Irish goods 'from the producers we name'. *IE*, October 1921.

cause after 1916. It was ‘not only reluctant to criticise the [British] government, but seemed at times to lend it support or at least approval’.<sup>111</sup> In the North East, Richard Collins, the English-born Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle, followed the example of most of his colleagues, and showed scant interest in Ireland, or in the concerns of the Irish within his own diocese, though he did not forbid masses for the nationalist dead being said in his cathedral and parish churches.<sup>112</sup> In Middlesbrough, however, Richard Lacy, who was, at that time, one of only three Irish-born Catholic bishops in England, and who had revealed his nationalist sympathies in the 1870s, was prepared publicly to lend a degree of moral support, and, in August 1920, though he apologised for his non-attendance at an ISDL meeting in his diocese, said that ‘he regarded the invitation... as a compliment’.<sup>113</sup>

Though Cardinal Bourne was reluctant to address directly events in Ireland and made no mention of the ISDL by name, his Lenten pastoral letter of February 1921 explicitly re-used Cardinal Manning’s 1867 condemnation of Fenianism in a clear criticism of the ISDL’s activities:

I have grave reason to fear that some of my own flock impelled by legitimate love of country... are unwarily allowing themselves to become implicated, by active sympathy, or, even, actual cooperation in societies and organisations which are in opposition to the laws of God and the Catholic Church.<sup>114</sup>

The ISDL’s reaction was immediate and well-publicised. Bourne was condemned by Art O’Brien for having ‘created the greatest indignation amongst Irish residents in

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<sup>111</sup> Boyce, *Englishmen and Irish Troubles*, p. 77, quoted in Aspden, *Fortress Church*, p. 88; Bishop Cotter of Portsmouth and Bishop Amigo of Southwark were, however, exceptions, with Southwark Cathedral being used for MacSwiney’s funeral, at which Cotter celebrated the requiem mass. Aspden, *Fortress Church*, pp. 80-91.

<sup>112</sup> In 1914, Bishop Collins had shown no reluctance in giving his support to the raising of the Tyneside Irish Brigade.

<sup>113</sup> Aspden, *Fortress Church*, p. 80; Bishop Lacy in Middlesbrough had ‘the loyalty and respect of his largely Irish congregation’. Jennifer F. Supple, ‘The Catholic Clergy of Yorkshire, 1850-1900: A Profile’, *Northern History*, 21.1 (1985), p. 234; Supple, ‘Yorkshire Catholics’, p. 235; RORO, 5 August 1920.

<sup>114</sup> *The Tablet*, 9 February 1921, quoted in Aspden, *Fortress Church*, p. 99.

England’; attacked for using pulpits to declare that ‘Irish organizations in London were sinful and against the law of the Church’; warned ‘to keep out of Irish politics, as he was always found on the side of Ireland’s oppressors’; and damned as the ‘Black and Tan Cardinal’.<sup>115</sup> The outrage spread to Tyneside, where Hebburn’s ISDL branch condemned the letter as ‘a direct attack against the Irish people’.<sup>116</sup>

Whilst the English Catholic bishops remained largely silent and inactive, some diocesan clergy were prepared to act, and Barrington, in his witness statement, paid special tribute to Father Joseph Byrne of St. Bede’s, who had chaired ISDL branch meetings in South Shields, and who had been instrumental in organising the visit of Archbishop Mannix to Newcastle.<sup>117</sup> Byrne was openly republican, concluding his speech at MacSwiney’s symbolic funeral with the words ‘God speed the will of Ireland, and may the Irish Republic be acknowledged the world over’.<sup>118</sup> Father Byrne, however, was not the only Irish nationalist active in North Eastern presbyteries, though few others matched his fervour. Thus in September 1920, Father Henry Dix appealed to his congregation in Stanley on behalf of the ‘Belfast Expelled Workers’ Fund’, who had been ‘wantonly thrown out of work’; whilst on Teesside, in November 1921, a ‘stirring appeal’ for new ISDL members in Grangetown was made by Father McEntaggart.<sup>119</sup> Most reports of clerical involvement in nationalist politics, however, were in response to the highly-charged cases of Mannix and MacSwiney, though not all were at the ISDL’s behest. Hence, on 29 August 1920,

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<sup>115</sup> *CTCO*, 19 February 1921; Poplar ISDL branch. *IE*, March 1921; ISDL meeting, Kingsway Hall, London, 21 March 1921. Aspden, *Fortress Church*, p. 100.

<sup>116</sup> *TCN*, 26 February 1921.

<sup>117</sup> Barrington Statement, pp. 11-12; Barrington also praised Father James Bradley, Tyne Dock, and Father McElroy, South Shields. Mary Barrington, *Irish Independence*, p. 11.

<sup>118</sup> *NDC*, 1 November 1920; Byrne probably met the republican Father Thomas O’Donnell at an ISDL meeting in Marsden. In April and May 1920, O’Donnell, an Australian Imperial Force chaplain, who had been imprisoned in 1919 for sedition, spoke at meetings in the North East. *TCN*, 8 May 1920, and L. L. Robson, ‘O’Donnell, Thomas Joseph (1876–1949)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, (Accessed 10 October 2012).

<sup>119</sup> *ACC*, 23 September 1920; *IE*, December 1921.



the 'Irishmen and Roman Catholics of Consett' held a pro-Mannix meeting in a local cinema that appears to have been called without any ISDL input. In the chair was Father John O'Donoghue from Blackhill, and the speakers included Canon Magill and local councillors, but the most popular speech was made by Father Martin Hoyne, also of Blackhill, who told a cheering audience that 'they ought to show themselves Irishmen' and not show 'the white feather' in their support of Mannix.<sup>120</sup> On the same day, an extraordinary meeting took place after mass in Jarrow, when Father Mackin and his congregation approved the sending of a telegram to Lloyd George:

The congregation of St. Bede's church, Jarrow, which provided 1,200 soldiers for the war, protest against the Government's offensive action towards Archbishop Mannix, an indignity which Catholics resent... We also protest against the treatment of the Lord Mayor of Cork as unjustified and request his immediate release.<sup>121</sup>

Masses had been said for MacSwiney following his death, and the first anniversary was not forgotten, with masses in churches in Middlesbrough and on Tyneside, where ISDL members marched from Willington Quay to St. Columba's at Wallsend.<sup>122</sup>

Even where the clergy were not openly supportive, their churches and parish halls were used by the ISDL as recruiting offices, for meetings, for church door collections, and for the selling of republican literature.<sup>123</sup> Not all ISDL collectors were, however, made welcome. In December 1921, J. Brady, chairman of Newcastle's ISDL, reported 'a very unpleasant incident', when three women, collecting for Prisoners' Aid outside St. Mary's Cathedral, were ordered away from

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<sup>120</sup> *NEC*, 30 August 1920; *ACC*, 2 September 1920.

<sup>121</sup> *NEC*, 30 August 1920.

<sup>122</sup> *TCN*, 29 October 1921; *IE*, November and December 1921.

<sup>123</sup> *RORO*, 10 June 1920; the ISDL collected £5 outside St. Phillip's, Dunston; £10 outside St. Aloysius', Hebburn; and £36 from Middlesbrough's churches. *IE*, November and December 1921, January 1922.

the door by Father Joseph Newsham, who also forbade any of the congregation from making a donation. The women then stepped off the kerbside and were arrested by plain-clothes police. After questioning, the women were released, though their collecting boxes were retained. Brady subsequently reported that the charges against the women had been dismissed, and accused Father Newsham ‘of costing the Branch something like £5’.<sup>124</sup> The reason for Newsham’s action probably lay in the growing division within the Irish community following the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Some within the Newcastle branch had already made their choice by mid-December, closing a branch meeting with ‘hearty cheers for the Irish Republic and President de Valera’.<sup>125</sup> Whilst Father Newsham, though he had been willing to celebrate a requiem mass for MacSwiney, as he had for Redmond, was, however, no republican, as he demonstrated the following November, when he joined the ‘Irish Free State representatives on Tyneside’ at a dinner to celebrate the National Club’s golden jubilee.<sup>126</sup>

## **The ISDL and the Irish Republican Army**

By the end of 1920, there were, once again, companies of Irish Volunteers in Liverpool, London, Manchester, and on Tyneside.<sup>127</sup> The reasons and process behind this re-establishment have been identified by Hart.<sup>128</sup> In 1919, in order to satisfy the demand from Ireland for weapons and munitions, a revitalised IRB in Britain sought ‘an infusion of young blood’, and looked to the newly-forming Volunteer companies for that infusion. At the same time, ISDL and Sinn Féin club activists were

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<sup>124</sup> *IE*, January and February 1922.

<sup>125</sup> *IE*, January 1922.

<sup>126</sup> *NDC*, 12 March 1918; *NEC*, 24 November 1922.

<sup>127</sup> On Tyneside, no direct connection has yet been found between the 1914 and 1920 Irish Volunteers. In 1921, the IRA fought a gun battle with police at the old UILGB hall in Erskine Street, Manchester, where a Volunteer company had been formed in 1914. *LCH*, 2 May 1914; *RORO*, 7 April 1921.

<sup>128</sup> Hart, *IRA at War*, pp. 142-143, 146-147.

independently founding those new Volunteer companies. These ‘enthusiastic novices’ soon came under the influence of ‘established IRB men’, and many of the ‘uninitiated officers and activists’ were then sworn into the organisation. Thus, by 1921, Hart believed that ‘most IRB members belonged to the IRA, most of whose members had first joined Sinn Féin or the ISDL’.

This process was followed on Tyneside, where the first two Volunteer companies, in Jarrow/South Shields and Newcastle, were formed in early 1920 from within the ISDL by Gilbert Barrington and Richard Purcell acting on their own initiative, as both had become dissatisfied with ‘the rather ineffectual nature of our [ISDL] work, depending as it did solely on the cultivation of a favourable public opinion’.<sup>129</sup> Barrington later explained the nature of this relationship:

The political organisation preceded the formation of IRA Companies and maintained this precedence throughout the whole period. That is to say in the Counties of Northumberland, Durham and Yorkshire the formation of a branch of the ISDL invariably preceded the formation of a company of the brigade.

Barrington, Purcell, and four others were then inducted into the IRB, on Rory O’Connor’s instructions, before O’Connor, the IRA’s Director of Engineering and ‘O/C Britain’, visited Tyneside himself in November 1920 to vet the new Volunteer brigade staff.<sup>130</sup> Subsequently Purcell, Barrington, and Joseph Connolly were respectively confirmed as Brigade Commandant, Quartermaster, and Adjutant of the Tyneside IRA. Once a new ISDL branch had been formed, usually through local initiative rather than external pressure, Barrington remembered: ‘It was not long... until endeavours would be made by some of the members to get in touch with responsible officers of the IRA with a view to the establishment of a company in the district’. In this manner, six companies of the IRA’s Tyneside Brigade had been

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<sup>129</sup> This paragraph is derived from Barrington Statement, pp. 1-3, 9-10.

<sup>130</sup> Hart, *IRA at War*, p. 150.

raised by November 1920 at Jarrow/South Shields, Hebburn, Newcastle, Wallsend, Bedlington, and Consett, and a further four companies were raised, between January and March 1921, at Stockton on Tees, Chester le Street, Thornley/Wheatley Hill, and Sunderland, giving the brigade a total strength of about 480 officers and men. Each of these ten companies encompassed at least one ISDL branch, which, Barrington acknowledged, 'afforded excellent cover' for the IRA's activities. It is interesting to note, however, that in Gateshead, though there was an active ISDL branch from June 1919, and the town had been the centre of Volunteer activity on Tyneside in 1914, no IRA company was revived in the town, probably because the Irish Labour Party's influence outweighed that of the ISDL.

In January 1921, as the IRA's military campaign in Britain was developing, Sean McGrath, the ISDL's general secretary, and himself a 'veteran IRB and IRA organiser', asserted that the ISDL was 'a perfectly open' organisation, and that 'we have nothing to hide, and nothing to be ashamed of'.<sup>131</sup> Four months later, following a police raid on the ISDL's London headquarters and the arrests of key officers, including McGrath, the ISDL's standing committee issued a challenge to the police 'to produce... any scrap of evidence to show that the activities of the League are not, in every way, legitimate and legal'.<sup>132</sup> In spite of these protestations, however, in the North East, and especially on Tyneside, the ISDL and the IRA could be regarded, at the leadership level at least, as the political and military wings of the same republican organisation. Thus Purcell was president of Newcastle's ISDL branch; Barrington, president of the South Shields' branch; and Joseph Connolly, an ISDL organiser. Similarly, James Conroy was both a Volunteer officer in Wallsend and a Tyneside

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<sup>131</sup> Hart, *IRA at War*, p. 204; Report, 5 January 1921 (NLI, MS 8432 /40).

<sup>132</sup> Circular letter to ISDL branches from ISDL Standing Committee, 31 May 1921 (NLI, MS 8432 /40).

District delegate to the ISDL's national conference in April 1922; Thomas Joyce both commanded the Volunteers in Jarrow and was treasurer of the ISDL in South Shields; James Melody was both a Volunteer officer in Consett and secretary of the local ISDL branch; Anthony Mullarkey both commanded the Volunteers in Bedlington and was the local ISDL's branch delegate to the Tyneside District committee; and John Philbin was both a Volunteer officer in Jarrow and chairman of the local ISDL branch.<sup>133</sup> Doubtless, with further research, other joint memberships would be disclosed.

Between early March and May 1921, the IRA waged a guerrilla war across the North East of England led by these Volunteer officers.<sup>134</sup> The local press described the 'carefully orchestrated' attacks in great detail, and, when James Conroy was arrested after setting fire to a Wallsend boatyard, he was named in court as 'the Secretary of the Jarrow branch of the Irish Self Determination League'.<sup>135</sup> Similarly, at the trial in Newcastle of Barrington and Purcell, who had been arrested in October 1921 following the theft of explosives in Northumberland, their leading roles within the ISDL were emphasised by the prosecution, and the League itself described as:

An organisation which purported to exist for the advancement of the separate aspirations of a portion of Ireland by legitimate propaganda. It laid stress on its constitutional character... [but] from what appeared in this case, the League apparently held within its numbers members whose objects were criminal and unscrupulous.<sup>136</sup>

Publicly the ISDL denied these accusations, though, in April 1922, the ISDL's executive came close to acknowledging the League's relationship with the IRA,

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<sup>133</sup> Mary Barrington, *Irish Independence*, pp. 13, 17; *NEC*, 8 August 1922; *IE*, April 1922; J. Melody, secretary, Consett branch ISDL, to Art Ó Briain, 11 February 1922 (NLI, MS 8445 /17); Minutes, Tyneside ISDL District Committee, 6 June 1922 (NLI, MS 8436 /24).

<sup>134</sup> For the IRA's military campaign in the North East, see Inoue, 'Political Activity of the Irish in Britain, 1919-1925'; and Kevin Davies, 'The IRA Campaign in the North East and the State Response, 1920-1923', *North East History*, 41 (2010), pp. 78-100.

<sup>135</sup> *ACC*, 26 May 1921; James Conroy commanded the IRA in Wallsend in May 1921. Mary Barrington, *Irish Independence*, p. 17.

<sup>136</sup> *BN*, 31 October 1921; Mary Barrington, *Irish Independence*, p. 13.

when Sean McGrath referred to the continuing imprisonment of Barrington, Purcell, and Joseph Connolly, who had been arrested in South Wales for smuggling munitions to Ireland, for 'so called illegal acts' during the Anglo-Irish Truce, but said that it was not for the ISDL 'to criticise or condemn them for their work as soldiers of the IRA', and added that the League's executive was 'proud of the work they have done'.<sup>137</sup>

Lurid newspaper reports of the IRA's bomb and incendiary attacks did not, however, appear to have adversely influenced Irish opinion in the North East, and conversely may even have been seen as a source of local, nationalist pride, strengthening group identity in the face of external condemnation. Thus, two weeks after the first IRA operations in Newcastle and Tyne Dock on 5 March 1921, St. Patrick's Day was widely celebrated across the North East with 'Republican colours' as much in evidence as the traditional shamrocks.<sup>138</sup> Then, on Sunday 22 May, a 'remarkable' open-air ISDL meeting was held in County Durham, when Barrington and Purcell spoke outside the still smouldering remains of High Westwood railway station, attacked by IRA Volunteers from Consett only a few hours earlier, and collected 'a substantial sum' for Irish causes from the audience. Barrington attributed this to 'the impartial attitude of the Durham miners' to the 'Irish case', and explained that public meetings, where that case was put 'in uncompromising terms', were received 'without interruption', and the response was 'invariably good and not

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<sup>137</sup> RORO, 14 April 1921; Report on Organisers, 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference (NLI, MS 8432 /43); the Director of Public Prosecutions opposed the release of any Irish prisoners, and warned that 'the outrages' had been organised by the ISDL 'which is still maintaining the claim of Ireland to absolute independence, and which might at any moment declare for an Irish republic and renew the campaign of outrage in this Country'. Director of Public Prosecutions to the Home Office, 23 January 1922 (TNA, HO 144/4645).

<sup>138</sup> For example in Newcastle, *Newcastle Daily Journal* (NDJ), 18 March 1921; and in Houghton le Spring. ACC, 24 March 1921.

confined to Irish people in the audience'.<sup>139</sup> The ISDL's outdoor meetings in the North East must regularly have seen a non-Irish contingent within the audience, yet the 'invariably good' response reported by Barrington, even during the height of the IRA's mainland campaign, was at odds with the reaction seen elsewhere in Britain. Whilst sectarian inspired attacks were only to be expected in Glasgow and Liverpool, violence also flared in the Yorkshire coalfield when a speech by Hanna Sheehy Skeffington sparked a fight between 'British Labour and Sinn Féin', and resulted in the expulsion of 30 Irish workers from the district.<sup>140</sup>

Within the narrower circle of North Eastern ISDL membership, though the majority of the members were not Irish Volunteers, support for the IRA was widespread, as was demonstrated by the degree of concern, and pride, shown in branch meetings for IRA prisoners, and especially for the local Volunteers who had been gaoled.<sup>141</sup> Thus, in December 1921, as the first Irish prisoners were being released from Durham gaol, ISDL members in Thornley were asked to assist these men 'until they were able to travel home' to Ireland.<sup>142</sup> Similarly, when two newly-released IRA prisoners thanked a branch meeting in Newcastle for sending them comforts whilst in prison, they were told that 'thanks are not necessary, and it is deemed a privilege to do any little or big thing we can do for our people and country'.<sup>143</sup> After the first releases, however, the continuing imprisonment of Barrington, Connolly, and Purcell caused outrage within the North East's ISDL branches to a level not seen since MacSwiney's protracted hunger strike. There was a torrent of resolutions protesting against their having been excluded from 'the general

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<sup>139</sup> Mary Barrington, *Irish Independence*, pp. 17, 21; ACC, 26 May 1921.

<sup>140</sup> Hanna Sheehy Skeffington's husband had been murdered by a British officer in Dublin in 1916. Max Caulfield, *The Easter Rebellion* (London, 1964), p. 218; RORO, 1 and 8 July 1920.

<sup>141</sup> See List of prisoners in custody for offences connected with the Sinn Féin movement, convicted in England and Wales, 19 January 1922 (TNA, HO 144/4645).

<sup>142</sup> *IE*, January 1922.

<sup>143</sup> *IE*, February 1922.

amnesty of Irish political prisoners sentenced in Great Britain for political offences committed in connection with the recent war in Ireland'.<sup>144</sup> These resolutions prompted Michael McGrath to warn O'Brien that the 'feeling here is very high regarding the detention of those three prisoners and our people may adopt their own measures if these prisoners are not released forthwith'.<sup>145</sup>

Jarrow's ISDL branch was the most enthusiastic in its support for the IRA prisoners.<sup>146</sup> At a branch meeting on 18 February 1922, four ex-prisoners, all local men, had been given 'a hearty welcome', and praised by the chairman, Thomas Kerr:

It was men like these who had suffered for our Country... who shared a great part of the credit of bringing the British Government to a rude awakening. It was only when England found that such men – and there were yet plenty of them – were determined to stand by their Country, with life itself if necessary, that she decided to listen to Ireland's demands.

This was followed by a formal reception on 24 February to which the Tyneside District committee, Michael McGrath, and local Catholic clergy had all been invited. After Terence O'Connor had toasted 'Our heroes of the IRA on Tyneside', speaker after speaker applauded the prisoners' sacrifice. Interestingly, however, Father William Brennan from St. Bede's complained that, whilst for the IRA in Ireland 'all men were their friends', in England 'even our own were their enemies', suggesting possible division within the broader Irish community over the IRA's military campaign. Despite the welcome, the reality for at least one of these ex-prisoners was, however, very different. Patrick Kerrigan, who, though ultimately acquitted, had

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<sup>144</sup> Letter from Shildon's ISDL branch to Art Ó Briain, 28 January 1922 (NLI, MS 8445 /17); amongst O'Brien's papers are 16 letters, dated January to February 1922, with resolutions from Backworth, Bishop Auckland, Consett, Cornsay, Crook, Hebburn, Horden, Jarrow, Redcar, Sacriston, Shildon, South Shields, Sunderland, Thornley, Willington Quay, and Wingate. Other branches passed similar resolutions, for example Bedlington. *BN*, 6 March 1922.

<sup>145</sup> Michael McGrath to Art Ó Briain, 22 February 1922 (NLI, MS 8445 /17).

<sup>146</sup> The ex-prisoners were James Conroy, Patrick Kerrigan, John McAlinden, and Michael Wynne. This paragraph is derived from the Jarrow ISDL Minute Book, 18 and 24 February 1922; and from Patrick Brennan's on-line history, *The IRA in Jarrow 1920-1923*, [http://www.donmouth.co.uk/local\\_history/ira/jarrow\\_isdl.html](http://www.donmouth.co.uk/local_history/ira/jarrow_isdl.html) (Accessed 10 October 2012).



been held in Durham gaol from his arrest in March to November 1921, wrote to O'Brien just days after the Jarrow reception complaining that he had been unable to find work since his release; that 'the ISDL has done nothing for me'; and that, unless he received financial help, 'I am going to wash my hands' of both the ISDL and the IRA, as 'I am treated since I came out of jail as if I was a Black and Tan'.<sup>147</sup>

## The Collapse of the ISDL

The ISDL was, like its nationalist predecessors in Britain, governed by external events far beyond its control.<sup>148</sup> During the second half of 1920, an unrelenting litany of attacks and reprisals in Ireland, the death of MacSwiney, the execution of the IRA Volunteer Kevin Barry, and the 'Bloody Sunday' killings in Dublin, had enabled the ISDL to become the voice of Irish nationalist anger in Britain.<sup>149</sup> In July 1921, however, with neither the Crown forces nor the IRA seemingly able to achieve an outright military victory, a truce was agreed.<sup>150</sup> De Valera then travelled to London to meet Lloyd George, and in October a conference opened that was to result in the Anglo-Irish Treaty being signed in London on 6 December 1921.<sup>151</sup> The impact of this protracted peace process on the ISDL was catastrophic. Between March and December 1921, membership fell by half from 38,726 to 19,104 (Table 2.1).<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Letters from Patrick Kerrigan to Art Ó Briain, 5 and 11 March 1922 (NLI, MS 8432 /21).

<sup>148</sup> Hutchinson, 'Diaspora Dilemmas', pp. 119-120.

<sup>149</sup> See Hopkinson, *Irish War*, pp.79-92; Hutchinson has suggested that the ISDL was 'the voice of the Irish in Britain'. This was probably only true in the second half of 1920. Hutchinson, 'Diaspora Dilemmas', p. 120.

<sup>150</sup> Hopkinson, *Irish War*, pp. 192-197.

<sup>151</sup> See Frank Pakenham, *Peace by Ordeal: An Account, from First-hand Sources of the Negotiation and Signature of the Anglo-Irish Treaty 1921* (London, 1935); Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland*, pp. 327-328; Hopkinson, *Irish War*, pp. 192-197.

<sup>152</sup> Membership report, nd (late December 1921) (NLI, MS 8432 /5). This report sought to soften the blow by suggesting that the ISDL's strength 'cannot be gauged merely from the affiliation fees'.

**Table 2.1: The decline in ISDL affiliated membership by District, March to December 1921.**

<b>ISDL District</b>	<b>March 1921</b>	<b>December 1921</b>	<b>% Fall</b>
Manchester	7,465	4,942	34
London	6,481	3,699	43
<b>Tyneside</b>	<b>3,965</b>	<b>878</b>	<b>78</b>
Liverpool	3,349	825	75
Bradford	2,447	1,032	58
<b>Teesside</b>	<b>2,440</b>	<b>673</b>	<b>72</b>
Leeds	1,768	1,188	33
<b>Mid Durham</b>	<b>1,736</b>	<b>909</b>	<b>48</b>
Wigan	1,582	538	66
Sheffield	1,515	615	59
North West Lancs	1,372	891	35
Swansea	1,151	824	28
Cardiff	1,053	642	39
Pontypridd	962	602	37
Birmingham	670	516	23
North Staffs	415	105	75
Notts & Derby	294	205	30
Leicester	61	20	67
<b>Total</b>	<b>38,726</b>	<b>19,104</b>	<b>51%</b>

This fall, however, was not spread evenly across England and Wales. Whilst membership in the two largest districts, Manchester and London, shrank by less than 50 per cent, Tyneside's membership, the third largest, plummeted from 3,965 to 878 members, a fall of 78 per cent; Liverpool's from 3,349 to 825 members, a fall of 75 per cent; and Teesside's from 2,440 to 673 members, a fall of 72 per cent. In Mid-Durham, the smallest of the North East's three districts in March 1921, membership declined by only 48 per cent, from 1,736 to 909 members, which left the Mid-Durham district in December 1921 with the ISDL's fifth largest membership. The report also included individual branch memberships. Whilst figures for the Mid-Durham and Teesside districts, though incomplete, were included, those for Tyneside are missing from the original document (Tables 2.2 and 2.3). Examination of the Mid-Durham totals reveals that the less-severe overall decline in membership actually masked the near collapse of several branches, with Cornsay Colliery falling by 83 per cent, and Crook being reduced to just seven members, a fall of 95 per

cent.<sup>153</sup> Thus in Mid-Durham in December 1921, there were ten reporting branches each with fewer than 50 members, though Wingate had actually increased its membership by 12 per cent.

**Table 2.2: ISDL affiliated membership in the Mid-Durham District, March to December 1921.**

ISDL Branch	March 1921	December 1921	% Fall
1	89	42	53
2 (Cornsay Colliery)	228	38	83
3 (Spennymoor)	200	129	36
4 (Crook)	131	7	95
5 (Thornley)	133	130	2
6	82	-	
7	100	-	
8 (Chester le Street)	44	-	
9 ( Kelloe)	100	95	5
10	59	4	93
11 (Consett)	20	-	
12	58	2	97
13	100	20	80
14	40	-	
15 (Horden)	97	68	30
16 (Wingate)	125	140	-12
17	130	40	69
18	-	20	
19	-	57	
20 (Shildon)	-	38	
21 (Bishop Auckland)	-	64	
22 (Esh Winning)	-	15	
23 (Sacrison)	-	-	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1736</b>	<b>909</b>	<b>48%</b>

**Table 2.3: ISDL affiliated membership in the Teesside District, March to December 1921.**

ISDL Branch	March 1921	December 1921	% Fall
1 (Grangetown)	263	-	
2 (South Bank)	283	45	84
3	1023	370	64
4	-	-	
5 (Redcar)	87	-	
6 (Hartlepool)	110	37	66
7	316	34	89
8	40	-	
9	150	70	53
10	-	-	
11	-	-	
12	168	116	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>2440</b>	<b>673</b>	<b>72%</b>

<sup>153</sup> Some non-reporting Mid-Durham branches, for example Consett and Sacrison, were, however, still functioning in January 1922. See Letters from North East ISDL branches to Art Ó Briain, January – April 1922 (NLI, MS 8445 /17).

Similar results are seen on Teesside, where South Bank fell by 84 per cent and No: 7 branch (location unknown) by 89 per cent. Initially the ISDL's executive blamed the membership collapse on unemployment – 'unhappily unemployment and industrial and domestic distress is rampant everywhere and the industrial centres where our people congregate most have suffered the heaviest', and organisers reported that in the Mid-Durham and Teesside districts '80% of our members are unemployed'.<sup>154</sup> A report, however, written by Sean McGrath, but not presented to the ISDL's conference on 1 April 1922, argued that unemployment was not the sole reason for the decline, and blamed 'the apathy since the Truce' and 'the general uncertainty of the political situation'.<sup>155</sup>

Following the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the ISDL's executive met in Manchester on 18 December 1921 and agreed that the ISDL should not 'pronounce any opinion' on the Treaty until after Dáil Éireann had 'declared its policy', and that the ISDL's position would then be decided at a national conference.<sup>156</sup> In Dublin on 7 January 1922, after a long and acrimonious debate, the Treaty was ratified by just seven votes, with Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith voting for, and Eamon de Valera against.<sup>157</sup> Even before the Dáil vote, however, the British Cabinet was being warned that Art O'Brien supported de Valera, and further warned, barely a week after the vote, that O'Brien 'may cause a split in the Irish Self-Determination League'.<sup>158</sup> Over the next few months, that split became a reality, as pro- and anti-Treaty factions manoeuvred for control, and, when the ISDL's national conference

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<sup>154</sup> Membership report, nd (late December 1921) (NLI, MS 8432 /5); Report by Sean McGrath to ISDL Central Executive, 5 March 1922 (NLI, MS 8432 /43).

<sup>155</sup> Report on Organisers, 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference (NLI, MS 8432 /43); McGrath visited Middlesbrough on 1 February 1922 but found only 'apathy'. Report by Sean McGrath to ISDL Standing Committee, 11 February 1922 (NLI, MS 8432 /43).

<sup>156</sup> *IE*, January 1922.

<sup>157</sup> O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, p. 303.

<sup>158</sup> RORO, 15 December 1921, and 12 January 1922.

met in London on 1 April 1922 with P. J. Kelly in the chair, O'Brien failed to persuade the delegates to agree a pro-republican policy, and the conference was postponed until after a general election had been held in Ireland.<sup>159</sup> When the conference finally reconvened in London on 29 July, O'Brien, through his control of the ISDL's standing committee, had ensured that only delegates from affiliated branches were allowed to attend, resulting in Kelly's non-attendance, O'Brien's election as president, and the ISDL's adoption of a pro-republican policy.<sup>160</sup> By then, however, the Treaty dispute in Ireland had turned to civil war, and the ISDL was 'falling to pieces all over the country'.<sup>161</sup>

In the North East, as elsewhere in England and Wales, news of the Anglo-Irish Treaty and its ratification had been enthusiastically welcomed.<sup>162</sup> In his New Year message, Charles Diamond told his readers that 'an overwhelming majority of the Irish of Great Britain support the treaty and the men who signed it', and dismissed O'Brien's claim to speak for the Irish in Britain.<sup>163</sup> Then, on Teesside, the Bishop of Middlesbrough, Richard Lacy, publicly expressed his support:

In common with every true lover of Ireland, I rejoice and thank God for the decision arrived at by Dail Eireann. The Treaty gives the Irish the substance of freedom beyond the wildest dreams of the men who have bled for her in the past... Vivat Hibernia.<sup>164</sup>

Even before the Dáil vote, the Cabinet had been advised that the Irish in the North of England were generally in favour of the Treaty.<sup>165</sup> Few ISDL branches, however,

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<sup>159</sup> Fitzpatrick, 'A curious middle place', p. 44; *IE*, April 1922.

<sup>160</sup> Only 43 ISDL branches out of 217 were affiliated in July 1922, and only 37 delegates attended the reconvened conference. In comparison, there had been 169 delegates at the April conference. *RORO*, 3 August 1922; Jarrow's strongly republican branch, though affiliated, was not represented at the reconvened conference, as it was 'not in a financial position' to send a delegate. *Jarrow ISDL Minute Book*, 7 July 1922.

<sup>161</sup> *RORO*, 27 July 1922.

<sup>162</sup> In Manchester, a parish priest declared that 'we are all Free Staters in Manchester'. *Catholic Herald (CH)*, 25 March 1922.

<sup>163</sup> *TCN*, 31 December 1921.

<sup>164</sup> *CTCO*, 14 January 1922.

<sup>165</sup> *RORO*, 15 December 1921.

matched Stanley's enthusiasm. In late January 1922, a meeting in the Hibernian Hall heard the branch chairman, Thomas Waldron, express the hope that the Treaty would be 'the foundation of an everlasting peace with Great Britain and Ireland', and, as a sign of the changing times, ended the evening with the traditional *God Save Ireland* rather than the republican anthem *The Soldiers' Song*.<sup>166</sup> This was followed in February with a banquet to celebrate 'the coming into existence of the Irish Free State'. Chaired by Waldron, this celebration was attended not only by the local ISDL grandees, but also by 'prominent Irishmen' associated with 'the struggle of the Irish Nationalist Party for many years', including Councillor Patrick Duffy.<sup>167</sup>

Whilst the Irish in Stanley were reverting to a more traditional pre-1916 nationalism, the Cabinet was being warned that the ISDL's leaders in London and 'some of those in the North are decided Republicans'.<sup>168</sup> On Tyneside, with Barrington and Purcell in prison, this leadership role had been assumed by Theresa Mason, who had 'declared herself for President de Valera and the Irish Republic' on 5 February 1922, asserting that 'ours is a moral fight, and it would be moral cowardice to give it up at this crucial moment', and that 'just as the Irish of Newcastle had been the first in the North to raise the flag of the Irish Republic... never by their will or sanction would it be lowered and trailed in the dust'.<sup>169</sup> Then, on 1 April at the ISDL's national conference, Mrs Mason, who was the only women reported to have spoken at length in the crucial debate on the ISDL's future, pleaded for unity and the Treaty's rejection:

We have a wonderful organisation and we have a body of people who will work for an Irish Republic. We are not going to dictate to the Irish people, because they are beaten down to their knees, but if we vote for the Treaty

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<sup>166</sup> ACC, 2 February 1922.

<sup>167</sup> ACC, 2 March 1922.

<sup>168</sup> RORO, 9 February 1922.

<sup>169</sup> IE, April 1922.

we will be giving a mandate to the Irish people. Have the moral courage of your convictions. Cling to your League as it stands. It embodies everything.<sup>170</sup>

Whilst Theresa Mason may have represented Tyneside to the national conference as being staunchly republican, in Newcastle pro-Treaty supporters were gathering strength. At the same meeting at which Mrs Mason had declared for de Valera, Martha Larkin had announced that ‘if the majority of our people were in favour of accepting the Free State, she was in favour of supporting them’, and had been immediately denounced by Theresa Mason as ‘a Free Stater’. Undeterred, Mrs Larkin then vociferously challenged the appearance at the meeting of a uniformed IRA officer, after he had, in her opinion, unfavourably compared the ‘Free State Army’ to the ‘the real, true IRA boys’.<sup>171</sup> Martha Larkin was, however, about to receive some support from an unexpected source, when Barrington, Connolly, and Purcell were released from prison.<sup>172</sup>

On 6 June 1922, a meeting of the Tyneside District committee sealed the fate of the League in the North East and prompted the accusation that ‘the blackest treachery has been at work’.<sup>173</sup> Richard Purcell began by announcing that he was resigning with immediate effect as chairman as he no longer supported the ISDL’s policy, and explained that, after his release from Dartmoor in April 1922, he had gone to Ireland, where he had been offered and had accepted a government post ‘to lay the case’ for the Free State in Britain.<sup>174</sup> Though Purcell was supported by

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<sup>170</sup> *IE*, April 1922.

<sup>171</sup> *IE*, May 1922.

<sup>172</sup> In January 1922, the Cabinet had been informed that ‘it is a curious fact that... some of the most extreme Sinn Feiners and members of the Irish Republican Army are amongst the most enthusiastic supporters of the Treaty’. RORO, 19 January 1922.

<sup>173</sup> Letter from Mrs Mary Emms, secretary, Newcastle ISDL branch, to Art Ó Briain, 12 June 1922 (NLI, MS 8436 /24). The minutes of the Tyneside District meeting of 6 June 1922 accompanied this letter (NLI, MS 8436 /24). Note: Mary Emms was Theresa Mason’s sister.

<sup>174</sup> Art O’Brien reported that a Provisional Government representative had visited him in January 1922 ‘with a message that the anti-Treaty tendencies of the organisation [ISDL] were repugnant to the

Martha Larkin and by Joseph Connelly, who also announced his resignation as district secretary, the republican majority on the committee immediately condemned Purcell, with Gilbert Barrington declaring that there was now 'an unbridgeable political chasm' between them, though they had once enjoyed a 'close political friendship'. Newcastle's branch president, J. Brady, then said that Purcell 'had sounded the death knell of the ISDL in the North', and condemned him for 'joining hands' with 'all the old leaders of the UIL, the men with the money and the power at their back, the men who would not touch the ISDL in its hard struggle for Ireland during the last three years'. In an impassioned speech, Theresa Mason pleaded for the ISDL's continuation as it had 'revived the national spirit', and developed 'the holy ideal of a free Ireland in the hearts of the Irish people born in England, who had had no chance of throwing off their English training until the League'. At the end of the meeting, Terence O'Connor sadly expressed his shock at the proceedings, though announced that he would remain loyal to the ISDL.<sup>175</sup>

In late June 1922, as Dublin's IRA Brigade was being shelled into submission in the Four Courts by Free State artillery, a Pro-Treaty Propaganda Committee was formed on Tyneside 'at the request of Messrs Griffith and Collins' to organise 'moral and material support' for the Provisional Government in Ireland 'in their endeavour to restore ordered government in Ireland based upon the will of the Irish people'.<sup>176</sup> With a membership that included Joseph Connolly as secretary, Patrick Crilly from Newcastle's National Club as treasurer, John Gorman, Thomas Hayes, and John

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Provisional Government, and that if we did not mend our ways they ... would start another organisation here... presumably because we did not mend our ways, a "pro-treaty" organiser was sent from Dublin to the Tyneside, where he is still'. Circular letter to ISDL branches from Art Ó Briain, August - September 1922 (NLI, MS 8436 /24).

<sup>175</sup> After the ISDL's demise, O'Connor remained politically active in Jarrow, serving as an Independent Alderman, and was appointed Mayor of Jarrow in 1938. *CH*, 29 September 1939.

<sup>176</sup> *NEC*, 8 July 1922; for the Irish Civil War, see Michal Hopkinson, *Green Against Green: The Irish Civil War* (Dublin, 2004).



Mulcahy, this committee was an extraordinary coalition of ISDL, IRA, UILGB, and Irish Labour Party.<sup>177</sup> The committee's first rally was in Sunderland on 10 July, and over the next two months a series of well-attended rallies was held across the North East.<sup>178</sup> Not everyone attending, however, was prepared to give 'three cheers for the Free State and Michael Collins' and on Town Moor Purcell was called a traitor.<sup>179</sup> Surprised by the initial success of the pro-Treaty activists; demoralised by the defection of Purcell and Connolly; and deprived of Barrington's organisational and leadership skills; the anti-Treaty republican rump on Tyneside was slow to respond, but had mustered sufficient forces to attempt to disrupt two major, pro-Treaty rallies over the August Bank Holiday weekend.<sup>180</sup> The first was on Sunday 6 August in St. James' Hall, Newcastle, when fireworks were thrown and speeches interrupted with shouts of 'liar' and 'traitor' by a group of some 50 people, described by the *Evening Chronicle*'s reporter as comprising 'girls in their teens, some with their hair in plaits' and 'youths of the hobble de hoy type'. The reporter also noted that sitting apart from this group, but clearly directing the disruption, were 'several of the leaders of the Republicans in Newcastle'. The second attempt was in Durham the next day, when the annual Irish gala in Wharton Park, arranged by the ISDL's Mid-Durham District without reference to the Tyneside District, and with a platform packed with pro-Treaty speakers, was invaded by republicans 'haling chiefly from Tyneside', who 'turned up in force and caused considerable disorder'.<sup>181</sup> These acts of bravado were,

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<sup>177</sup> *TCN*, 17 June 1922; O'Brien derided all those who had 'wobbled out of the old UIL' and 'tumbled out of the ISDL' to support the pro-Treaty organisation. Circular letter, August - September 1922 (NLI, MS 8436 /24).

<sup>178</sup> *NEC*, 10 July 1922.

<sup>179</sup> *NEC*, 17 July 1922; *RORO*, 27 July 1922.

<sup>180</sup> In June 1922, Barrington left Tyneside for Ireland, where he had been offered work. Letters from Gilbert Barrington to Art Ó Briain, 25 and 31 May, and 13 June 1922 (NLI, MS 8433 /12); Barrington continued his anti-Treaty activities in Ireland and was interned by the Free State government in March 1923. Mary Barrington, *Irish Independence*, p. 5.

<sup>181</sup> *NEC*, 7 and 8 August 1922; the disruption was reportedly co-organised by John King, Newcastle. *RORO*, 10 August 1922.

however, no more than the death throes of a dying organisation, as Art O'Brien had admitted to Barrington, though O'Brien did send the ISDL's London organiser, Richard Patrick Purcell, north to encourage the Tyneside republicans.<sup>182</sup> On 9 August 1922, the London organiser shared the platform with Theresa Mason at an anti-Treaty meeting in Newcastle, chaired by Jarrow's president, John Philbin, and, later that week, Purcell reassured the Jarrow branch that 'the Irish Republic proclaimed in Easter Week 1916 was still functioning', and appealed to members 'to strengthen the branch and help keep up the good name Jarrow always had'.<sup>183</sup>

In early September 1922, John McNulty, the ISDL's secretary in Spennymoor, announced that the Mid-Durham District committee had unanimously agreed to sever all links with the parent organisation over the 'anti-Treaty policy recently adopted', but would, however, remain ready 'to support any scheme which has for its object the carrying out of the policy of the late President Griffith and General Collins'.<sup>184</sup> Across the North East, as across Britain, support for the ISDL was crumbling. In October, the *Catholic Herald*, which had long campaigned against the ISDL's financial management, damned the organisation as 'defunct, discredited and despicable', and, in early November, the Cabinet was advised that the ISDL was 'dying fast', and that 'generally speaking the Irish in Great Britain are tired of Republicanism and are devoting their attention to local matters'.<sup>185</sup>

The gradual withering of the ISDL, even in its republican Tyneside heartland, is captured in the minute book of the ISDL's branch in Jarrow. During 1922 and 1923, this 'purely Republican Branch' battled against a shrinking membership to

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<sup>182</sup> O'Brien had predicted that the ISDL on Tyneside, as elsewhere, would 'disintegrate'. Letter from Art Ó Briain to Gilbert Barrington, 8 June 1922 (NLI, MS 8433 /12).

<sup>183</sup> *NEC*, 11 August 1922; Jarrow ISDL Minute Book, 11 August 1922.

<sup>184</sup> *NEC*, 7 September 1922.

<sup>185</sup> *CH*, 7 October 1922; *RORO*, 2 November 1922.

remain faithful to the ideals of 1916.<sup>186</sup> Without strong local leadership or direction, however, the branch degenerated into little more than a republican social club arranging dances and card nights, though each meeting still ended with *The Soldiers' Song*. Occasionally, however, external events intruded. Thus in late 1922 prayers were said for Erskine Childers and Rory O'Connor executed by the Free State government; in March 1923 a telegram was sent to Dublin demanding Gilbert Barrington's immediate release from internment; and, also in March, great excitement was engendered by the visit of the republican heroine of 1916, Countess Markievicz, to Tyneside.<sup>187</sup>

That republican branches of the ISDL survived on Tyneside beyond the end of 1922 was probably due to the tireless work of Theresa Mason, whose position as local leader had been recognised by her appointment as Tyneside District organiser in late 1922, and by the fact that her national position within the ISDL was confirmed when she was invited to speak at a protest rally in London in place of Maud Gonne McBride, who had been arrested.<sup>188</sup> Inexplicably, however, Theresa Mason was not seized during the mass arrest of republicans in Britain in March 1923.<sup>189</sup> By late 1924, her health was failing, and, in spite of her efforts, Tyneside's ISDL had been reduced to just five branches, with the Newcastle branch alone still meeting weekly with 40 to 50 members; Jarrow and South Shields meeting fortnightly with 20 to 30 members each; Sunderland meeting fortnightly with just 12

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<sup>186</sup> In 1921, Jarrow's branch had suggested that the ISDL should be renamed the 'Irish Republican League'. Draft for new ISDL Constitution, nd (possibly February 1921) (NLI, MS 8435 /12).

<sup>187</sup> Jarrow ISDL Minute Book, undated entry (24 November 1922?), 8 December 1922, 5 January, 26 February, and 5 March 1923; Countess Markievicz addressed 300 republicans in South Shields, 60% of whom were reportedly female. RORO, 28 March 1923.

<sup>188</sup> Jarrow ISDL Minute Book, undated entry (15 December 1922?); RORO, 3 May 1923.

<sup>189</sup> Over 100 people were arrested in Britain, including Art O'Brien, but only four were arrested in the North East, including Thomas Joyce, Jarrow; John King, Newcastle; and Anthony Mullarkey, Bedlington. *TCN*, 17 March 1923.

members; and Felling reduced to a four man committee.<sup>190</sup> Before she retired, however, Theresa Mason had one last act to perform. During the latter half of 1924, the republican leadership in London had been riven by personal rivalries, and, after her appeals to O'Brien for 'unity and comradeship' had been ignored, Mrs Mason informed the Tyneside District committee that the Newcastle branch 'disheartened by the failure... to realise unity among the meagre Republican population that was left' had affiliated to Sinn Féin in Dublin and was, therefore, no longer part of the ISDL.<sup>191</sup> It is not known what happened to the remaining ISDL branches on Tyneside, but, in April 1925, de Valera wrote to O'Brien and Sean McGrath informing them that there was now 'but one Republican organisation in Great Britain – SINN FÉIN', and that all remaining ISDL branches must 'immediately' begin the transfer process.<sup>192</sup> In his reply, McGrath angrily reminded de Valera that the British had sought 'to destroy the ISDL', and that it would be 'a sorry victory for you if you succeeded where the British Government had failed'.<sup>193</sup> After five years, however, de Valera had finally decided that the ISDL, his own republican organisation created 'in the heart of the British Empire', had ceased to have any value to the wider republican movement.

## Conclusion

In October 1922, Lloyd George's Coalition government collapsed and a general election was called in Britain.<sup>194</sup> As tradition demanded a meeting was held in

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<sup>190</sup> She complained of her failing sight and 'weak' lungs, and explained that she had sought a cure at Lourdes. Letters from Theresa Mason to Art Ó Briain, 8 and 27 October 1924 (NLI, MS 8432 /13).

<sup>191</sup> Tyneside District Committee, Minutes, 6 December 1924 (NLI, MS 8432 /13); see the Art Ó Briain Papers for the increasingly bitter correspondence between London and Dublin in late 1924/early 1925 (NLI, MS 8460 /55, MS 8438 /7, and MS 8432 /44).

<sup>192</sup> Letter from de Valera to Art Ó Briain and Sean McGrath, 20 April 1925 (NLI, MS 8432 /44).  
Note: Capitalization used in original.

<sup>193</sup> Letter from Sean McGrath to de Valera, 5 May 1925 (NLI, MS 8432 /44).

<sup>194</sup> See Robert Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill* (London, 1970), pp. 202-209.

Newcastle's National Club to agree the advice that would be given to Irish voters in the forthcoming election, however, the majority of Irish voters on Tyneside, and across Britain, were no longer listening to any nationalist advice – Free State or Republican.<sup>195</sup> By November 1922, nationalist politics had lost whatever hold it had once had on the mass of the Irish electorate on Tyneside, and across Britain, for, with the creation of the Free State regardless of its unfinished independence, the 'national honour' of most Irish voters had been satisfied, and, for those voters, the old economic and social concerns that had been subordinated to the national struggle assumed far greater importance than the re-drawing the boundaries in a partitioned Ireland or the freeing of republican political prisoners.<sup>196</sup>

Though both Boyce and Inoue have praised the ISDL for its propaganda role in Britain in presenting the nationalist case to both British and Irish audiences, perhaps the organisation's real value to the Irish Revolution lay not in its propagandising and educative role, as originally conceived by Sinn Féin in Dublin, but rather in providing a front for IRA activities in England, and especially in the successful acquisition and transmission of much-needed munitions to Ireland.<sup>197</sup> Nevertheless, the ISDL has been dismissed by Fitzpatrick as no more than 'a feeble flash in the pan', and, even during the second half of 1920, when the ISDL genuinely voiced Irish nationalist anger in Britain, the League's leadership was heavily criticised in the Dáil for achieving negligible results and for approaching 'all questions with an air of

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<sup>195</sup> The meeting in the Irish National Club was chaired by Richard Purcell. *NEC*, 6 November 1922.

<sup>196</sup> See Hutchinson, 'Diaspora Dilemmas', p. 121.

<sup>197</sup> Barrington estimated that between March and October 1921 the Tyneside IRA spent £1,200 on weapons that were then smuggled with 'considerable quantities of explosives' to Ireland via Liverpool. Mary Barrington, *Irish Independence*, p. 19; Hart calculated that 289 handguns, 53 rifles, 24,141 ammunition rounds, and 1,067 pounds of explosives were shipped to Ireland via Liverpool, 1919-1921. Hart, *IRA at War*, pp. 183-184; as a comparison, 400 rifles were smuggled via Newcastle in 1913 to arm the UVF. Bowman, *Carson's Army*, p. 141.

hopelessness'.<sup>198</sup> The ISDL's separatist message, its insistence on an exclusive ethnic identity, on shunning all political involvement other than for nationalist politics, might, temporarily have found some support amongst the Irish in Britain during the worst years of the Anglo-Irish War. For the majority, however, who never joined the organisation and for those, bar the die-hards, who did, came the understanding that their future, and their children's future, in Britain lay in integration rather than separation.<sup>199</sup> In March 1922, as the ISDL was foundering, Charles Diamond gave voice to this understanding when he wrote that the Irish in Britain have 'their own lives to lead, their own fortunes to carve out, their children to bring up and educate and give a fair chance in life', and insisted that 'they must be citizens of the land of their adoption without mental reservation or equivocation'. Diamond then predicted that:

If they will put as much work, as much energy, as much brains and effort into their duties as citizens, as Trade Unionists, as Labour leaders, as upholders of every good cause, as they put into the work of the ISDL, they will be an irresistible force... for good, for their own progress and advancement, and for the good of their adopted country.<sup>200</sup>

The ISDL was the culmination of decades of Irish nationalist organisation in Britain, but it was no more than a political cul-de-sac for the Irish in Britain, and with its demise 'the era of mass nationalist organisations was at an end'.<sup>201</sup> The history of organised Irish nationalism in the North East, however, did not end with the ISDL's implosion. Another organisation on Tyneside had co-existed with, even pre-dated, the ISDL, and though much smaller, and barely remembered today, illustrates how, after the Great War, some working-class Irish nationalists in Britain

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<sup>198</sup> Boyce, *Englishmen and Irish Troubles*, p. 86; Inoue, 'Dáil Propaganda', p. 52; Fitzpatrick, 'A curious middle place', p. 44; Dáil Éireann, *Minutes* (Dublin, 1959), 17 September 1920, p. 226, quoted in Arthur Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government in Ireland. Dáil Éireann 1919-22*, (Dublin, 1995), p. 252.

<sup>199</sup> See Fitzpatrick, 'A curious middle place', p. 45; Hutchinson, 'Diaspora Dilemmas', pp. 121-123.

<sup>200</sup> *CH*, 25 March 1922.

<sup>201</sup> Hutchinson, 'Diaspora Dilemmas', p. 121.

sought a limited assimilation in the British labour movement that did not jeopardise their nationalist loyalties. This organisation, the Irish Labour Party, will be the subject of the final chapter.

## Chapter 5

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### **‘Enthusiastic Workers’: The Irish Labour Party on Tyneside, 1918-1925**

#### **Introduction**

Though the Labour Party’s performance in the 1918 general election in the North East had been disappointing, especially away from the Durham and Northumberland coalfields, the results disguised the real progress that the party had achieved, both locally and nationally, since 1914, and was to continue to achieve during the 1920s.<sup>1</sup> It was against this background that Charles Diamond, who had supported Labour during the election, and who had stood as a Labour candidate, informed his readers that ‘there is no Irish Party anymore. There is no United Irish League of Great Britain... It is time to bury it all and its officials and hangers on’, and, therefore, that ‘the only sound and rational course for the Irish in Great Britain to follow’ was to join the Labour Party.<sup>2</sup> Diamond concluded by arguing that it was time for the Irish in Britain to leave the ‘Irish Ghetto’ for ‘wider, freer, healthier air’, and, possibly for the first time in his newspapers, explicitly advanced the cause of Irish integration in their adopted country. Two months later, Diamond repeated his call for greater assimilation, when he told an audience in South Shields that Irish Catholics in Britain ‘must make a new start and... take their full share of their duties as citizens, without religious or national distinctions; and go forward in the work of raising and

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<sup>1</sup> For example, between 1918 and 1920, Labour constituency parties were formed in every division in County Durham. Maureen Callcott, ‘The Making of a Labour Stronghold: Electoral Politics in County Durham between the two World Wars’, in M. Callcott & R. Challinor (eds), *Working Class Politics in North East England* (Newcastle, 1983), pp. 63-64.

<sup>2</sup> *TCN*, 11 January 1919; Charles Diamond stood unsuccessfully as a Labour parliamentary candidate in London in 1918, 1922, and 1924. Neil Riddell, ‘The Catholic Church and the Labour Party, 1918-1931’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 8.2 (1997), p. 173.



strengthening the position of their people'.<sup>3</sup> Diamond then added, mindful of the deteriorating political situation in Ireland and the nationalist sympathies of his audience, that 'Ireland's cause' would also be served by the advancement of the Irish in Britain.

The transference of Irish Catholic allegiance in Britain from nationalist organisations that had, to a greater or lesser degree, emphasised, for their own political ends, the racial, religious, and cultural differences of the Irish from the host population, to the British Labour Party – the journey 'from the ghetto politics of Irish nationalism to mainstream British "class" politics' – was one of the key stages in the assimilation of the Irish Catholic community, and particularly its working-class majority, into British society.<sup>4</sup> Though enduring disagreements, especially over denominational schools, later severely tested the relationship between Labour and Irish Catholics in Britain, the Labour Party became 'the repository of Catholic support', and the party remained, until the later decades of the twentieth century, 'the preferred political choice of both the Irish-born and those of Irish descent'.<sup>5</sup>

On Tyneside, in the immediate post-war years, some working-class Irish, possibly with a heightened sense of their own ethnicity, were unable or unwilling, though drawn to the ethos of the Labour Party, to make the journey that Diamond advocated, and had himself followed, whilst the Irish national question remained unresolved, and so formed their own organisation – the Irish Labour Party. Though no party manifesto has yet been found, the objectives of the IrLP's branch in Gateshead were reported in June 1919 in the *Irish Transport and General Workers'*

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<sup>3</sup> *TCN*, 22 March 1919.

<sup>4</sup> Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, p. 299.

<sup>5</sup> Tom Gallagher, *Glasgow: The Uneasy Peace. Religious Tension in Modern Scotland* (Manchester, 1987), p. 182; Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity*, pp. 119, 130.

Union's newspaper, *The Voice of Labour*, and it is probable that these aims were held in common by the party on Tyneside:

Self-Determination for Ireland; affiliation to the British Labour Party for work in common with British workers for better conditions; and the election of Irish workers, men and women, on the public bodies so that Irish workers in Great Britain may play their proper part in local government.<sup>6</sup>

The Irish Labour Party, first described by Inoue in her pioneering thesis, has not to date received detailed attention from either labour historians or historians of the Irish in Britain.<sup>7</sup> Yet the IrLP, though short-lived and with few members, was a significant part of the narrative of Irish nationalism in the North East, as it uniquely enabled Irish men and women on Tyneside to fight alongside their British co-workers for common social and economic goals, whilst continuing the struggle for Irish independence, and without compromising their own distinct Irish Catholic customs and traditions.<sup>8</sup> Thus, in Gateshead on St. Patrick's Day 1922, Michael Brett, the IrLP's branch chairman, told his audience that 'our duty as Irish workers is to live up with the working-class movement. We must throw ourselves in favour of the Labour Party', but added that 'we as an Irish community must keep ourselves organised in an Irish movement – a movement that will keep alive our Irish traditions'.<sup>9</sup>

The chapter opens with an analysis of the origins of the Irish Labour Party on Tyneside before December 1918, and, in particular, reveals the crucial role played in the organisation's formation by the Catholic Social Guild and the Jesuit priest and social reformer, Father Charles Plater. Thereafter it offers a detailed examination of the IrLP's progress, especially in Gateshead, where the party enjoyed greater success than anywhere else on Tyneside, before revealing how, after Irish nationalism as an

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<sup>6</sup> *Irish Opinion: The Voice of Labour (VOL)*, 14 June 1919.

<sup>7</sup> Inoue, 'Political Activity of the Irish in Britain, 1919-1925'.

<sup>8</sup> *IE*, June 1922.

<sup>9</sup> *CH*, 25 March 1922.

emotive force lost much of its impact with the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the party was gradually subsumed within the British Labour Party.

## **Origins of the Irish Labour Party on Tyneside, 1917-1918**

Though little archival evidence of the Irish Labour Party appears to have survived, reports in the contemporary Catholic press indicate that the party grew from discussions on Tyneside held in working men's study groups organised by the Catholic Social Guild. The CSG had been formed in Manchester in 1909 in response to the papal encyclical of 1891 *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of the Working-Classes) that, whilst condemning socialism, had inspired 'the rapid growth of practical Catholic organisations of almost bewildering variety', and the CSG's leading evangelist and co-founder, Charles Plater, was a Jesuit priest, who had embraced the encyclical's call for clerical involvement in 'the work of social betterment'.<sup>10</sup>

Though the CSG had arrived in the North East shortly after its formation, by 1911 there were only two study groups with approximately 20 members, and the movement did not begin to flourish until the summer of 1913, when Father Plater undertook the first of his annual tours across the region.<sup>11</sup> Using as his base Whinney House, a recently-opened Jesuit retreat centre in Gateshead, Plater spoke on the value of religious retreats for working men and the importance of study groups on 160 occasions, including a meeting at Jarrow, where he spoke to 200 men, and at South

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<sup>10</sup> J. M. Cleary, *Catholic Social Action in Britain, 1909-1959. A history of the Catholic Social Guild* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 33-35; V. M. Crawford, *Catholic Social Doctrine, 1891-1931* (Oxford, 1933), pp. 42, 47; Joan Keating, 'The making of the Catholic labour activist: The Catholic Social Guild and Catholic Workers' College, 1909-1939', *Labour History Review*, 59.3 (1994), pp. 44-56.

<sup>11</sup> Cleary, *Catholic Social Action*, p. 48; for Plater, see C. C. Martindale, *Charles Dominic Plater S.J.* (London, 1922); and Aspden, *Fortress Church*, p. 37.

Shields, where he preached at three masses.<sup>12</sup> Plater also spoke in Newcastle's Irish National Club, and club members, including John O'Hanlon, subsequently visited him at Whinney House for 'talk, tea, and Irish concert'.<sup>13</sup> Even after Father Plater had returned to teach at Stonyhurst College in September 1913, his influence remained, and in December Plater's protégée, Henry Somerville, travelled to South Shields to speak in the Miners' Hall on 'Capitalism, Socialism and Catholicism'.<sup>14</sup> This proselytising by Plater and Somerville coincided with the protracted Dublin lock-out, and the widespread sympathy for the strikers amongst Irish and British workers in the North East may have assisted their work. Shortly after Somerville's visit to South Shields, a CSG study group was formed at St. Bede's church 'for the men of the parish', and began to meet monthly.<sup>15</sup>

By August 1914, over 20 CSG study groups with some 200 members had been established in the North East.<sup>16</sup> During the Great War, Plater continued to visit the region finding, even in late 1918 and in spite of war-time losses, twelve functioning groups and large audiences for his speeches, particularly at Hebburn, where 'the future of Labour was the chief topic discussed'; at Gateshead, where he hoped that revitalised post-war study groups would kindle 'the enthusiasm and imagination' of the town's young Catholics; and at South Shields, where he found

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<sup>12</sup> Plater also spoke at Blackhill, Blaydon, Felling, Gateshead, Leadgate, Newcastle, Walker, and Wrekenton. Martindale, *Plater*, pp. 152-157.

<sup>13</sup> Quotation from Plater's diary. Martindale, *Plater*, p. 157; *TCN*, 16 August and 6 September 1913.

<sup>14</sup> Notice Book, St. Bede's RC Church, South Shields, 7 December 1913 (TWA, C.SS 29/11/13); born in 1889, Henry Somerville was working in a Leeds factory, when his Catholic social activism caught the attention of Father Plater, who then found him work on Charles Diamond's newspapers, before sending him to Ruskin College, Oxford. Cleary, *Catholic Social Action*, pp. 56-58; Somerville also lectured in Dipton, Gateshead, Leadgate, and Willington Quay. *TCN*, 22 and 29 November 1913.

<sup>15</sup> Notice Book, St. Bede's RC Church, South Shields, 4 January and 1 February 1914 (TWA, C.SS 29/11/13); a women's CSG study group also met at St. Bede's in 1919, but it is not known when this group was first formed. Notice Book, St. Bede's RC Church, South Shields, 21 September 1919 (TWA, C.SS 29/11/14).

<sup>16</sup> Morris and Gooch, *Down Your Aisles*, p. 32.

that ‘Catholics carry weight and have a splendid spirit’.<sup>17</sup>

On Sunday 25 November 1917, a small CSG study group met in Tyne Dock.<sup>18</sup> The debate that evening was on ‘the advisability of forming a Catholic Labour Party’ in Britain, during which the proposer, William McAnany, argued that ‘Catholics wanted organising for co-operative, trade union, municipal and political purposes’. At least two of this group’s members, both coal miners, were already active in the labour movement. Luke Hannon, who worked as a deputy overman at Boldon colliery, had been elected earlier in the year as the colliery’s delegate to the Durham Miners’ Federation, and Hannon, together with William McAnany, had also been elected to represent Boldon on the Miners’ Federation board for the Houghton Company’s four collieries.<sup>19</sup> Both these men had also used the pages of the *Tyneside Catholic News* in 1917, no doubt with Diamond’s full approval, to advance labour’s cause.<sup>20</sup> In letters attacking miners’ low wages, McAnany unfavourably compared the poverty of a miner’s life to ‘the capitalist with plenty to eat and a nice comfortable mansion to live in’; whilst Hannon argued that ‘miners are today worse off than they were previous to the war’, and stated that ‘when asked if I am a Socialist, I say I am one better than that. I am a social reformer, ever trying to remember I am a Catholic’.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, only a few years before, both these men had been active solely in the

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<sup>17</sup> During the war, Plater spoke in Blaydon, Blyth, Byker, Chopwell, Crawcrook, Gateshead, Hebburn, Jarrow, Leadgate, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, Port Clarence, Stanley, Stockton, Walker, Wallsend, West Hartlepool, and Willington Quay. Martindale, *Plater*, pp. 246-254; *CTCO*, 18 January 1919.

<sup>18</sup> The Tyne Dock CSG study group included G. Grassby (chairman), William McAnany, Luke Hannon, P. Clarke, C. Devenport, W. Lovell, W. Mullen, and Mr Ryan. *TCN*, 1 December 1917; McAnany had been a CSG member from at least October 1917. *TCN*, 6 October 1917.

<sup>19</sup> *TCN*, 16 June and 7 July 1917; during the Jarrow by-election, Curran had been supported by Boldon’s miners, but it is not known if Hannon and McAnany were working at Boldon in 1907.

<sup>20</sup> Diamond had promoted CSG membership in 1913. *TCN*, 18 January 1913.

<sup>21</sup> *TCN*, 25 August and 29 September 1917; Henry Somerville writing in the CSG’s monthly journal, *Christian Democrat*, in November 1921 denied that the Labour Party was socialist, and, in answer to the question ‘Can a Catholic be a Socialist?’, argued that a Catholic ‘must be a Socialist’, quoted in Keating, ‘The making of the Catholic labour activist’, p. 47.

nationalist cause. Luke Hannon had been a member of the AOH in South Shields, whilst McAnany, like his father before him, had been a member in Tyne Dock of both the Hibernians, where he had been assistant branch secretary, and the UILGB, where he had been elected as branch delegate to the League's annual convention.<sup>22</sup> It is not known what finally prompted these men to acknowledge their class and openly embrace labour activism, though without rejecting their ethnicity and religion. Their membership of the CSG must, however, have played some part in that change, and William McAnany, at least, remained an active guild member, and was awarded a scholarship to study at the Catholic Workers' College in Oxford in 1930.<sup>23</sup>

On 2 January 1919, Father Plater returned to South Shields to speak at St. Bede's church.<sup>24</sup> If William McAnany attended the CSG lecture that evening, it was not simply as a guild member. He was by then secretary of the 'Tyne Dock Irish Labour Party': a party that was already claiming 'several hundred members' in South Shields; had pledged its support for George Rowe, the town's Labour parliamentary candidate; and had applied for affiliation to the South Shields Labour Party and Trades Council.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *TCN*, 25 January, 22 February, and 3 May 1913; though McAnany resigned as assistant branch secretary of Tyne Dock's AOH in 1913, he continued to attend meetings, and was elected in January 1918 as branch auditor and delegate to district meetings. *TCN*, 18 October 1913 and 21 October 1916, and *WCN*, 12 January 1918; in 1913, William's father, Patrick McAnany, was both AOH branch president and chairman of Tyne Dock's UILGB branch. *TCN*, 25 January and 3 May 1913.

<sup>23</sup> The Catholic Workers' College trained labour activists with limited formal education 'to assume leadership roles in their communities'. Between 1921 and 1939, 80 students attended the college. Keating, 'The making of the Catholic labour activist', pp. 49, 51.

<sup>24</sup> Notice Book, St. Bede's RC Church, South Shields, 29 December 1918 (TWA, C.SS 29/11/14).

<sup>25</sup> Chairman of Tyne Dock's IrLP was John Rodgers, with William McAnany as secretary. *WCN*, 23 November 1918; *NDC*, 26 November 1918; McAnany was a signatory of Rowe's nomination papers. *SDG*, 4 December 1918; the South Shields Labour Party and Trades Council had only been formed in February 1918. David Clark, *We Do Not Want The Earth. The History of the South Shields Labour Party* (Whitley Bay, 1992), p. 44.

## Growth of the Irish Labour Party on Tyneside, 1919

It is not known when the inaugural meeting of the Irish Labour Party was held in Tyne Dock, but in early 1919, driven by the UILGB's collapse and the widespread failure of Labour's candidates on Tyneside in the recent election, the party spread from South Shields up the Tyne, first to Newcastle, and then to Gateshead.<sup>26</sup> By May 1920, the IrLP had moved further up river to Crawcrook and Greenside, neighbouring colliery villages near Ryton, and, then in September, to the Durham iron and coal towns of Consett and West Stanley.<sup>27</sup> A second branch of the party was also established in Gateshead in September 1920, and it is possible that other branches were formed in the North East, though why the party met with so little success when compared to the ISDL is not known.<sup>28</sup>

An early recruit in South Shields was Gilbert Barrington, who had been an active pre-war member of the UILGB.<sup>29</sup> In March 1919, after his demobilisation from the army, Barrington returned to his family home and his work as a teacher at St. Bede's school.<sup>30</sup> He later recalled:

Shortly afterwards I was approached by some people who had formed a political party which they called the Irish Labour Party. At this stage, it only existed in South Shields and Tyne Dock. In a very short space of time there were branches all along the Tyneside.<sup>31</sup>

The 'convinced assimilationist' Charles Diamond, however, took no pleasure in the growth of the new party, and in March 1919, as part of the St. Patrick's Day demonstrations, told audiences in South Shields and Newcastle that he could see 'no

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<sup>26</sup> *NDC*, 24 February and 10 March 1919.

<sup>27</sup> *TCN*, 22 May and 4 September 1920. It is not known if the Consett and West Stanley IrLP branches ever functioned.

<sup>28</sup> The formation of the new IrLP branches in September 1920 was probably in response to MacSwiney's hunger strike. *Gateshead Labour Party and Trades Council Monthly Circular (GLPC)*, 47 (September 1920).

<sup>29</sup> Mary Barrington, *Irish Independence*, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Barrington was reported as being a teacher at St. Bede's school during his trial. *FJ*, 26 October 1921.

<sup>31</sup> Barrington Statement, p. 1.

good purpose to be served by an Irish Labour organisation in Great Britain'.<sup>32</sup> Later in the year, as the IrLP prospered, Diamond's displeasure turned to outright condemnation, and he denounced the party as 'an absurdity' that weakened the labour movement in Britain by dividing it, and which would 'keep the Irish people in the outer darkness, where they wandered so long, instead of allowing them to take their full and fair share in the public life of the country in which they live'.<sup>33</sup> In Dublin, however, the Irish labour movement welcomed the news that Irish workers on Tyneside were 'finding their natural place in the ranks of organised Labour', whilst maintaining 'the direct connection with the movement at home', and expressed the hope that the new party would take root and flourish 'wherever Irish workers are to be found in Great Britain'.<sup>34</sup> This hope was not, however, fulfilled. Independently of Tyneside, an Irish Labour Party was formed in Glasgow in late December 1918 and established close contact with the Tyneside branches.<sup>35</sup> A short-lived branch of the party was also formed in Bolton.<sup>36</sup> In spite, however, of Barrington's claim that the party also spread to Wales, no evidence has yet been found to substantiate his claim.<sup>37</sup> The reasons for the IrLP's failure to flourish amongst the Irish working-class in Britain may only be surmised, but it is interesting to note that Bolton, Gateshead, and Glasgow all contained major railway works.<sup>38</sup>

The IrLP's rationale was expounded at the inaugural meeting of the Newcastle branch held in the National Club on 23 February 1919, when the

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<sup>32</sup> Gallagher, *Glasgow*, p. 92; *TCN*, 22 March 1919.

<sup>33</sup> *TCN*, 8 November 1919.

<sup>34</sup> *VOL*, 14 June 1919.

<sup>35</sup> The IrLP in Glasgow was formed by railway workers in Springburn on 22 December 1918, with a political programme based on that of the ILP&TUC. *VOL*, 25 January 1919; also see Gallagher, *Glasgow*, p. 89.

<sup>36</sup> In July 1920, Bolton's IrLP amalgamated with the local ISDL branch, arguing that 'best interests would be served by a fusion of the organisations'. *TCN*, 26 June and 17 July 1920.

<sup>37</sup> Barrington Statement, p. 1; see O'Leary, *Immigration and Integration*.

<sup>38</sup> Edgar J. Larkin and John G. Larkin, *The Railway Workshops of Britain, 1823-1926* (London, 1988), pp. 55, 66, 68.



chairman, Austin McNamara, argued that, as the UILGB was ‘practically dead’, a new political organisation was required for the Irish in Britain.<sup>39</sup> McNamara, rejecting both the Conservative and Liberal parties, then urged his audience to support ‘the progressive forces’ in Britain, whilst maintaining ‘their national spirit and nationality’, and explained ‘that was why an Irish party had been formed within the Labour Party’. The purpose of this new party, he declared, was ‘to organise the Irish men and women, to keep them in touch with the new spirit that had arisen in Ireland, and to help the people of the Old Country in their fight for liberty’. Reinforcing McNamara’s argument, William O’Neill, branch secretary, explained that the Irish in Britain had been ‘gradually drifting into the Labour Party because the leaders of the old Nationalist Party in this country could not speak with the authority of the Irish working people at election times’. O’Neill, however, emphasised that the new party would not simply focus on the ‘Old County’, but would actively work ‘for the social betterment of the Irish in this country as well as in Ireland’, and that it was the new party’s intention to establish branches across the North East.

Two weeks later on 9 March 1919, at a well-attended meeting in Gateshead – ‘the most solidly working-class constituency on Tyneside’ – a new branch of the Irish Labour Party was formed with Thomas Ryan as chairman.<sup>40</sup> At this inaugural meeting, Austin McNamara, in his capacity both as chairman of the IrLP in Newcastle, and as treasurer of the Newcastle and District Trades Council, stated that the IrLP’s purpose was ‘to organise the Irish on Tyneside with a view to the regeneration of their old country’, but warned that the party must not ‘merge into the Independent Labour Party and thus give up their separate spirit until their country

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<sup>39</sup> *NDC*, 24 February 1919.

<sup>40</sup> Manders, *Gateshead*, p. 279; Annie Hanlon and W. J. Stephens were elected secretaries. *NDC*, 10 March 1919.

was free'. This fear of premature absorption into the British labour movement, before Ireland had gained its independence, was echoed by W. B. Mullen, finance secretary of the Tyne Dock branch, who, while accepting that 'Ireland's hopes rested only in the Labour Party', argued that a separate identity was vital to give the Irish 'a weight in the labour movement which they would not possess if simply merged into the Labour Party'.<sup>41</sup>

It has been argued that, before 1914, there was 'a powerful legacy of distrust' between the Independent Labour Party and Irish Catholics in Britain, the result of long-standing Irish support for the Liberal Party.<sup>42</sup> This distrust, compounded by popular prejudices about the Irish, and ILP and Irish disagreement over temperance and denominational education, probably continued after the war.<sup>43</sup> This may explain why, after the IrLP and its 'enthusiastic workers' had been granted affiliation to the Gateshead Labour Party and Trades Council, the GLP&TC's own newspaper was moved to assure its readership that there was 'no sectarianism' in the IrLP, and that the Irish party had 'proved' that it had 'the real political ideal strongly developed'.<sup>44</sup> The GLP&TC's *Monthly Circular* also explained that, whilst the IrLP recognised 'unity with the English Labour Party on the great question of social progress... in the interest of the special claims of their homeland they desire for the time being to maintain a separate organisation'.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Mullen had been a member of Tyne Dock's CSG study group. *TCN*, 1 December 1917.

<sup>42</sup> David Howell, *British workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906* (Manchester, 1983), p. 370.

<sup>43</sup> See Purdue, 'ILP in the North East', pp. 37-38; in July 1920, however, Sacriston's ILP reported assisting other local ILP branches, including the 'Irish Labour Party of Great Britain'. *The Labour Leader* (LL), 22 July 1920.

<sup>44</sup> Manders, *Gateshead*, p. 279; *GLPC*, 28 (March 1919), 30 (May 1919), 31 (June 1919); the GLP&TC had been formed in 1913, when 'more politically conscious trade unionists' seceded from the Newcastle and District Trades Council. J. F. Clarke and T. P. McDermott, *The Newcastle and District Trades Council, 1873-1973, A Centenary History*, (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1973), p. 23.

<sup>45</sup> *GLPC*, 30 (May 1919).

Confident of the party's growing support, the IrLP's first conference was held in Gateshead on 19 July 1919, under the chairmanship of Thomas Ryan, and each of the three branches reported their progress.<sup>46</sup> For Tyne Dock, W. B. Mullen explained that the branch had been formed because Irish labour activists there had found it 'impossible to get the Irish workers into the British Labour Party and so they decided to form an Irish Labour Party, and affiliate with the local Labour Party'; for Newcastle, Austin McNamara, though no longer president, explained that the branch was 'making headway against great odds'; whilst for Gateshead, Thomas Ryan explained that prior to the branch's formation there had only been two Irishmen in the town's Labour Party, whereas, after only four months, the branch had almost 400 members affiliated to the local Labour Party, 'which had treated them most generously'. Listening to these reports was Thomas Johnson, treasurer of the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, who had been invited by the Gateshead branch. Johnson, who had previously visited Newcastle in 1913 at the end of a fund-raising tour for the victims of the Dublin lock-out, told the IrLP delegates that they were not only helping the 'old country', but were also 'helping themselves by joining the British Labour Party', and he reiterated *The Voice of Labour's* hope that other Irish workers in Britain would follow Tyneside's example.<sup>47</sup>

At the 25<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the ILP&TUC at Drogheda in August 1919, Johnson reported that on Tyneside and Clydeside 'there was a widespread desire on the part of workers of Irish descent and birth in those districts to organise and to have some connection with the movement in Ireland'.<sup>48</sup> Though proposals for 'cross-

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<sup>46</sup> *TCN*, 19 July 1919.

<sup>47</sup> Born and raised a Protestant in Liverpool, Johnson described himself as 'Liverpool English'. J. Anthony Gaughan, *Thomas Johnson, 1872-1963, First leader of the Labour Party in Dáil Éireann* (Dublin, 1980), pp. 15-16, 25.

<sup>48</sup> *Report of 25<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress* (Drogheda, 1919), pp. 56, 69-73, quoted in J. Dunsmore Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism in Ireland* (New York 1926,

Channel branches of the Irish Labour Party' were rejected by the ILP&TUC's executive, Johnson expressed the executive's hope that Irish workers in Britain would 'organise themselves in groups, bring all their influence to bear upon the national and local labour organisations in Great Britain, and keep in close touch with [the executive's] work in Ireland'.<sup>49</sup> Johnson concluded by suggesting that:

There was the making of a very powerful movement that would help the British Labour Party to a more militant policy, industrially and politically, and at the same time force the British Labour Party, local and national, to face this issue: that their protestations on behalf of self-determination must first have application in respect of Ireland.

Finally the Congress was informed that attempts were being made 'to encourage similar organisations of Irish workmen' in Lancashire and South Wales.

## **Ireland and the British Labour Movement, 1919**

The driving force behind the ILP&TUC's desire to influence the British labour movement from within had arisen from the historic public declaration forced on the British Labour Party at the first post-war International Labour and Socialist Congress held at Berne in February 1919. This Congress had begun inauspiciously for the British delegation, led by Ramsay MacDonald, when Thomas Johnson and Cathal O'Shannon, the ILP&TUC delegates, were seated separately from the British group, thus recognising Ireland's status as a distinct nation.<sup>50</sup> O'Shannon then argued for 'free and absolute self-determination for the Irish people' and recognition 'of the Republican declaration of Independence at Easter Week, confirmed by the people at the General Election'.<sup>51</sup> After much discussion, and under pressure to compromise,

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reprinted 1970), pp. 413-414; also see *TT*, 11 August 1919; and *TCN*, 16 August 1919.

<sup>49</sup> Before 1922, the ILP&TUC acted as an all-Ireland movement, and resisted any intervention by British labour in Ireland. Arthur Mitchell, *Labour in Irish Politics, 1890-1930* (Dublin, 1974), pp. 40-42.

<sup>50</sup> This decision 'left the British Labour Party floundering'. Dunsmore Clarkson, *Labour and Nationalism*, p. 412; also see Gaughan, *Johnson*, pp. 159-62.

<sup>51</sup> ILP&TUC, *Ireland at Berne* (Dublin, 1919), p. 40, quoted in Mitchell, *Labour in Irish Politics*, pp.

MacDonald was forced to accept the Congress's final declaration that 'the principle of free and absolute self-determination shall be applied immediately to the cause of Ireland'.<sup>52</sup> Prior to February 1919, the British Labour Party's policy on Ireland had advocated little more than Home Rule, but, following the unequivocal Berne declaration, 'the Irish Labour leaders set out to win the British Labour movement as a whole' to this advanced position.<sup>53</sup>

Only weeks after the Berne declaration, a meeting in Newcastle's National Club agreed to revive, for the first time since 1914, 'the celebration of the Irish National Festival on Tyneside'.<sup>54</sup> Whilst not advertised as being called by the IrLP, this meeting was chaired by Austin McNamara, and William O'Neil was elected organising secretary. The St. Patrick's Day demonstration was held in Newcastle's Hippodrome on Sunday 16 March, under the chairmanship of Thomas Hayes.<sup>55</sup> In his opening remarks, Hayes said that it was the 'duty of all Irishmen to organise' to secure self-determination for Ireland, and that 'behind their unity they had the support of the great democracy of Great Britain, and they had also the full knowledge that the Labour Party was with them and would help them attain their ambition'. Amongst the speakers were William O'Brien, ILP&TUC secretary, and John Robert Clynes, a Manchester Labour MP, who condemned 'the means by which Ireland was robbed of her self-government' as 'shameful and degrading'.<sup>56</sup>

During the remainder of 1919, the IrLP on Tyneside sought to influence their

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<sup>52</sup> *Labour Party Conference Report, 1920*, p. 6.

<sup>53</sup> The resolution of June 1918 only recognised 'the claim of the people of Ireland to Home Rule and to self-determination in all exclusively Irish affairs'. *Labour Party Conference Report 1918*, p. 69; Mitchell, *Labour in Irish Politics*, p. 132.

<sup>54</sup> *NDC*, 19 February 1919.

<sup>55</sup> *NDC*, 17 March 1919.

<sup>56</sup> Clynes, born in Oldham of Irish parents, described himself as 'half Irish and wholly Lancastrian'. J. R. Clynes. *Memoirs* (London, 1937), p. 27, quoted in Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity*, p. 15.

British comrades' policy on Ireland. In October, the GLP&TC unanimously agreed a resolution from its affiliated IrLP branch 'demanding the withdrawal of troops from Ireland', and asserting that the Irish people's 'only crime is that they, as a nation, desire to rule themselves'.<sup>57</sup> Whilst in Newcastle in December, a 'Hands off Ireland' demonstration was organised jointly by the local Labour and Irish Labour parties.<sup>58</sup> This demonstration, chaired by John Hill, from the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress, featured three prospective Labour parliamentary candidates in Newcastle (Walter Hudson, David Adams, and C. P. Trevelyan); and Cathal O'Shannon, general secretary of the Irish Transport Workers Union. O'Shannon, addressing 'his friends and exiles' in the audience, reiterated the message of the Labour leadership in Dublin that 'the place of Irishmen in England was in the ranks of the English Labour and Socialist party... and be the spearhead of the Labour movement'. When the British Labour representatives spoke, whereas both Hill, who referred to Ireland as an 'occupied country', and Hudson, who described the current agitation in Ireland as 'a spontaneous national expression of political right', demanded self-determination for Ireland, Adams, speaking as 'the mouthpiece of the Newcastle Labour Party', showed that not every member of British Labour had fully absorbed the Berne declaration, when he declared that 'the Labour Party was not anxious to see the secession of the Irish people from the British Commonwealth', and 'would prefer to see separate Parliaments with a Central Parliament for dealing with inter-Dominion and inter-National affairs'. This did not impress one member of the audience, Luke Hannon, who, in his letter to Art O'Brien, scathingly labelled Adams as being 'no good' and 'childish' for advocating little more than 'a kind of

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<sup>57</sup> *GLPC*, 36 (October 1919).

<sup>58</sup> *NDC*, 2 December 1919.

Home Rule', and concluded by dismissing 'English [Labour] MPs' as 'all gob'.<sup>59</sup>

## **The Irish Labour Party and the Ballot Box**

During 1919, the IrLP did not confine itself to propaganda events, but, as Gateshead's 'manifesto' advocated, sought success at the municipal ballot box in order both to influence the British labour movement, and seek 'better conditions' for the working-class Irish living in the region.<sup>60</sup> The need for that success had been highlighted at the launch of Gateshead's branch in March 1919, when Austin McNamara had complained that there was 'not one representative of the Irish people on Newcastle City Council' and blamed this on 'the apathy of the Irishmen in Newcastle', whilst W. B. Mullen expressed the hope that the new party would allow the Irish on Tyneside to secure 'adequate municipal representation'.<sup>61</sup> Gilbert Barrington later claimed that the Irish obtained in South Shields 'disproportionate representation on local bodies through their affiliation with Trades Councils within the English Labour Party', and was himself selected 'on the Labour ticket' as a Poor Law guardian, and served as an IrLP delegate to the South Shields Trades and Labour Council.<sup>62</sup> Barrington's claim is corroborated by a letter from William McAnany in which he described himself as 'one of the organisers and founders' of the 'Irish Labour Party of Great Britain':

We have already obtained great things in the Labour Party, six members of the Irish Labour Party in this town have, through the Labour Party, obtained seats on the Board of Guardians and one member has been elected for the Durham County Council. Similar successes amongst the Tyneside branches are recorded.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Luke Hannon to Art Ó Briain, 6 December 1919 (NLI, MS 8433 /50).

<sup>60</sup> *VOL*, 14 June 1919.

<sup>61</sup> *NDC*, 10 March 1919.

<sup>62</sup> Barrington Statement, p. 1; Barrington stood as the 'Irish Labour Party's nominee and the South Shields Labour Party's candidate' in August 1919, and was returned unopposed at Westoe. *TCN*, 30 August 1919.

<sup>63</sup> *TCN*, 10 May 1919.

The six IrLP members elected as guardians in South Shields in April 1919 were William McAnany (miner), Mary McDermott (teacher), James Taroni (insurance agent), Patrick McManemy (joiner), Mary O'Neil (nurse), and Michael Joseph Kinlen (agent); whilst Luke Hannon was elected for the Westoe division to Durham County Council.<sup>64</sup>

Two ill-tempered municipal election contests in Gateshead revealed that not all Irish Catholic voters enthusiastically supported the IrLP.<sup>65</sup> In July 1919, following a joint meeting in Oakwellgate of the GLP&TC and the IrLP, James McVay was selected as the Labour Party's candidate to fight a by-election in the North-East ward.<sup>66</sup> To the surprise of the IrLP, McVay, who was well-known in the town as District Secretary of the National Amalgamated Union of Labour, was opposed by another Catholic, John Michael Costelloe, a pawnbroker. After the election, the editor of the GLP&TC's newspaper wrote that:

The new Irish Labour Party... had expected that a candidate holding Mr McVay's views would have received no opposition from a Catholic source, but it is clear that the worker must fight for his position every time. As a Labour Party we are not surprised. We have had a long experience. Our Irish friends must learn in the same school. The real fight that matters is the fight between capital and labour... the fight is the same for the Irish worker, the British workers and the workers the world over.<sup>67</sup>

The election was held on 26 July, and McVay defeated Costelloe by 1,453 votes to 221, a majority of 1,232.<sup>68</sup> The following month, the GLP&TC secretary reported that 'the fight gave us some insight of what can be done, when the forces of Labour are united', and praised the IrLP's 'enthusiasm', particularly for its campaigning in areas where 'the very names on the register indicated that many sons and daughters

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<sup>64</sup> *SDG*, 20 March 1919; and *TCN*, 19 April 1919.

<sup>65</sup> For the two Gateshead elections, see Inoue, 'Political Activity of the Irish in Britain, 1919-1925'.

<sup>66</sup> *GLPC*, 32 (July 1919) and 33 (August 1919).

<sup>67</sup> *GLPC*, 32 (July 1919).

<sup>68</sup> *NDC*, 28 June 1919.



of Erin were living in the vicinity' – presumably the very areas where the British Labour Party had previously made little headway.<sup>69</sup> After campaigning in harmony with the wider labour movement, Gateshead's IrLP then underlined its commitment to British Labour's programme at a meeting in Birtley of the local Federation of Independent Labour Party branches, when the IrLP's delegate called for 'drastic action... on the part of trade unions' to stop food profiteering, and blamed the British government's inaction.<sup>70</sup>

A second by-election in Gateshead in late August 1919 saw more opposition to the strengthening link between Irish Catholics and British Labour, when James Gunn, the Labour candidate and IrLP nominee, faced 'powerful opposition' from another Catholic, Charles Crilley, a local publican.<sup>71</sup> The trouble had arisen because Gunn had initially been invited to stand in the North ward as the candidate for the Catholic Truth Society, but had declined, as 'he is a strong Labour man, and he was not desirous that his religion should be brought into conflict with his Labour ideals'. Illustrating the Catholic Church's enduring desire to influence Irish politics in the North East, opposition to Gunn was centred on St. Joseph's church, where Father Martin McDermott was parish priest.<sup>72</sup> McDermott, denouncing Gunn's candidacy from the pulpit, said that 'if the congregation did not stand by him he would ask the bishop to send him to another parish', and refused to accept 'any offertories from members of the Irish Labour Party, saying "If I cannot have their support... I will not touch their money"'. The parish priest also banned the sale of the *Tyneside Catholic News* from outside his church for its unequivocal support for James Gunn; support that was offered in spite of Diamond's well-publicised opposition to a separate IrLP:

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<sup>69</sup> *GLPC*, 33 (August 1919).

<sup>70</sup> *NDC*, 18 August 1919.

<sup>71</sup> See *GLPC*, 33 (August 1919) and 34 (September 1919); *TCN*, 23 and 30 August 1919.

<sup>72</sup> *Northern Catholic Calendar*, 1920.

We urge Catholic and Irish electors to give Mr Gunn their enthusiastic support... In doing so they are serving in the best possible way the cause of Ireland and the cause of Labour, as well as the Catholic cause. It is a matter upon which every Catholic is perfectly entitled to think and act for himself, and no dictation either from press or pulpit is justifiable.<sup>73</sup>

James Gunn was elected as Labour's fifth councillor in Gateshead, with 1,300 votes to Crilley's 875, a majority of 425. Importantly, this victory for an Irish Labour candidate, though campaigning under the banner of British Labour, had been gained by the combined effort of all the labour organisations in the town, including the Independent Labour Party. This support is confirmed in the diary of Ruth Dodds. Dodds, who had been secretary of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in Gateshead, and had joined the ILP in January 1919, wrote that the by-election had 'ended in a glorious victory... a better win than even the Irish themselves expected, for the priests were against them, and Father McDermott used, by all accounts, very violent language against them'.<sup>74</sup> After the election, an open letter to McDermott from the GLP&TC censured him for wanting 'to keep the Catholic working man and the Protestant working man in two separate camps', and explained that the Labour Party was 'a united party, representative of all workers', and, therefore, 'the religious opinions of our members are outside our province'.<sup>75</sup>

In October 1919, in a significant public act of solidarity, the Gateshead Labour and Irish Labour parties held their first joint social gathering, under the chairmanship of Thomas Peacock, to congratulate James McVay and James Gunn on their victories.<sup>76</sup> With the Labour Party seemingly on the ascendant in Gateshead, the GLP&TC called a meeting to select ten candidates to carry the 'Banner of Labour' in

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<sup>73</sup> *TCN*, 23 August 1919.

<sup>74</sup> Diary of Ruth Dodds, 23 August 1919 (TWA, DF.DOD/1/10).

<sup>75</sup> *GLPC*, 34 (September 1919).

<sup>76</sup> *TCN*, 18 October 1919; Thomas Peacock became Gateshead's first Labour Mayor in 1924. Manders, *Gateshead*, p. 49.

the impending municipal elections.<sup>77</sup> Two of the candidates chosen were Thomas Ryan and Thomas Hayes, respectively chairman and secretary of Gateshead's IrLP.<sup>78</sup> In the November 1919 election, nine of the ten Labour candidates were elected; Labour increased its holding from five to fourteen seats; and both Hayes and Ryan defeated sitting Independent members: Hayes in the North East ward with a majority of 766 votes, and Ryan in the North West ward with a majority of 483 votes.<sup>79</sup>

Across the Tyne, Newcastle's IrLP celebrated the party's success in Gateshead, and planned for its own successes in both the forthcoming municipal and, ultimately, parliamentary elections.<sup>80</sup> At a meeting in early September 1919, Richard Purcell, from the Northumberland Miners' Association, and assistant secretary of Newcastle's ISDL branch, nominated Austin McNamara as the IrLP's own parliamentary candidate for one of Newcastle's four constituencies, citing McNamara's qualifications as 'a founder of the Newcastle branch of the Irish Labour Party, President of the local branch of the ISDL, Honorary Treasurer of the Newcastle Trades and Labour Council, and a member of the Board of Guardians'.<sup>81</sup> McNamara duly accepted the nomination, arguing that 'Irishmen of the city, as in every constituency where they had such voting strength as in Newcastle, should be directly represented'.<sup>82</sup> The incumbent Labour leadership in Newcastle, however, ignored this argument, and McNamara was not selected as a parliamentary candidate, and the IrLP had no more success in gaining nominations for its members as official Labour candidates in the municipal elections in Newcastle in November 1919. This

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<sup>77</sup> Labour enjoyed little success in municipal elections in Gateshead before 1914. Only after 1918 did 'a combination of tighter organisation... and the reflection of a national trend caused by unemployment result in Labour gains of a large scale'. Manders, *Gateshead*, p. 49.

<sup>78</sup> *GLPC*, 36 (October 1919).

<sup>79</sup> *NDC*, 3 November 1919.

<sup>80</sup> *TCN*, 30 August 1919.

<sup>81</sup> *TCN*, 6 and 20 September 1919.

<sup>82</sup> *TCN*, 20 September 1919.

failure might have been linked to the IrLP's non-affiliation to the Newcastle Trades and Labour Council, despite McNamara holding office as treasurer.<sup>83</sup> In South Shields, however, where the IrLP was affiliated, William McAnany was also unsuccessfully nominated by the party as the town's prospective Labour parliamentary candidate, though he had been selected as a Labour candidate in November's municipal election.<sup>84</sup>

A year later, in November 1920, against a background of worsening violence in Ireland and deepening economic hardship in the North East, the Labour Party on Tyneside renewed its municipal election campaign.<sup>85</sup> In Gateshead, as elsewhere on Tyneside, Labour suffered heavily in the polls, winning only two seats in ten contests.<sup>86</sup> Two of the defeated Labour candidates in Gateshead, both IrLP nominees, were women. Standing in the North West ward, Mrs Mary Gunn, James Gunn's sister-in-law, was a member of the GLP&TC's executive committee and was praised as 'one of our most active workers', who 'has all a mother's interest in domestic questions and the care of child life'. Her sister, Annie Hanlon, a member of the Shop Assistants' Union, stood in the East ward and was described as 'one of our young and enthusiastic lady members... keenly interested in the women's side of public life and an active social worker'.<sup>87</sup> Both women were defeated by male Coalition candidates.<sup>88</sup> These two defeats may simply have been the result of Labour's

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<sup>83</sup> Austin McNamara was finally elected as a Labour councillor in Wallsend in 1924. *TCN*, 8 November 1924.

<sup>84</sup> William McAnany, however, failed to win the Simonside ward in South Shields. *SDG*, 3 November 1919; Clark, *We Do Not Want The Earth*, pp. 47, 53, 57.

<sup>85</sup> The elections were held on 1 November 1920, the day that Kevin Barry was hanged in Dublin, the first Irish political prisoner to be executed since 1916. Hopkinson, *Irish War*, pp. 87-88; with the Northumberland and Durham miners on strike, the Cabinet was warned that 'unemployment, greatly aggravated by the miners' strike, is increasing rapidly and will seriously threaten the stability of the country during the winter'. *RORO*, 28 October 1920.

<sup>86</sup> Manders, *Gateshead*, p. 49.

<sup>87</sup> *GLPC*, 48 (October 1920).

<sup>88</sup> North West ward: Coalition candidate 1,284 votes, Mrs Gunn 907 votes. East ward: Coalition 2,331 votes, Miss Hanlon 1,110 votes. *GLPC*, 50 (November 1920).

unpopularity at the polls, but, possibly, may have reflected voters' disapproval of female candidates. The IrLP's increasingly militant nationalist stance in 1920 may also have had an influence on the outcome.

Following the electoral disappointments of 1920, the IrLP hoped for greater success in November 1921. In Gateshead, though the incumbent James Gunn was defeated, James McVay retained his ward, and Mary Gunn, 'one of the most enthusiastic members of that enthusiastic body the Irish Labour Party', was elected as the town's first female Labour councillor, and the first female Catholic municipal councillor in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.<sup>89</sup> Further success came to the IrLP the following year, when, in spite of what was described in the local press as a 'great Labour rout', both Thomas Hayes and Thomas Ryan were re-elected in Gateshead, defeating Ratepayers' candidates, whilst in South Shields, one of the IrLP's founders, William McAnany, finally achieved electoral success in Simonside.<sup>90</sup> These victories were augmented in November 1923, when, as the Labour Party took control of Gateshead's town council for the first time, Annie Hanlon was elected in the West Central ward, as Labour's third female councillor in the town.<sup>91</sup> Away from Gateshead, however, in Newcastle and elsewhere on Tyneside, IrLP nominees remained unselected by the local Labour leaderships. This rejection may have been the result of continuing prejudice against Irish candidates, or of a realistic assessment by these leaderships of the relative value of the Irish vote in their locales, and the likelihood of Labour achieving electoral victory with Irish candidates.

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<sup>89</sup> *GLPC*, 61 (October 1921); North ward: Ratepayers candidate 1,007 votes, James Gunn 955. North East ward: James McVay 1,184 votes, Ratepayers 527. North West ward: Mrs Mary Gunn 1,669, Ratepayers 1,038. *NDC*, 2 November 1921; *Northern Catholic Calendar*, 1922.

<sup>90</sup> In Gateshead, Hayes was re-elected with 1,817 votes to Ratepayers 517; Ryan with 2,095 votes to Ratepayers 739. In South Shields, William McAnany was elected with 1,099 votes to 891 votes. *Newcastle Chronicle and Northern Mail*, 2 November 1922.

<sup>91</sup> Manders, *Gateshead*, p. 49; *Gateshead Herald (GH)*, September 1938.

In contrast to its clear public profile in municipal elections, IrLP activity is less easily seen in parliamentary elections. In the general election of November 1922, the first since 1918, the British Labour Party made sweeping gains on Tyneside winning five seats, including two in Newcastle.<sup>92</sup> Whilst Catholic newspapers had confidently predicted that the majority of the Irish vote in Britain would go to Labour, the IrLP appears to have had no publicised role in these successes, a reflection, possibly, of the party's decline, and a measure of the gathering pace on Tyneside of the integration of the Irish within the broader labour movement.<sup>93</sup> Even in Gateshead, where the Labour Party significantly increased its share of the poll from 23.8 per cent in 1918 to 43.8 per cent in 1922, and saw John Brotherton elected as the town's first Labour MP, the largest and most active of the IrLP's branches, with its proven organisational record and internal discipline, appears to have played no part in the victory.<sup>94</sup>

## **The Irish Labour Party and the Irish Revolution**

The Irish Labour Party, in spite of its desire for co-operation with British labour and its pursuit of local electoral success, was primarily an Irish nationalist organisation, with 'Self-Determination for Ireland' first amongst its objectives.<sup>95</sup> Initially, however, that nationalism was muted, prompting Gilbert Barrington and others, uncomfortable with the party's focus on what they deemed as 'English Labour interests', to seek affiliation to 'the Irish Labour Party proper in Dublin', which, with its continuing commitment to direct action and the nationalist cause, seemed to these

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<sup>92</sup> In 1922, Labour won 5 out of 7 seats on 'industrial Tyneside', including David Adams in Newcastle West. Ian Hunter, 'Labour in Local Government on Tyneside 1883-1921', in Callcott and Challinor (eds), *Working-class Politics in North East England*, p. 35.

<sup>93</sup> *CTCO*, 4 November 1922

<sup>94</sup> Callcott, 'The Making of a Labour Stronghold', p. 71; Brotherton was narrowly defeated by a Liberal in 1923, but Labour re-won the seat in 1924. Manders, *Gateshead*, p. 280.

<sup>95</sup> *VOL*, 14 June 1919.

more advanced nationalists to be their natural home.<sup>96</sup> The application was probably discussed during Thomas Johnson's visit to Tyneside in July 1919, but to Barrington's disappointment Johnson 'was not favourably disposed towards the proposal and left the situation unchanged', leading Barrington and the others to seek a more advanced home in the recently formed Irish Self-Determination League.<sup>97</sup>

As has been discussed in the previous chapter, the IrLP initially perceived the ISDL as a nationalist ally rather than as a rival, and was instrumental in the early growth of the League in Newcastle and Gateshead. Thus in July 1919, Austin McNamara welcomed Thomas Johnson, ILP&TUC treasurer, to a meeting in the Irish National Club not of the IrLP but of the ISDL.<sup>98</sup> Others, however, were less sure of the alliance and, as early as November 1919, John McKay, a miner working at Montagu colliery in Scotswood, complained that the ISDL was hindering the growth of the IrLP, and argued that only the IrLP 'points the way for the general well-being of the working-classes'.<sup>99</sup> By early 1920, the fraternal alliance between Tyneside's nationalist organisations had all but ended, as the ISDL single-mindedly pursued its advanced nationalist agenda, rejecting the IrLP's more moderate nationalism. This, however, should not have been a surprise to the IrLP's leadership on Tyneside. Before the 1918 general election, there had been a struggle in Ireland between Sinn Féin and the ILP&TUC over Labour candidates standing in the election, until Irish Labour, accused by Sinn Féin of opposing the national movement, of failing to support the republican government, and – most woundingly of all – of 'deserting the legacy of Connolly', capitulated and agreed to field no

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<sup>96</sup> Barrington Statement, p.1.

<sup>97</sup> *TCN*, 12 July 1919; Barrington Statement, pp. 1-2.

<sup>98</sup> *NDC*, 7 July 1919.

<sup>99</sup> *TCN*, 29 November 1919.

candidates.<sup>100</sup>

The break with the ISDL, however, did not prevent the IrLP from gradually embracing its own more advanced nationalist stance during 1920 as the Anglo-Irish War intensified. This increasing militancy was additionally fuelled by frustration with British Labour's policy on Ireland – a policy that has been described as being 'in defiance' of both the 2<sup>nd</sup> International and the Irish electorate.<sup>101</sup> In late January 1920, a month after the IRA's attempted assassination of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, a delegation from the Parliamentary Labour Party, led by Arthur Henderson MP, visited Ireland 'to investigate the Irish situation at first hand', and find a solution to 'what the Labour Party regards as one of the most urgent questions in British politics'.<sup>102</sup> On the day he returned from Ireland, Henderson told a meeting in Bishop Auckland that:

The majority of the Irish people had lost all faith in British statesmanship... the political creed of the majority might be summed up in two significant and serious words 'Clear out'. They are frankly declaring for a separate Independent Republic.<sup>103</sup>

The demand to 'Clear out', however, was not heard by the leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party, J. R. Clynes. Though *The Labour Leader*, the ILP's 'official organ', had urged Labour to decide 'without ambiguity' its position regarding Sinn Féin's 'demand for complete self-determination', when Clynes opened the debate in parliament for his party at the second reading of the Government of Ireland Bill, it was to reject full self-determination for Ireland.<sup>104</sup>

During the first half of 1920, the IrLP's growing nationalist militancy was

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<sup>100</sup> Gaughan, *Johnson*, pp. 118-120; also see Mitchell, *Labour in Irish Politics*, pp. 91-103.

<sup>101</sup> Geoffrey Bell, *Troublesome Business: The Labour Party and the Irish Question* (London, 1982), p. 48.

<sup>102</sup> *NDC*, 20 January 1920.

<sup>103</sup> *ACC*, 5 February 1920.

<sup>104</sup> *LL*, 29 January 1920; Bell, *Troublesome Business*, p. 48.



illustrated by meetings in Newcastle that condemned British rule in Ireland as ‘the most treacherous, hypocritical and despotic that have disgraced the annals of the British Parliament’, and emphasised the party’s blood-soaked nationalist heritage:

We, members of the Irish Labour Party, recall with pride the spirit of independence and love of freedom displayed by the Irish Labour leaders during the memorable year 1916. That we pledge ourselves to cultivate and bloom the seeds they planted, and watered with their blood. Further, we recognise that nothing short of that independence for which they died will satisfy the Irish people and for that aim and object the Irish Labour Party stands first.<sup>105</sup>

For all its misgivings, however, the IrLP still saw its place as within the wider British labour movement, and at a St. Patrick’s Day demonstration in Gateshead’s town hall, Councillor Thomas Ryan, from the chair, insisted that there was no other way ‘to advance the progress of the Irish cause’ than ‘to band themselves together in an Irish Labour Party, linked up with the British Labour Party, so that they could fight not only the enemies of Ireland, but the enemies of the working man’, and stressed that the ‘Irish citizens of Gateshead’ were ‘at one with the people of Ireland’.<sup>106</sup> This meeting was attended by Cathal O’Shannon, who, speaking under an assumed name for fear of arrest, reaffirmed Ryan’s message, saying that ‘just as more than one half of the workers in Ireland were organised in the Labour movement and in one union, so... the proper place of every working Irish working man and woman in England, Scotland and Wales was in the Labour movement’.<sup>107</sup>

This did not, however, mean that the IrLP gave slavish support to British Labour, as was demonstrated in late March 1920, when the Labour candidate in the Stockport by-election was questioned on his party’s Irish policy and found

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<sup>105</sup> Thomas Larkin, General Workers Union, chaired both meetings. *NDC*, 9 February and 5 April 1920.

<sup>106</sup> *NDC*, 15 March 1920; *CTCO*, 20 March 1920.

<sup>107</sup> O’Shannon, alias Conor Hayes, spoke at meetings in England in early 1920, whilst on the run from the RIC. He was arrested in London in April 1920. *RORO*, 15 April 1920; also Cathal O’Shannon (ed.) *Fifty Years of Liberty Hall, 1909-1959* (Dublin, 1959), p. 77.

wanting.<sup>108</sup> After receiving what was deemed to be an unsatisfactory reply from Labour's National Executive Committee, an Irish Electors' Committee in Stockport, dominated by the local ISDL, put forward as a rival candidate, William O'Brien, the interned secretary of the ILP&TUC. Though O'Brien's candidacy had not been authorised by Labour leaders in Dublin, Thomas Johnson sent a telegram of support to Stockport, and other telegrams supporting O'Brien were sent by the IrLP in Gateshead and Glasgow.<sup>109</sup> O'Brien only polled 2,336 votes, but this challenge to the British Labour Party in a British constituency, the result of the perceived inadequacies of its Irish policy, was a 'worrying development' for the British Labour leadership, for across industrial Britain there were many constituencies, where there were far more Irish voters than in Stockport.<sup>110</sup>

In mid-March 1920, delegates from the IrLP branches on Tyneside met in Gateshead and agreed to form an executive 'to consolidate rules and regulations' for the party, and to organise a national conference to which delegates from Glasgow would be invited.<sup>111</sup> The first national conference of the Irish Labour Party of Great Britain was held in Gateshead on 11 April 1920 'to discuss the Home Rule Bill and the present condition in Ireland'.<sup>112</sup> According to police reports, the Scottish delegation had been instructed to vote for complete isolation from all British political parties, including the Labour Party, and the conference agreed not to affiliate itself to

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<sup>108</sup> See John McHugh, 'The Stockport by-election of 1920: The Labour Party and the problem of Irish Self-Determination', *Manchester Region History Review*, 14 (2000), pp. 39-46; Mitchell, *Labour in Irish Politics*, p. 133.

<sup>109</sup> 'We did not request nomination but now the crisis has come O'Brien's life may be saved if Stockport electors speak loud enough for Government to hear'. *TT*, 29 March 1920; *FJ*, 23 March 1920.

<sup>110</sup> Labour's candidate came third in Stockport, losing by 6,000 votes. This defeat was not, therefore, solely caused by Irish voters deserting Labour. McHugh, 'Stockport by-election', p. 44; Bell, *Troublesome Business*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>111</sup> The delegate conference was held in the IrLP's branch rooms at 156 Askew Road, Gateshead. *NDC*, 15 March 1920; *RORO*, 30 March 1920.

<sup>112</sup> Gateshead's town council narrowly refused permission for the IrLP's conference to be held in the town hall. All 14 Labour councillors, Irish and British, voted in favour. *NDC*, 8 April 1920.

any other organization. As, however, at least two of Tyneside's IrLP branches, Gateshead and South Shields, were already affiliated to the Labour Party, this injunction, on Tyneside at least, was probably directed against the ISDL, which was accused during the conference by Thomas Ryan as 'working against' the IrLP.<sup>113</sup>

The day after the Gateshead conference, the ILP&TUC called a general strike across Ireland in support of the Irish political prisoners on hunger strike in Irish and British prisons, and an emotional appeal was made to British workers to 'speak in the only language that will be heard; speak and act instantly! If you have the spirit of freemen, prove it now'.<sup>114</sup> On Tyneside, the IrLP's long months of work within the British labour movement reaped their reward, when the Newcastle Trades Council congratulated the Irish workers on their strike; demanded 'the immediate release of Irish political prisoners and the withdrawal of the army of occupation from Ireland'; and called on the TUC's Parliamentary Committee to consider 'direct action in Ireland'.<sup>115</sup> Similar demands were made by the GLP&TC and at Montagu colliery, where the Miners' Lodge demanded that all Northumberland miners 'down tools at once' in support of the Irish hunger strikers.<sup>116</sup>

The call for direct action in Britain was repeated by Thomas Johnson, ILP&TUC acting secretary following William O'Brien's imprisonment, when he protested to British workers in his May Day message that Irish labour's battle with

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<sup>113</sup> Glasgow's IrLP delegates were James Roe, John Devine, and Thomas Murray. RORO, 30 March and 22 April 1920.

<sup>114</sup> *TT*, 13 April 1920; Thomas Johnson issued a manifesto as the strike began: 'To the Workers of Ireland... You are called upon to act swiftly to save a hundred dauntless men... Resolutions, votes, constitutional practise have been worn to shreds. They are cast aside as useless. As trade unionists we have only one weapon left – a general strike'. *Dublin Evening Telegraph*, 14 April 1920, quoted in Gaughan, *Johnson*, p. 136.

<sup>115</sup> *NDC*, 15 April 1920.

<sup>116</sup> *NDC*, 16 April 1920; the Northumberland Miners' Association's council rejected Montagu's resolution by 36 votes to 22, but stated that it was 'in favour of self-determination for Ireland'. *NDC*, 17 May 1920.

Irish capitalists was impeded by the continuing war in Ireland, and that:

If you, the British workers, will call off your armies our task will be simplified. You are compelling us to war on two fronts – to fight the political tyranny of a militaristic Empire and economic slavery imposed by our home-grown capitalists. And forty-eight hours' inaction on your part would bring us freedom.<sup>117</sup>

Across Britain, however, there was no direct action by British workers in support of the hunger strikers, and the only action by Irish workers was in Liverpool, where a short-lived dock strike led by P. J. Kelly, the ISDL's national president, failed as it was opposed by James Sexton, leader of the Dockers' Union, who feared sectarian violence in the city if the strike continued.<sup>118</sup>

On Saturday 1 May 1920, the first May Day demonstrations since 1914 were held on Tyneside and the IrLP ensured that its demands were at the forefront of the day's activities. In Newcastle, labour organisations from Newcastle and Gateshead united to march to Town Moor, where the resolutions demanded that the Irish should 'determine their own policy and system of government' and called for 'the immediate withdrawal of all imperial forces' from Ireland.<sup>119</sup> The IrLP, however, was not alone in representing Irish interests on Town Moor, as the ISDL was also present.<sup>120</sup> Three weeks later, on 20 May, the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union began an embargo on the movement of munitions for Crown forces in Ireland.<sup>121</sup> This ban, which spread in Ireland from the docks to the railways, though eventually ending in failure in December 1920, challenged the British Labour Party

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<sup>117</sup> *LL*, 29 April 1920.

<sup>118</sup> Davies, 'P. J. Kelly', pp. 168-171.

<sup>119</sup> *NDC*, 28 and 29 April 1920; Ruth Dodds attended the demonstration on Town Moor – 'I never saw such crowds' – and noted that Gateshead's IrLP had a lorry carrying a white and green May Pole, and 'a very pretty dark haired Erin in a long white shamrock-sprinkled robe standing in the middle of a dozen or more little red-cloaked, green petticoated colleens', whilst the party's fife and drum band played 'The Wearing of the Green'. Diary of Ruth Dodds, 1 May 1920 (TWA, DF.DOD/1/11).

<sup>120</sup> *NDC*, 3 May 1920.

<sup>121</sup> See Charles Townshend, 'The Irish Railway Strike of 1920: Industrial Action and Civil Resistance in the Struggle for Independence', *Irish Historical Studies*, 22.83 (March 1979), pp. 265-282.

over its Irish policy, and found widespread, though only verbal, support among British and Irish workers.<sup>122</sup> At meetings in July, organised on Town Moor by Newcastle's IrLP, Thomas Larkin condemned the 'war on the Irish people', and demanded 'the unanimous support of the British workers' for the Irish strikers; his wife, Martha Larkin, declared that 'if the British Government removed the machine guns... the Irish people would govern themselves, in republican fashion'; John McKay called for 'definite and direct action of the workers in the trade union movement' to solve the Irish problem; whilst Thomas Ryan warned the British Labour Party that, unless it dealt with the crisis 'carefully', there might be 'trouble in store'.<sup>123</sup> Meanwhile in Durham, IrLP members attended the annual miner's gala, at which Ernest Bevin from the Dockers' Union called on the government to 'bring back the troops from Ireland and let them produce wealth'.<sup>124</sup>

In response to the crisis in Ireland, a special Trade Union Congress met in London on 13 July 1920, and appeared to agree to a general strike by accepting a resolution from the Miner's Federation proposing 'a down tools policy' if the government refused to withdraw its forces from Ireland.<sup>125</sup> Geoffrey Bell has, however, argued that this seemingly revolutionary call was no more than 'an exercise in buck passing', as, though the idea of a general strike was agreed, its implementation was placed in the hands of each individual union, and the union leaders were 'fully aware it was never likely to happen'.<sup>126</sup> When a call for direct action finally came, however, it was not to halt the war in Ireland, but to prevent

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<sup>122</sup> The munitions' embargo has been described as Irish Labour's 'most effective contribution to the [Irish] struggle for independence.' Gaughan, *Johnson*, p. 140.

<sup>123</sup> *NDC*, 12 and 26 July 1920; *TCN*, 17 July 1920.

<sup>124</sup> *DC*, 23 July 1920.

<sup>125</sup> *NDC*, 14 July 1920.

<sup>126</sup> Bell, *Troublesome Business*, p. 58.

British involvement, as an ally of Poland, in the war against Soviet Russia.<sup>127</sup> The result was a Council of Action set up on 9 August.<sup>128</sup> Before the national council first met, however, the British government had already indicated that it would not become involved in a war with Soviet Russia, but across Britain some 350 local councils were already forming.<sup>129</sup> Many of these local councils, including twelve from Durham and Tyneside, were soon demanding an extension of the national council's terms of reference to include Ireland.<sup>130</sup> These calls were, no doubt, encouraged by a telegram sent by Thomas Johnson from Dublin to the national Council of Action pledging Irish Labour's co-operation, if the council decided on 'active measures', but also warning British Labour that 'they will have to share the responsibility for any such catastrophe, as the Lord Mayor of Cork's death by hunger strike, unless they take decisive action to prevent it'.<sup>131</sup> On 17 August, a meeting of Newcastle's Labour Party formed a local Council of Action, with twelve members elected from local labour organisations, including Thomas Larkin, representing both the IrLP and General Workers Union, and then co-opted nineteen further members, including another from the IrLP.<sup>132</sup> A North East District Council of Action soon formed, and on 5 September demanded that the national council meeting at Portsmouth should remain in session until 'universal peace has been secured in Europe and all British

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<sup>127</sup> See Stephen White, 'Labour's Council of Action 1920', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9.4 (1974), pp. 99-122; L. J. Macfarlane, 'Hands off Russia: British Labour and the Russo-Polish War, 1920', *Past and Present*, 38 (1967), pp. 126-152.

<sup>128</sup> The Labour leadership's response to the Soviet crisis has been unfavourably compared to its weak response to the Irish munitions' embargo. Townshend, 'Irish Railway Strike', p. 267.

<sup>129</sup> A meeting of the North East District Council of Action was attended by 35 delegates, including those from Chester le Street, Durham, Gateshead, Houghton, Jarrow, Newcastle, Sedgefield, South Shields, Sunderland, Tynemouth, Wallsend, and Wansbeck. North East District Council of Action, Minutes, 18 September 1920 (LHASC, LP/CA/GEN/547).

<sup>130</sup> By December 1920, over 70 local councils had made this request. Bell, *Troublesome Business*, p. 58; in the North East, these included Beamish, Bedlington, Consett, Hexham, Newcastle, Sacriston, Seaham, Sedgefield, Stanley, Sunderland, Tanfield, and Tantobie. National Council of Action, Lists, nd (November 1920) (LHASC, LP/CA/GEN/875; LP/CA/ADM/41 and 42).

<sup>131</sup> The Council of Action Report on the Special Conference on Labour and the Russian-Polish War, 13 August 1920, (DCRO, D/DMA (Sam Watson) 38(box)/15); *TCN*, 28 August 1920.

<sup>132</sup> *NDC*, 18 August 1920.

troops withdrawn from Ireland, Egypt, India, Mesopotamia'.<sup>133</sup>

Moving swiftly in response to 'the rapidly approaching Irish crisis', Thomas Ryan called a conference in Newcastle of the Irish Labour Party of Great Britain for 22 August 1920, and invitations were sent to Glasgow.<sup>134</sup> With Thomas Larkin in the chair and Cathal O'Shannon in attendance, the conference debated the resolution: 'That this meeting representing the Irish working-class opinion in Britain calls upon the Council of Action to apply in the case of Ireland the same policy as it has applied in the case of Russia'. In support of the resolution, James Roe from Glasgow argued that they had spent too long listening to 'the honeyed phrases and sweet words' of 'the political representatives of the working-classes' in Britain, and that words were 'no use in the present fight for freedom, when Ireland was bleeding from every pore of its body'; whilst Councillor Joseph Jenkin from Gateshead echoed his arguments, stating that 'there was no further use for flag-waving and singing songs – the time had come for action'.<sup>135</sup>

The Irish crisis was intensified to a degree previously unknown by Terence MacSwiney's hunger strike, and his deteriorating health increased the pressure on British Labour's leadership for decisive action. On 27 August, a telegram was sent to the Home Secretary on behalf of 'Irishmen in Gateshead' appealing 'in the name of humanity' for MacSwiney's release.<sup>136</sup> The same day, Newcastle's IrLP after an urgently convened meeting chaired by Thomas Larkin, sent a telegram to the same minister calling 'in the name of the Irish workers of the city' for MacSwiney's

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<sup>133</sup> National Council of Action, Telegram from the North East District Council of Action, 5 September 1920 (LHASC, LP/CA/GEN/542).

<sup>134</sup> RORO, 12 August 1920.

<sup>135</sup> NDC, 23 August 1920.

<sup>136</sup> The signatories were Councillors Ryan, Gunn, Jenkin, Murray, and McVay. *NEC*, 27 August 1920.

release, and this appeal was echoed in Irish communities across the North East.<sup>137</sup> The IrLP also pressed for a positive response from outside its own community, and, on 1 September, Gateshead's town council passed, by 19 votes to 15, a resolution demanding the immediate release of MacSwiney.<sup>138</sup> The IrLP was, however, less successful in Newcastle and Consett, where similar resolutions were heavily defeated.<sup>139</sup>

Joining the growing list of protestors, the British Labour leadership sent a formal protest to Lloyd George on 30 August:

The whole of organised British Labour asks you to reconsider the Government's decision to allow the Lord Mayor of Cork to die rather than release him. His suffering is greater than any imprisonment. His death will make Irish solution more remote.<sup>140</sup>

A second, equally ineffectual, protest was sent by the Labour leadership on 3 September. A few months earlier, in May 1920, hunger strikers had been released from prison after a successful general strike in Ireland, and only another general strike, supported by both Irish and British workers, would force the government to free MacSwiney. On 4 September, Mary MacSwiney wrote to the National Council of Action about her brother's continuing hunger strike:

When told of the sympathetic attitude of the English Press and people some days ago, the Lord Mayor replied; "If the English Labour Party desired my release they could enforce it within twenty four hours". I repeat that now, **YOU COULD IF YOU WOULD**.<sup>141</sup>

The Labour leaders, however, had no intention of taking direct action, their written protests were the extent of their intervention, and MacSwiney continued his hunger

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<sup>137</sup> *NEC*, 27 August 1920; for example at Houghton le Spring (*ACC*, 9 September 1920) and Hebburn (*NDC*, 30 August 1920).

<sup>138</sup> *GLPC*, 47 (September 1920).

<sup>139</sup> *NDC*, 2 September 1920; *ACC*, 9 September 1920.

<sup>140</sup> *NDC*, 31 August 1920.

<sup>141</sup> National Council of Action, Letter from Mary MacSwiney, 5 September 1920 (LHASC, LP/CA/MAC/7. Note: Capitalisation in original.



strike until his death.<sup>142</sup>

On 18 October 1920, during the final days of that hunger strike, a joint meeting of the executives of the Labour Party, Parliamentary Labour Party, and Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress met in London with ILP&TUC delegates, including Thomas Johnson and Cathal O'Shannon.<sup>143</sup> After being appraised of the current situation in Ireland, Arthur Henderson suggested that a committee should be formed comprised of British and Irish Labour representatives 'with the object of arriving at some common policy which could be the subject of propaganda throughout Great Britain'. This was followed on 11 November, by an announcement by William Adamson, chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party, during the third reading of the Government of Ireland Bill, that his party had agreed a new policy on Ireland, the main points of which were: the withdrawal of 'the British Army of Occupation'; the question of the future government of Ireland to be put to 'an Irish Constituent Assembly'; the guaranteed protection of minorities under the new Irish Constitution; and the prevention of Ireland from becoming 'a military or naval menace to Britain'.<sup>144</sup> A special ILP&TUC conference in Dublin on 16 November then accepted British Labour's new policy, 'as being the fulfilment of Ireland's demand for the right to choose and decide its own form of Government', though Arthur Mitchell has argued that both the British and Irish Labour organisations were ignoring the fact that the Irish Republic already existed, and that the Dáil would become the sole authority once the British Army was withdrawn, without reference to any Constituent Assembly.<sup>145</sup> In return for Irish Labour's

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<sup>142</sup> Amongst those attending MacSwiney's funeral in Southwark Cathedral on 28 October was James MacVeagh (McVay) from Gateshead's IrLP. *Anglo-Celt*, 6 November 1920.

<sup>143</sup> Minutes of Joint Meeting of Executive of Labour Party, Parliamentary Labour Party and Parliamentary Committee of TUC, 18 October 1920 (LHASC, LP/CA/ADM/24).

<sup>144</sup> The Labour Party, *Report of the Labour Commission to Ireland* (London, 1921), p. 57.

<sup>145</sup> *Report of the Labour Commission to Ireland*, p. 57; Mitchell, *Labour in Irish Politics*, pp. 133-134.

acceptance, British Labour agreed to send a delegation to Ireland before the end of 1920.<sup>146</sup>

The Labour Commission left for Dublin on 30 November 1920, 'at the end of possibly the worst month during the Anglo-Irish War'.<sup>147</sup> The British commissioners, including Jack Lawson, MP for Chester le Street, met Irish political and religious leaders, including Sinn Féin's Arthur Griffith, then in Mountjoy Prison, and also witnessed the widespread destruction in Cork caused by British incendiaries.<sup>148</sup> The commissioners presented their damning report to 800 delegates at a special conference in Westminster on 29 December. In his introduction to the conference, the chairman of the Labour Party's national executive, William Adamson, compared the actions of the British government in 1920 with the actions of the government in the Irish Famine.<sup>149</sup> During the debate that followed, Arthur Henderson stated, to cheers, that 'so far as the political side of the Irish question was concerned the British and Irish Labour Parties were practically unanimous', and Thomas Johnson, speaking for the ILP&TUC, promised that Irish Labour would help British Labour in its fight against 'the powers of imperialism and capitalism' in Britain, if British Labour would help Irish Labour in 'their fight for freedom'.<sup>150</sup> As no amendments, however, were allowed, which Bell has suggested was to prevent militant local Councils of Action from proposing strike action to force a British withdrawal from Ireland, Johnson's appeal for direct action was ignored, and Irish Labour had to settle for a propaganda campaign that would, it was claimed, 'raise a storm of indignation'

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<sup>146</sup> Bell, *Troublesome Business*, p. 61.

<sup>147</sup> Mitchell, *Labour in Irish Politics*, p. 134; on 21 November 1920, the killing of British agents in Dublin and Irish civilians at Croke Park were followed on 28 November by the IRA's ambush of Auxiliaries at Kilmichael. Hopkinson, *Irish War*, pp. 89-91.

<sup>148</sup> *Report of the Labour Commission to Ireland*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>149</sup> *Report of the Labour Commission to Ireland*, Appendix 5.

<sup>150</sup> *TT*, 30 December 1920; *Report of the Labour Commission to Ireland*, pp. 2-3.

over the British government's actions in Ireland.<sup>151</sup>

Labour's national campaign began at Manchester on 17 January, and ended at the Albert Hall in London on 15 February 1921. Over 500 meetings were held across Britain, with thousands of 'Peace with Ireland' pamphlets distributed, but, if Lloyd George's hand had not been forced by MacSwiney's hunger strike, it was unlikely that 'Peace with Ireland' meetings alone, no matter how many or how indignant, would achieve that end.<sup>152</sup> The reluctance of British Labour's leaders to replace words with direct action over Ireland was explained during the national campaign. When J. H. Thomas, the National Union of Railwaymen's leader, was asked in January 1921 why there had been no strike in Britain in support of the Irish munitions' strikers, he had replied 'because we knew that not five per cent of the men would strike in England on that issue'.<sup>153</sup>

On 31 January 1921, as part of Labour's national campaign, the IrLP organised a meeting in Gateshead town hall, chaired by John Brotherton, the town's parliamentary Labour candidate, to 'spread the truth' about Ireland.<sup>154</sup> Amongst the speakers, John Mills, MP for Dartford, reminded his audience that, as taxpayers, they were paying 'for the British Army being used in Ireland to crush the spirit of nation', and argued that it was their duty to pressure the government 'to give effect to the only just solution of the Irish problem, and that was self-determination for Ireland'.<sup>155</sup> Thomas Johnson, who spoke at 20 of the 'Peace with Ireland' meetings, including those at Sunderland and Gateshead, where his vivid description of the 'terror' in Ireland 'touched the heart of everyone present', believed that Labour's

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<sup>151</sup> Bell, *Troublesome Business*, p. 63; *Report of the Labour Commission to Ireland*, Appendix 5.

<sup>152</sup> Bell, *Troublesome Business*, p. 64.

<sup>153</sup> *Cardiff Mail*, 18 January 1921, quoted in Boyce, *Englishmen and Irish Troubles*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>154</sup> *GLPC*, 52 (January 1921).

<sup>155</sup> *NDJ*, 1 February 1921.

propaganda campaign had been a success: ‘Whatever may have been the facts before the campaign began, no Labour man in England can now plead ignorance of the situation [in Ireland]’.<sup>156</sup>

During the first half of 1921, as the Tyneside IRA brought the Anglo-Irish War to the North East, and unemployment rose across the region, Gateshead’s IrLP continued its mission with two demonstrations celebrating its ethnic, religious, political, and nationalist foundations. On 17 March, at a St. Patrick’s Day meeting in Gateshead town hall, the audience, wearing both shamrocks and tricoloured badges, heard Hanna Sheehy Skeffington condemn the government for talking about peace, whilst ‘they erected scaffolds and imported hangmen’, and praise ‘the spirit of Irish Labour’ for halting work in Dublin, when six Republican prisoners were executed. She then asked her audience what British Labour ‘did on the day of these executions’, and was answered with cries of ‘Nothing!’<sup>157</sup> Away, however, from the orchestrated demonstrations of nationalist fervour, the extent of the continuing integration of the IrLP into the wider labour movement was revealed, when, on Sunday 1 May 1921, an estimated 2,000 people from every section of Gateshead’s labour movement took part in a May Day parade through the town. Joining the parade was Gateshead’s IrLP, accompanied by its fife and drum band, a wagon carrying ‘Irish colleens’, and a motor car bearing one of its own young activists, Annie Hanlon, chosen as that year’s ‘May Queen’.<sup>158</sup> In Newcastle, however, though Thomas Larkin and others from Newcastle’s IrLP joined the estimated 20,000 May Day demonstrators on Town Moor, they could not compete with the 46 ISDL

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<sup>156</sup> *GLPC*, 53 (February 1921); *FJ*, 18 February 1921.

<sup>157</sup> Other speakers were Annie Hanlon, Thomas Hayes, and Austin McNamara. *NDC* and *NDJ*, 18 March 1921; this was not Mrs Sheehy Skeffington’s first visit to Tyneside. In November 1920, she spoke at two meetings in Newcastle; the first organised by the ISDL, the second by Newcastle’s Labour and Irish Labour parties. *NDC*, 15 November 1920.

<sup>158</sup> *NDJ*, 2 May 1921; *GLPC*, 56 (May 1921).

branches that took part.<sup>159</sup>

As the ISDL and IrLP vied for support amongst the Irish Catholic community across the North East, negotiations were underway between the British government and Sinn Féin that was to lead from a truce to the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The disagreements in the Dáil over the Treaty and the subsequent civil war in Ireland, led, as has been discussed in the previous chapter, to irreparable divisions in the ISDL in Britain, and to its ultimate collapse. The IrLP was, however, more than a single issue movement; more than just a nationalist movement. In May 1919, William McAnany had anticipated the reasoning that enabled the IrLP to accept the Anglo-Irish Treaty, no matter how flawed, and the establishment of the Irish Free State, and with the British Labour Party's acceptance of that Treaty make 'the social betterment' of the Irish in Britain its priority: 'It is our duty to work for the self-determination of Ireland. It is for the people at home in Ireland to say what form of government they require'.<sup>160</sup> Thus, on 10 September 1921, whilst Gilbert Barrington and Richard Purcell, leaders of both the ISDL and IRA on Tyneside, continued, despite the Anglo-Irish truce, to acquire and smuggle arms and explosives to Ireland, Gateshead's IrLP branch was enjoying a family picnic by the River Tyne at Wylam.<sup>161</sup>

## Conclusion

On St. Patrick's Day 1922, during the Irish Labour Party's celebrations in Gateshead town hall, the chairman, Father Patrick Staunton from St. Joseph's church, urged everyone present to accept the Anglo-Irish Treaty, arguing that Michael Collins would never have been a signatory 'if he had not thought it gave salvation to his

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<sup>159</sup> *NDC*, 2 May 1921.

<sup>160</sup> *TCN*, 10 May 1919; also see Bell, *Troublesome Business*, p. 67.

<sup>161</sup> *GLPC*, 60 (September 1921).

country'.<sup>162</sup> After 1922, there were progressively fewer references to the IrLP on Tyneside, either in the regional or Catholic press.<sup>163</sup> By the late 1920s, the IrLP, even in its former Gateshead stronghold, appears to have been subsumed within the mainstream British Labour Party; and after 1928 the IrLP on Tyneside had probably ceased to be a distinct, active political organisation.<sup>164</sup> It was not, however, forgotten. In 1942, Mary Gunn, who had held Gateshead's North West ward for Labour from 1921 until her election as an alderman in 1938, was chosen as the first female mayor of the borough, and *The Gateshead Herald* reminded its readers that she was 'a born Irish fighter' and 'a true representative of the working housewife', who had been a 'stalwart supporter of the Irish Labour Party', which had 'in its day played a lively and effective part in rousing the Gateshead voters of Irish descent to take an interest in municipal affairs'.<sup>165</sup> Other leaders of the IrLP also wore the mayoral chain on Tyneside. In South Shields, William McAnany, who had been elected as a Labour councillor in 1922, was chosen as mayor in 1941.<sup>166</sup> In Gateshead, Thomas Ryan, who, as chairman of the party's local branch, was credited as having 'assisted in the formation of the Irish people of our town into a definite political body', served as mayor in 1944.<sup>167</sup>

In 1927, Mary Gunn's husband, Hugh, died, and his obituary in *The Gateshead Herald* provides an epitaph not only for this 'keen Irish Nationalist' and 'ardent Labour man', but also for the Irish Labour Party itself, which, through its affiliation

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<sup>162</sup> *NDC*, 18 March 1922.

<sup>163</sup> Gateshead's IrLP is occasionally glimpsed celebrating St. Patrick's Day or pursuing social activities, for example in 1925 the IrLP's band entertained the Gateshead Union with a concert, and in 1927 the branch held its annual summer outing on the coast at Marsden Rock. *TCN*, 17 January 1925; *GLPC*, 35 (July 1927).

<sup>164</sup> The last reference to the IrLP in Gateshead as a distinct political organisation was in October 1928. *Gateshead and District Labour News (GDL)*, 50 (October 1928).

<sup>165</sup> *GH*, December 1942.

<sup>166</sup> Anon, *The South Shields Centenary* (South Shields, 1950).

<sup>167</sup> *GDL*, 50 (October 1928); Manders, *Gateshead*, p. 349; Ryan resigned from the British Labour Party in 1931 over the implementation of the Means Test. *GH*, December 1931.

to the British Labour Party, had ‘built a bridge for many of our loyal and active adherents’:

While the great majority of local Irishmen were still finding their chief political interest in the Irish Question, Hugh Gunn was working in his quiet and persistent way to induce them to take an active part in the British Labour Movement. It was one of the joys of his life that he lived to see his efforts crowned with such a remarkable measure of success.<sup>168</sup>

With the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the Irish Labour Party’s principle objective of ‘self-determination for Ireland’ had, to the satisfaction of its membership, been achieved.<sup>169</sup> There was, therefore, no longer any need for a separate Irish labour organisation on Tyneside, and the Irish Labour Party simply withered away.

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<sup>168</sup> *GH*, December 1942; *GDL*, 31(March 1927).

<sup>169</sup> *VOL*, 14 June 1919.

# Conclusion

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From the middle of the nineteenth century, the rapid industrial development of the North East of England attracted migrants from across Great Britain and Ireland to work in the region's collieries, ship yards, chemical works, and other heavy industries to such an extent that County Durham in the 1920s was compared to the United States of America, and described as being 'a melting pot of races and culture'.<sup>1</sup> Into this dynamic mix came tens of thousands of Irish Catholic men and, to a lesser extent, women, seeking work and a new home on Tyneside and Teesside, and in the colliery villages and small industrial towns of Northumberland and Durham.

The majority of research during the last 30 years on these Irish Catholic migrants to the North East, and their descendants, has concentrated on their demographic and settlement-pattern histories; their role as victims of sectarian violence; or their relationship with the region's Liberal/Radical establishment. The purpose of this study, however, has been to investigate a hitherto under-explored aspect of the history of Irish Catholics in the North East – organised Irish nationalism – and to examine both the vitality and diversity of that nationalism, and the impact that nationalism had on these migrants and their descendants, and, especially, on their eventual absorption into the wider regional culture. This study has, from its inception, been more than just a local history of the Irish in the North East. Organised Irish nationalism in the region was but part of a wider nationalist phenomenon in Britain, with all subject to fluctuating events in Ireland and at Westminster. Irish nationalism in its North Eastern manifestation, therefore, can only

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<sup>1</sup> Henry A. Mess, 'The Social Survey of Tyneside: An English Regional Social Survey', *The American Journal of Sociology*, 33.3 (1927), p. 425.



be fully understood with detailed reference to that broader context, and this study has provided that essential context, and thus illuminates the history of Irish nationalism in Britain, and in Ireland itself.

Whilst studies of the Irish in Britain have focussed overwhelmingly on the famine generations, this study took as its beginning 1890, because that year marked a major turning point from the ‘vibrancy and urgency’ of the 1880s.<sup>2</sup> The closing months of 1890 saw constitutional Irish nationalism in the North East, and across the diaspora, at its lowest ebb, riven by disputes over Parnell’s continuing leadership of the nationalist movement. Just over three decades later in the early 1920s, the achievement of limited self-government in a partitioned Ireland provided a natural conclusion to the study, since that self-government, however flawed, and despite bearing the seeds of future Troubles, was acknowledged as legitimate by the majority of the Irish diaspora. What occurred between those two dates was remarkable not only in the wider context of Irish and British politics, but also specifically in the context of the North East’s Irish politics. This period holds several keys to understanding why, and to what extent, the Irish supported Home Rule; the level to which constitutionalism overshadowed extremism; and, crucially, how the ‘green’ and the ‘red’ – nationalism and labour – eventually merged.

In Ireland, the dramatic events in Dublin in 1916 gave an impetus to Sinn Féin and the republican movement, and debilitated the Irish Parliamentary Party to the point of collapse before the end of the Great War. 1916 would, therefore, appear to be the watershed between the old and the new nationalisms. That outcome, however, was not mirrored in the North East of England until the end of the Great War, and, hence, 1918 rather than 1916 was used to divide this study into two

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<sup>2</sup> MacRaild, *Culture, Conflict and Migration*, pp. 117-118.

distinct sections.

Before 1918, during the years of Irish Parliamentary Party dominance, the inadequacies of Irish nationalist organisation in Britain had been starkly revealed by the failure of John O’Hanlon’s candidature in Jarrow in 1907, for that campaign had been nationally run and involved the combined resources of both the IPP and the UILGB. Crucially, the Jarrow by-election also revealed the weakness of the nationalist vote in the face of competition for Irish votes from the British labour movement – competition that, in the North East at least, was only going to strengthen after 1918. Challenged by Labour; challenged by the Catholic Church; ignored by the vast majority of Irish Catholics in Britain too busy with their own lives; constitutional nationalism from 1890 to 1914, as depicted in chapter 1, appears to have been no more than a catalogue of failings and unfulfilled promises. Even the Irish Republican Brotherhood, resurgent in the 1890s after Parnell’s fall, had been reduced in the North East by 1914 to a rump maintained solely by external activists.

Such a negative assessment, tainted by the knowledge of post-1916 events, is not, however, the sum total of this study’s interpretation, as my research has revealed that the nationalist organisations had a significant, and enduring, impact on the Irish community in the North East, by facilitating the development of an enthusiastic and capable local Irish leadership, and by introducing the Irish community to British municipal politics through the election of these nationalist leaders as councillors and Poor Law guardians. Each year from about 1870 to at least 1930, the *Northern Catholic Calendar* annually listed the Catholic members of public bodies within the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. Cross-referenced with local and Catholic newspaper reports of Irish nationalist activities between 1890 and the 1920s, many of

the men and women listed in these calendars have featured prominently in this study. Irish nationalism, in all its manifestations from the traditional nationalism of Councillor Patrick Duffy in Stanley to the republicanism of Councillor Terence O'Connor in Jarrow, proved an ethnic training ground for those who wished to participate in the political life of their adopted towns; and by 1914 Irish nationalist leaders were not only well established in the region's politics, but were welcomed even in mayoral parlours.<sup>3</sup> Though beyond the scope of this current investigation, further research in this direction might reveal the full extent of the relationship between the North East's Irish nationalist leadership and the membership of public bodies from the 1870s to the Labour victory in 1945, and this could be part of a future prosopographical project exploring the membership of the Irish nationalist organisations in the region.

In August 1914, the Irish nationalist leadership in the North East, confident that Home Rule had finally been achieved, seized the opportunity presented by the outbreak of the Great War to prove its loyalty and commitment not only to John Redmond and the Irish party, but also to their adoptive homes in the region by raising the Tyneside Irish Brigade for service in the British Army. The Tyneside Irish Brigade was Irish nationalism's crowning achievement in the North East of England, possibly even in Britain, but it was not Home Rule, and the Great War consumed more than just manpower. By 1918, in the North East and across Britain, the old constitutional nationalism had been left exhausted by the war and ill-prepared to face an aggressive challenge from republicanism, resurgent in the aftermath of the Easter Rising. Though this study has revealed the full significance of the role of the North East's Irish nationalist organisations in the raising of the Tyneside Irish, and the

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<sup>3</sup> For comparison, see Maguire, *"We'll Wreath the Shamrock with the Rose": Irish Nationalism in the West Riding, 1870-1922*.

extent to which that nationalism was prepared to compromise for the sake of that goal, material uncovered on the Irish Volunteers on Tyneside in the months before August 1914, when civil war in Ireland seemed certain, is also of real significance. Further research, especially in the Irish archives, may uncover more on these – presumably – short-lived Volunteer companies, and possibly establish a continuity with the IRA companies formed on Tyneside in 1920, as occurred in other Irish centres in Britain. The reasons why the Gateshead Irish were at the forefront of Irish Volunteer recruiting in 1914, but formed no IRA company in 1920, is also clearly worth investigating.

After Sinn Féin's electoral victory and the resultant collapse of the Irish Parliamentary Party in late 1918, two new Irish nationalist organisations took root in the North East. Unlike the pre-1914 organisations, however, these two were not uniformly distributed across every major Irish centre in Britain from Glasgow to London. The larger of the two, the Irish Self-Determination League, failed to make any headway in Scotland, and even struggled in Liverpool, whilst the Irish Labour Party, one of the smallest Irish nationalist organisation to be established in Britain, had few, if any, active branches beyond Tyneside and Clydeside.

The wealth of the Art O'Brien papers in Dublin, added to the excellent verbatim reportage of the contemporary local and Catholic newspapers, has enabled a thorough investigation into the activities of the ISDL in the North East from its founding to its collapse. Comparison with events described in *The Irish Exile* suggests that the organisation in the North East confronted the same problems as those faced by the ISDL in the rest of England and Wales, though the IRA's military activity in the North East, and the ISDL's role as a front for that activity, was not

replicated across every ISDL district. This study has also established that, in the North East at least, the ISDL was as dependent on events in Ireland, as had been the old pre-1918 nationalist organisations in Britain. Thus the ISDL attracted widespread popular support during the worst excesses of the Anglo-Irish War, but was forsaken after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty and Ireland's descent into civil war. In Newcastle and on South Tyneside, as in Ireland, the republican stalwarts fought on, but across the rest of the region the remaining members of the last mass Irish nationalist organisation in Britain stood down. One key difference from the North East's pre-1918 nationalist organisations, however, concerned the role of women at the highest level in the ISDL. Nationalist women had had a role in the North East from the time of the Ladies' Land League, but that role had always been secondary. Theresa Mason and Martha Larkin were different, and have deservedly featured in this study, and it is a pity that neither has bequeathed any publicly accessible archive. Further research might establish the role of women not only in the North East but also in the wider ISDL. What these Irish women subsequently achieved politically in Britain, beyond the limits of the nationalist organisation, might also be revealed. The future activities of the republican die-hards on Tyneside would also be worthy of further investigation, as it is likely that these men, and women, though few in numbers, did not simply abandon their beliefs in the mid-1920s, and may have remained active until the Second World War, and beyond.

The ISDL not the Irish Labour Party was originally intended to be the climax of this study, but the smaller nationalist organisation with its mere handful of branches and no more than a few hundred members on Tyneside, proved to be of great interest and its size belies its importance in the history of the Irish in the North East. In the years before the Great War, Irish Catholics in Britain, the majority of

whom were working-class, were drawn to the British labour movement out of common interest, as that labour movement appeared to offer these people the best prospect for their political, social, and economic advancement in their adopted country. The victory of Curran and the humiliating defeat of the nationalist candidate in the Jarrow by-election exposed the extent of Labour's growing attraction to Irish working-class voters in Britain before 1914. On the other hand, despite John Redmond's claim that the Irish Parliamentary Party was 'the oldest and largest Labour Party in Parliament', the nationalist organisations in Britain, from the UILGB to the ISDL, sought Irish votes not for the benefit of the Irish working-class in the country where they lived and worked, and where their children went to school, but to attain self-government for a country in which those migrants and their families no longer lived.<sup>4</sup> Had the national question in Ireland been resolved by 1914, concurrently the British Labour Party would probably have become the natural political party of the majority of the Irish working-class in Britain, but without that resolution, being Irish and Catholic and Nationalist in Britain branded these people as dangerously different and potentially disloyal. Until the Irish question had been resolved, therefore, some of those Irish Catholics, who cherished their national principles, were reluctant to accept a British Labour Party without reservation. The Irish Labour Party on Tyneside was the product of that reluctance, and this study has both established its origins in the Catholic social movement and identified its importance to the Irish community in Gateshead until at least the late 1920s, and possibly well beyond. Why the party failed to find greater support in the North East and elsewhere in Britain, as the Irish Labour Party in Dublin desired, remains, however, a mystery. Why the Gateshead Irish were so central to the success and longevity of the Irish Labour Party is also not known, and further research, outside

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<sup>4</sup> *TCN*, 6 July 1907.

the limits of this thesis, might prove fruitful in a wider study of the assimilation of the Irish community into the British community on Tyneside.

Some of the complexities of that assimilation are illustrated in an interview conducted in 1991 as part of the North of England Open Air Museum's oral history programme with two elderly members of the Irish Catholic community on Tyneside, Terence Monaghan (born 1911), and his wife, Irene Monaghan (born 1917).<sup>5</sup> In the 1860s, Terence's Gaelic-speaking grandfather had quit Mayo, moving first to Scotland before finding work in a chemical works in Gateshead. In 1907, Irene's father had left rural Westmeath to work in the Tyneside coke-ovens. Springing from such antecedents, Terence and Irene Monaghan both described themselves to their interviewer without hesitation as being Irish, though neither, like so many others in this study, for example Theresa Mason and Gilbert Barrington, had been born in Ireland. Terence additionally remembered his mother as being 'very Irish minded', though only Irene's parents had been born in Ireland. These two working-class Irish Catholic families, just two amongst the thousands of migrants who had sought work and made their homes in the North East of England in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were the raw material that formed the Irish community in the region. The majority of these families remained aloof from the nationalist organisations, and probably from all political activity, but a significant number provided the rank and file memberships of the Irish nationalist organisations in the region before and after the Great War; demonstrating in Wharton Park and on Tyne Moor; filling the town halls of Newcastle and Gateshead to celebrate St. Patrick's Day; attending requiem masses for the repose of the souls of Terence MacSwiney

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<sup>5</sup> The North of England Open Air Museum, Sound Archive, No: 1991/54. Interview with Terence and Irene Monaghan.

and Michael Collins; and welcoming political giants such as John Redmond and Michael Davitt to the region. By the mid-1920s, however, with the national question resolved to the satisfaction of most, the majority of the North East Irish transferred their political allegiance to the British Labour Party, though in Gateshead, as has been seen, some reminder of the old nationalism lingered in the Irish Labour Party, whilst in Jarrow and other republican strongholds on Tyneside small groups of die-hards continued to meet and defiantly sing *The Soldiers' Song*.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Known centres of organised Irish nationalist activity in the North East of England in 1914.

Location	United Irish League of Great Britain	Ancient Order of Hibernians	Irish National Foresters
Ashington		1	
Bedlington	1	1	
Benwell	1 (Father Richard Vaughan)		
Birtley	1		
Blaydon	1		
Blyth		1	
Burnopfield	1		
Byker	1 (O'Meagher Condon)		
Consett	1	1	
Cowpen	1 (O'Connell)		
Crook		1	
Darlington			1 (Exiles)
Dipton	1	1	
Easington	1 (O'Connell)	1	
Felling		1	
Gateshead	2 (Central & Joseph Biggar)		1
Grangetown	1		
Hartlepoons	1		
Hebburn	1	1	1
Horden		1	
Houghton le Spring	1		
Jarrow	1	1	1 (Father Matthew)
Langley Moor	1 (Robert Emmett)	1 (plus Ladies' Auxiliary)	
Middlesbrough	1		1 (Cardinal Manning)
Newcastle upon Tyne	2 (Irish National Club & O'Connell)	1 (No:37)	2 (Edward Savage & Bernard M'Anulty)
Redcar	1		
Ryhope		1	
Seaham Harbour		1 (plus Ladies' Auxiliary)	
South Bank	1		
South Shields	1	1 (plus Ladies' Auxiliary)	
Southwick	1		
Spennymoor	1		
Stanley/West Stanley	1	1 (No:331)	
Stockton on Tees	1		
Sunderland	1	1 (plus Ladies' Auxiliary)	
Thornaby			1 (St. Kevin)
Thornley	1	1	
Trimdon	1 (William Abraham)	1 (No:607)	
Tyne Dock	1 (Michael Davitt)	1	
Ushaw Moor		1	
Wallsend		1 (plus Ladies' Auxiliary)	
West Wood		1	
Willington Quay	1		
Wingate	1		
<b>Total Branches</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>8</b>

**Sources:** CCTO, TSCN, TCN, WCN, January to August 1914. Note: Other branches/divisions are known to have existed before January 1914. The UILGB and INF branch titles and AOH division numbers are as reported in the source.

## Appendix 2: Membership of the Tyneside Irish Committee, 1914 - 1917.

Letter 12 September 1914	Committee 15 September 1914	Meeting 14 October 1914	Committee 17 October 1914	Committee 17 February 1917
<i>10 signatories</i>	<i>19 members</i>	<i>15 members</i>	<i>15 members</i>	<i>10 members</i>
Lavery, Felix	Lavery, Felix	Lavery, Felix (secretary)	Lavery, Felix	Lavery, Felix
Bradley, Peter	Bradley, Peter (chairman)	Bradley, Peter	Bradley, Peter (joint chairman)	
Gorman, John J.	Gorman, John J. (joint secretary)	Gorman, John J.		Gorman, John J.
Bennett, Patrick	Bennett, Patrick (joint secretary)		Bennett, Patrick (assistant secretary)	Bennett, Patrick
Farnon, John	Farnon, John		Farnon, John	Farnon, John (treasurer)
O'Rorke, Patrick	O'Rorke, Patrick (joint secretary)		O'Rorke, Patrick	O'Rorke, Patrick
O'Hanlon, John	O'Hanlon, John			O'Hanlon, John
Mahony, John	Mahony, John			
McLarney, James	McLarney, James			
Scanlan, John E.	Scanlan, John E.			
	Doyle, James C.	Doyle, James C.	Doyle, James C.	Doyle, James C.
	Grattan Doyle, Nicholas	Grattan Doyle, Nicholas	Grattan Doyle, N. (joint chairman)	
	Edgar, J. H.	Edgar, J. H.		
	McGuinness, Stuart	McGuinness, Stuart		
	Murphy, P. Francis	Murphy, P. Francis		
		Mulcahy, John	Mulcahy, John (joint secretary)	Mulcahy, John (joint secretary)
		Conway, Edward	Conway, Edward	
		Wallace, Johnstone (chairman)	Wallace, Johnstone (treasurer)	
		Sheridan, Matthew		Sheridan, Matthew. (chairman)
			Stoney, Gerald (joint secretary)	Stoney, Gerald (joint secretary)
	Corballis, Frederick	Holohan, M.	Bridge, J. J. R.	
	McConville, Owen	Murray, R.	Donald, A. F.	
	O'Dwyer, M.	Reid, John.		
	Waters, James			

**Sources:** Column 1: Keating, 'Tyneside Irish', p. 80. Column 2: NDC, 15 September 1914. Column 3: Keating, 'Tyneside Irish', p. 91. Column 4: Keating, 'Tyneside Irish', p. 94; NDC, 20 October 1914. Column 5: TCN, 17 February 1917.

### **Appendix 3: Redmond Memorial Petition Signature Collectors, April 1918.**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Collectors</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Collectors</b>
Annfield Plain	Mrs Pickavance	New Seaham	Mrs Fitzsimmons
Ashington	J. Magin	Newcastle	James McLarney
Ashington	J. McCormack	Newcastle	J. P. Dwyer
Ashington	Mrs K. A. Dillon	Newcastle	James C. Doyle
Bedlington	Mrs P. Murphy	Newcastle	B. Everett
Bedlington	J. Carey	Newcastle	P. McGrady
Bedlington Station	John McPhillips	Port Clarence	W. McKenna
Blackhill	J. Hanna	Ryhope	P. Duane
Blackhill Mill	T. O'Neill	South Bank	M. McNicholas
Blyth	Mrs P. Dunne	South Bank	Mrs C. Martin
Boyne, Durham	J. R. Smith	South Shields	Miss McDermott
Brandon Colliery	Mrs M. Carohne	South Shields	J. Cahill
Choppington	J. McHugh	South Shields	Mrs J. Byrne
Consett	Thomas Dunne	South Shields	Mrs R. Marshall
Crook	T. Rafferty	Southwick	P. Smith
Dawdon	J. Giblin	Spennymoor	T. Mulley
Dipton	C. McDonald	Stanley	Cllr Patrick Duffy
Felling	C. Toberty	Stanley	P. Keogan
Felling	Cllr Patrick Bennett	Sunderland	J. W. Barr
Gateshead	G. Rix	Sunderland	Miss M. Hammill
Gateshead	P. McShane	Trimdon Colliery	M. Tobin
Gateshead	W. C. Thompson	Trimdon Colliery	Mrs King
Gateshead	J. McCurry	Tyne Dock	P. Hannan
Gosforth	Cllr John Farnon	Wallsend	Alderman John O'Hanlon
Hebburn	J. Clughen	Wallsend	John McCreesh
Jarrow	John Moore	Wallsend	T. Deane
Jarrow	W. J. McDonald	Wallsend	Mrs M. Carpenter
Jarrow	Cllr Terence O'Connor	West Hartlepool	J. Cunningham
Jarrow	M. Young	Willington	P. Traynor
Leadgate	J. J. Costelloe		

**Source:** NEC, 11 April 1918.

## **Appendix 4: Biographies of Irish Nationalists in the North East.**

Note: These biographies have been compiled from obituaries, reports and references found in regional and Catholic newspapers, with additional personal details (for example: year and place of birth, kinship, occupation, marriage, and year and place of death) gleaned from the family history website <http://www.ancestry.co.uk>, which provides on-line access to a wide range of records, including census returns for England and Wales, 1841-1911; birth, marriage, and death records; and British Army service records and medal index cards for the Great War.

**Bannon, Stephen:** Born Ireland, c.1859. Living in Elswick, Newcastle, 1891. Steel works labourer. President of No.1 branch Parnell Leadership Committee, Newcastle. Died, c.1900.

**Barrington, Gilbert Francis:** Born Blackburn, 1889, son of Joseph Barrington (q.v.). Living at family home in South Shields, 1911. Teacher at St. Bede's school (four of his sisters were also teachers). Served with Royal Army Medical Corps, WW1. Discharged, March 1919. Pre-war UILGB member. Joined IrLP, South Shields, 1919. Elected Poor Law guardian, August 1919. IrLP delegate to South Shields Trades and Labour Council. Joined ISDL, 1919. Secretary of ISDL's Tyneside District committee. IRB Head Centre in South Shields. Quartermaster of Tyneside Brigade IRA. Arrested with Richard Purcell (q.v.) for post-truce theft of explosives from Bebside colliery, October 1921. Tried and imprisoned. Released, April 1922. Moved to Ireland, June 1922. Interned by Irish Free State, March 1923. Died Ireland, 1977.

**Barrington, Joseph:** Born Queen's County, c.1853. Brought to England as a child. Aged 16 sworn into IRB in Liverpool by his father. Moved with family (wife born in

London of Irish-born parents) to South Shields, post-1901. Cabinet maker and furniture shop owner. Pre-1914, AOH president, South Shields, and UILGB member. Died South Shields, 1917.

**Barry, Lewis:** Born Wexford, c.1841. Moved as a child (father Coast Guard officer) to Northumberland. Retired joiner, living with his sister in Byker, Newcastle, 1901. Registration secretary of Byker Registration Association, 1894. Elder brother of John Barry, member of IRB's Supreme Council, and, later, Nationalist MP for County Wexford, 1880-95.

**Bennett, Patrick:** Born County Armagh, c.1846. Father of Patrick Bennett (q.v.). Chemical works foreman in Felling, 1881. Licensee of Oddfellows Arms, Felling, 1891. Gateshead town councillor, 1895. Land League activist.

**Bennett, Patrick:** Born Felling, c.1880, son of Patrick Bennett (q.v.). Living in Felling with Irish-born wife and two domestic servants, 1911. Solicitor in Newcastle. Durham Miners' Association's solicitor. Elected to Felling council. Durham County Alderman, March 1919. President of AOH, Felling, 1914. Member of Tyneside Irish Brigade committee. Successfully defended, at no cost, two Tyneside IRA Volunteers, Patrick Kerrigan (q.v.) and Patrick Joyce, at Durham crown court, November 1921. Died, 1935.

**Bradley, Peter:** Born County Tyrone, c.1852. Living in lodgings, Westgate, Newcastle, 1911. 'Tea agent'. Veteran Irish nationalist leader in Newcastle. President of Home Rule Confederation, 1880. Treasurer of No.1 branch Parnell Leadership Committee, 1891. UILGB executive member. Joint chairman of Tyneside Irish Brigade committee. Appointed JP. Died County Tyrone, June 1922.

**Brennan, James:** Born County Kilkenny, c.1872. Coal miner (hewer) in Coxlodge,

1911. Gosforth councillor, 1920. Chairman of Gosforth ISDL branch.

**Brennan, John:** Born Gateshead, c.1861, of Irish-born father (hawker). Boot merchant in Gateshead, 1901. Elected town councillor, 1896. Supporter of Gateshead's Catholic Registration Association, 1896.

**Byrne, Joseph Patrick:** Born County Kildare, 1872. Educated at St. Cuthbert's Grammar School, Newcastle. Ordained priest, 1899. Assistant priest in West Hartlepool and Stockton. Parish priest of St. Bede's, South Shields, from 1911 to his death. Member of South Shields' education committee. Chaired ISDL meetings. Co-organiser of Archbishop Mannix's visit to Newcastle, 1920. Died South Shields, 1942.

**Casey, John:** Born County Monaghan, c.1858. Coal merchant in Jarrow, 1911. Elected Jarrow borough council. Appointed Alderman, 1916. Veteran Irish nationalist. Mentor of Terence O'Connor (q.v.). First president of ISDL in Jarrow, 1919. First chairman of ISDL's Tyneside District committee, 1919. Died, May 1920.

**Connolly, Joseph Patrick:** Born Jarrow, c.1894, of Irish-born parents. Living with his parents in Jarrow, 1911. Pawnbroker's assistant. Appointed ISDL Northern organiser, 1920. IRB member. Adjutant of Tyneside Brigade IRA. ISDL organiser in South Wales. Arrested in Cardiff for post-truce conspiracy to smuggle munitions to Ireland, 1921. Tried and imprisoned. Released, April 1922. Secretary of Pro-Treaty Propaganda Committee on Tyneside, July 1922.

**Conroy, James:** Born Jarrow, c.1897, of County Galway born parents (father a labourer). School teacher in Jarrow. Secretary of Jarrow ISDL. Captain commanding 'D' (Wallsend) Company IRA. Arrested and imprisoned for arson attack in Wallsend, May 1921. Tyneside District delegate to ISDL's conference, April 1922.

**Costelloe, William John:** Born Allendale, Northumberland, c.1860 (his Irish-born father worked for the Ordnance Survey). Living in Gateshead with his family and one domestic servant, 1901. Pawnbroker. Moved to Cullercoats by 1911. Supporter of Gateshead's Catholic Registration Association, 1896. Elected to Gateshead town council, 1893. Appointed alderman, 1907. Mayor of Gateshead, 1910-11 and 1911-12 (second Roman Catholic to hold office). Poor Law guardian. Appointed JP. Died Cullercoats, 1914. His son, John Michael Costelloe (born 1883), unsuccessfully stood in a municipal election against the IrLP's candidate, James McVay (q.v.), July 1919.

**Crilly, Patrick:** Born Gateshead, c.1887, of County Derry born father. Living with his parents (father a labourer) in Gateshead, 1911. Iron moulder. Member of ISDL in Gateshead. Member of Irish National Club, Newcastle. Treasurer of Tyneside Pro-Treaty Propaganda Committee, June 1922. Died Gateshead, 1975.

**Cunningham, John:** Born Newcastle, c.1861, of Irish-born parents. Living in Byker, 1891. Railway clerk. Secretary of Byker Registration Association, 1894. Secretary of Newcastle's Amnesty Association, 1897.

**Doyle, James Courtney:** Born Scotland, c.1858, of Irish-born parents. Living with his family in Elswick, Newcastle, 1911. Assurance manager. Secretary of Newcastle's No.1 branch INLGB, 1890. Member of Tyneside Irish Brigade committee. Redmond Memorial signature collector, April 1918. Supported Labour's parliamentary candidates in Newcastle, 1918. Elected town councillor, 1920. Chairman of Newcastle's Poor Law guardians, 1920. Died Newcastle, 1933. His son, Henry, who was reportedly the Tyneside Irish Brigade's first recruit in 1914, was killed in action in 1917.

**Doyle, James:** Born Gateshead, c.1881, of County Wicklow born parents (father a labourer). School teacher in Gateshead, 1911. Probably chairman of UILGB branch in Gateshead, 1914. Chairman of Irish National Volunteers in Gateshead, June 1914. First North East donor to Irish National Aid and Volunteers Fund, June 1916. Died Gateshead, 1956.

**Duffy, Patrick:** Born County Monaghan, c.1875. Moved to Stanley, c.1900. Building contractor in Stanley by 1911. Elected member of Stanley Urban District Council and Lanchester Board of Guardians. Appointed JP. AOH English Provincial director, 1913-14. Chairman of Stanley AOH, 1920. Attended pro-Treaty banquet in Stanley, February 1922.

**Duggan, Charles:** Born Walker, c.1854, of Irish-born parents. Living with his wife in Walker, 1901. Boilermaker. Member of anti-Parnellite INLGB, 1890s.

**Emms, Mary:** Born Mary Price, Newcastle, c.1880, of English-born parents. Elder sister of Theresa Mason (q.v.). Living in Newcastle with her English-born husband (electrical engineer), 1911. Secretary of ISDL in Newcastle, 1922.

**Fanning, Peter:** Born Birmingham, c.1865, of Irish-born parents (father born Roscommon). Living as a lodger in Elswick, Newcastle, 1891. Assurance agent. Grocery shop owner in Jarrow by 1901. Co-founder of Gateshead's Catholic Registration Association, 1896. Possible IRB member. One of three North East representatives to the '98 Centennial Association of Great Britain and France, 1897.

**Farnon, John:** Born County Down, c.1852. Moved to Tyneside as a linen importer. Draper's shop owner in Gosforth, 1911. Poor Law guardian for 20 years. Chairman of Gosforth council, 1917-18. Appointed JP. Treasurer of Irish National Club's St. Patrick's Day demonstration, 1914. Treasurer of Tyneside Irish Brigade committee.



Died, 1923.

**Finn, Francis Joseph:** Born Gateshead, 1863, of Irish-born parents. Began work, aged 7, selling clay pipes for his father. Expanded the business after 1884. Living with his family in 'Killarney House', Gateshead (name may indicate his parents' origins), 1901. Elected to Gateshead council, 1895. Poor Law guardian. Appointed JP. Supporter of Gateshead's Catholic Registration Association, 1896. First Roman Catholic Mayor of Gateshead, 1898-99. Died Gateshead, 1909.

**Gormon, John Joseph:** Born Newcastle, c.1886, of Irish-born parents. Living in Elswick, Newcastle, 1911. Coal merchant's clerk. Joint secretary of Tyneside Irish Brigade committee, 1914. President Irish National Club, Newcastle, 1922. Member of Newcastle's Pro-Treaty Propaganda Committee, 1922.

**Gunn, Hugh:** Born County Fermanagh, c.1861. Elder brother of James Gunn (q.v.). Married Mary Gunn (q.v.) née Hanlon, 1904. Living in Gateshead, 1911. Insurance agent. Founding member of Gateshead's IrLP. Died Gateshead, 1927.

**Gunn, James:** Born County Fermanagh, c.1868. Younger brother of Hugh Gunn (q.v.). Married and living in Gateshead, 1911. Publican. Founding member of Gateshead's IrLP. Founding member of Gateshead's ISDL, and branch treasurer, June 1919. Elected in Gateshead's North ward as Labour councillor, August 1919 (lost seat 1921).

**Gunn, Mary:** Born Mary Hanlon, Sunderland, c.1879, of Irish-born father (coal miner). Sister of Annie Hanlon (q.v.). School teacher in Gateshead before she married Hugh Gunn (q.v.), 1904. Founding member of Gateshead's IrLP. Executive member of GLP&TC. Elected as first female Labour councillor in Gateshead, and first female Catholic municipal councillor in Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle,

November 1921. Held North West ward until appointed alderman, 1938. First female Mayor of Gateshead, 1942-43.

**Hamill, James:** Born Seaham Harbour, c.1875, of Irish-born parents. Married and living in Middlesbrough, 1911. Ship's plater. Elected town councillor in Middlesbrough. President of both Middlesbrough's ISDL branch and the ISDL's Teesside District, 1920-22. Died Middlesbrough, 1935.

**Hanlon, Annie:** Born County Durham, c.1885, of Irish-born father (coal miner). Sister of Mary Gunn (q.v.). Moved to Gateshead, 1902. Shop worker in Newcastle. Member of Shop Assistants' Union. Founding member and secretary of Gateshead's IrLP, March 1919. Served as a Labour councillor in Gateshead, 1923-26. Died Gateshead, 1938.

**Hannon, Luke:** Deputy overman at Boldon colliery, 1917. Elected Boldon's delegate to Durham Miners' Federation and, with William McAnany (q.v.), elected representative on Durham Miners' Federation board for Houghton Company, 1917. Member of South Shields' AOH. Founding member of IrLP in South Shields. Elected Durham County Councillor for Westoe, April 1919, as Labour candidate nominated by IrLP. Early member of ISDL, 1919. Elected by Tyneside District to serve on ISDL's national executive, February 1920. Note: It is possible that Luke Hannon was born Luke Gannon, c.1882, in Marsden, South Shields, of an Irish-born father (coal miner).

**Harrington, John:** Co-founder of Middlesbrough's Amnesty Association, May 1891. Possible IRB member. One of three North East representatives to the '98 Centennial Association of Great Britain and France, 1897.

**Hayes, Thomas:** Born Tralee, c.1887. Educated Maynooth College and University

College, Dublin. Assistant master at St. Cuthbert's Grammar School, Newcastle from 1906. Secretary of Gateshead's IrLP, 1919. Executive member of GLP&TC. Elected as Labour councillor in Gateshead's North East ward, November 1919. President Gateshead's ISDL, June 1919. Member of Newcastle's Pro-Treaty Propaganda Committee, 1922.

**Hoey, Michael:** Born County Louth, c.1854. Living in Sunderland with wife and one domestic servant, 1911. Licensed victualler. Poor Law guardian for 30 years. Served as borough councillor for 23 years. First Roman Catholic Alderman in Sunderland. Member of the General Committee of the Tyneside Irish, 1914. In charge of recruiting in Sunderland, 1914. Died Sunderland, 1928.

**Holland, William:** Born Leeds, c.1860, of Irish-born parents. Patternmaker for North East Railways in Darlington, 1901. Secretary of Darlington's INLGB, pre-1894. Secretary of newly-formed Darlington Trades Council, 1894.

**Jones, Francis:** Born County Monaghan, c.1846. Monumental sculptor in West Hartlepool, 1891. Member of Hartlepool's INLGB, 1890s. Elected Poor Law guardian, 1893, and still serving at his death. Died, 1918.

**Kelly, Bernard:** Born County Tyrone, c.1857. Chemical works furnaceman in Hebburn, 1911. Hebburn councillor, 1906. Durham County Councillor, 1908. Appointed JP. Appointed Durham County alderman, March 1919. Leading member of UILGB in Hebburn.

**Kerrigan, Patrick:** Born, c.1899. Labourer in Jarrow. Served with Durham Light Infantry and Labour Corps, WW1. Volunteer with 'A' (Jarrow) Company IRA. Arrested during IRA incendiary attacks on Tyneside, 26 March 1921. Defended by Patrick Bennett (q.v.) and acquitted at Durham Assizes, November 1921.

**Larkin, Martha:** Born County Armagh, c.1861. Living in Elswick, Newcastle, with her husband, Thomas Larkin (q.v.), 1911. Leading ISDL member in Newcastle, 1919-22. Member of ISDL's Tyneside District committee. Possible member of Cumann na mBan.

**Larkin, Thomas:** Born County Sligo, c.1855. Living in Elswick, Newcastle, with his wife, Martha Larkin (q.v.), 1911. Steel worker. President of Newcastle's IrLP, 1919. Chaired first ISDL meeting in Walker, 1920. Member of Newcastle's Council of Action, representing both the IrLP and General Workers Union, 1920. Died Newcastle, 1934.

**Lavery, Felix:** Born County Down, c.1876. Younger brother of John Lavery (q.v.). Living in Elswick, Newcastle, 1911. Owner of house furnishing business. Leading UILGB member in Newcastle, 1900s. Member of Tyneside Irish Brigade committee. Compiler *Irish Heroes in the War*, 1917. Supported Labour's parliamentary candidates in Newcastle, 1918. Died Tynemouth, 1934.

**Lavery, John:** Born County Down, c.1869. Elder brother of Felix Lavery (q.v.). Living in Elswick, Newcastle, with his family and two domestic servants, 1901. Linoleum merchant. Secretary of Newcastle's Parnell Leadership Committee, 1891. UILGB campaign manager, Gateshead by-election, 1904.

**Lavin, Thomas:** Born Darlington, c.1866, of Irish-born father (iron works labourer). Probably served in the British Army for 21 years, retiring with the rank of colour sergeant. Unmarried and living in Gateshead, 1911, with a housekeeper. Ship's fireman. Instigator of Irish Volunteers on Tyneside in May 1914. Tyneside and District Organiser, Irish Volunteers.

**Mason, Robert McDonough:** Born Birmingham, c.1859 (parents' origins

unknown). Living in Byker, 1901. Barman. Married Theresa Mason (q.v.), 1905. Living with wife and children in Sandyford, Newcastle, 1911. Bar manager. Advanced Irish nationalist and possible IRB member. President of Newcastle's Amnesty Association, Newcastle, 1897. One of three North East representatives to the '98 Centennial Association of Great Britain and France, 1897. Withdrew from open nationalist politics before 1914. Died Newcastle, 1925.

**Mason, Theresa:** Born Theresa Price, Newcastle, 1882, of English-born parents. Living in Byker with her Irish-born grandmother, 1901. School teacher. Married Robert Mason (q.v.), 1905. Joined ISDL, 1919. Possible member of Cumann na mBan. Elected vice president of Newcastle's ISDL, September 1919. Leading member of ISDL in North East and highest ranking woman. Assumed greater leadership responsibilities after arrest of Gilbert Barrington and Richard Purcell (qq.v.), October 1921. Tyneside representative at Irish Race Conference, Paris, January 1922. Anti-Treaty ISDL organiser on Tyneside. Spoke at ISDL conference, London, April 1922. Shared platform with Countess Markievicz, Newcastle town hall, March 1923. Affiliated Newcastle ISDL to Sinn Féin, December 1924.

**McAnany, William Patrick:** Born 1894, Hetton le Hole (son and grandson of coal miners – grandfather born in County Monaghan). Member of AOH, 1913-18 (his father had been both president of Tyne Dock's AOH and chairman of local UILGB). Coal miner at Boldon colliery. Elected, with Luke Hannon (q.v.), representative on Durham Miners' Federation board for Houghton Company, 1917. Original member of Tyne Dock's Catholic Social Guild study group, 1917. Founder member and secretary of IrLP, Tyne Dock, 1918. Elected Poor Law guardian, South Shields, April 1919. Organiser of first ISDL meeting in Newcastle, April 1919. Elected Labour councillor for Simonside, November 1922. Awarded CSG scholarship to

Catholic Workers' College, Oxford, 1930. Mayor of South Shields, 1941-42. Died 1966.

**McDermott, Mary:** Born c.1876, County Roscommon. Living in South Shields, 1911. Secondary school teacher. Early IrLP member in South Shields. First woman to speak at a St. Patrick's Day demonstration in Newcastle, March 1919. Elected as Poor Law guardian, April 1919. Died South Shields, June 1919.

**McEnaney, John:** Born c.1866, County Cavan. Living with his family in Gateshead, 1911. Gas stoker. UILGB leader in Gateshead. Encouraged Gateshead Irish to vote for Labour Party in 1918.

**McNamara, Austin:** Born Newcastle, c.1884, of County Mayo born parents. Living with his parents in Heaton, Newcastle, 1911. Corporation rent clerk. Secretary of INF's 'Edward Savage' branch, Newcastle, 1914. Treasurer of Newcastle and District Trades Council, 1919. First chairman of Newcastle's IrLP, 1919. First chairman of Newcastle's ISDL, 1919. Ousted as president of Newcastle's ISDL by Richard Purcell (q.v.), 1920. Poor Law guardian. Elected as Labour councillor in Wallsend, 1924. Died Newcastle, 1943.

**McVay, James:** Born Felling, c.1872, of Irish-born parents. Living with his family in Felling, 1911. Lime burner in alkali works. District Secretary of National Amalgamated Union of Labour, 1914. Founding member of Gateshead's IrLP, 1919. Elected in Gateshead's North-East ward as Labour councillor, July 1919. Re-elected as Labour councillor, 1921.

**Mulcahy, John:** Born Wickham, c.1869, of Irish-born parents. Living in Birtley, 1911. Coal miner (hewer). From his obituary, he was a 'miner, journalist, and

successful business man in turn'.<sup>1</sup> Appointed UILGB's Northern organiser, 1909. Organiser of UILGB's annual gala in Durham City from 1910. Joint secretary of Tyneside Irish Brigade committee. Member of Newcastle's Pro-Treaty Propaganda Committee, 1922. President of League of the Cross in Durham, 1914 (total abstinence confraternity). Diocesan president of Catholic Young Men's Society. Died Birtley, 1938.

**Mullarkey, Anthony:** Born County Mayo, c.1888. Coal miner in Bedlington, 1911. Married, 1912. Enlisted 2nd Battalion Tyneside Irish, November 1914. Discharged February 1919. Pre-WW1 AOH member. Delegate to ISDL's Tyneside District committee. Captain commanding 'E' (Bedlington) Company IRA, 1920. Arrested and deported to Ireland, 1923. Moved to Canada, 1925, and thence to New York, 1928.

**O'Connor, Terence:** Born Kibblesworth, County Durham, c.1869, of Irish-born parents (father coal miner). Owner of grocer's shop in Jarrow. Married, 1895. Jarrow town councillor from 1907. Durham County Councillor, 1914. Poor Law guardian. Appointed JP. Irish nationalist in Jarrow from 1907. Protégé of John Casey (q.v.). Leading member of North East ISDL. Treasurer of ISDL's Tyneside District committee from February 1920. Remained politically active after ISDL's demise. Independent Alderman. First Roman Catholic Mayor of Jarrow, 1938-39. Died Jarrow, 1939.

**O'Hanlon, John:** Born Washington, County Durham, 1859, of Irish-born parents (father born County Armagh). Moved to Jarrow aged 9. Worked from age 12 at Palmer's rolling mill, Jarrow, and also in chemical works. Co-founder Catholic Mutual Improvement Society, later Jarrow's Irish Literary Institute. Ship yard driller,

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<sup>1</sup> CH, 6 January 1939.

Wallsend, 1884. Leading nationalist on Tyneside from 1890s. Unsuccessful Nationalist candidate in Jarrow by-election, 1907. Elected to Wallsend District Council. Independent Alderman, 1910. Appointed JP. Mayor of Wallsend, 1913-14. North East President of AOH, 1914. Member of Tyneside Irish Brigade committee. President of Irish National Club, Newcastle, 1918. His son, Daniel, served as an officer with the Tyneside Irish, and was wounded.

**O’Keeffe, Daniel:** Born Ireland, c.1863. Estate agent’s collector in Stockton on Tees, 1891. Secretary of Stockton’s INLGB, 1890s.

**O’Rorke, Patrick:** Born County Down, c.1878. Living in Gosforth with one domestic servant, 1911. Owned draper’s business. UILGB activist in Newcastle, 1900s. Joint secretary Tyneside Irish Brigade committee. Supported Labour Party’s parliamentary candidates in Newcastle, 1918.

**Prior, Miles:** Born Darlington, c.1857, of Irish-born father. Living with his family and four domestic servants in Middlesbrough, 1891. Licensed victualler. INLGB activist, 1890s. Nominated by INLGB and elected to Middlesbrough town council, 1891. Died Middlesbrough, 1906.

**Purcell, Richard:** Born County Kilkenny, c.1883. Living in Gosforth, 1911. Coal miner (hewer) in Coxlodge. Northumberland Miners’ Association activist, 1919. Worked at Hazlerigg colliery until March 1921. Leading member of ISDL in North East. ISDL president in Newcastle. President of ISDL’s Tyneside District committee. IRB member. Commanding officer of Tyneside Brigade IRA. Arrested with Gilbert Barrington (q.v.) for post-truce theft of explosives from Bebside colliery, October 1921. Tried and imprisoned. Released, April 1922, and accepted paid office as Irish Free State advocate in Britain, resigning from ISDL.



**Ryan, Thomas:** Born County Tipperary, c.1873. Tramways inspector in Hastings, 1911. National Amalgamated Union of Labour activist. Moved to Gateshead after being forced to resign because of his trade union activities. Chairman of Gateshead IrLP, 1919. IrLP delegate to GLP&TC. Elected as Labour town councillor, 1919. Resigned from British Labour Party over Means Test implementation, 1931. Mayor of Gateshead, 1944-45.

**Scanlan, John Edward:** Born County Mayo, c.1861. Living with his family in Byker, 1911. Railway locomotive foreman. Chairman of UILGB in Byker. Poor Law guardian. Appointed JP. Member of Tyneside Irish Brigade committee. Supported Labour's parliamentary candidates in Newcastle, 1918. Awarded OBE for political and public services in Newcastle, 1932. Died Newcastle, 1948. His son, Thomas, served as an officer with the Tyneside Irish, was twice wounded, and awarded the Military Cross and bar.

**Sexton, Thomas:** Born County Cork, c.1834. Living with his Irish-born wife and Welsh-born children in Stockton on Tees, 1891. Plate mill worker. Innkeeper in Stockton by 1901. Chairman of INLGB in Stockton, 1890s. Died 1921.

**Walsh, Patrick James:** Born Ireland, c.1842. Innkeeper in Middlesbrough, 1891. Possible IRB member. Founding member of Middlesbrough's Amnesty Association, 1891. Died Middlesbrough, 1892. Memorial cross erected in North Ormesby cemetery by Irish committee, including John Harrington and Miles Prior (qq.v.), in recognition of Walsh's work 'with the Irish national movement in England'.<sup>2</sup> Brother of John Walsh, Land League organiser and North of England representative on the IRB's Supreme Council.

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<sup>2</sup> *NE*, 22 July 1893.

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