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Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

**Joining the Movement: Tradition and Ideology in the IRA**

**1948 – 1962**

**By**

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## List of Abbreviations

ACA	Army Comrades Association
ANC	African National Congress
APL	Anti-Partition League
EOKA	Ethnikí Orgánosis Kipriakou Agónos
RAF	Royal Air Force
FLN	Front de libération nationale
GHQ	General Headquarters
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IRB	Irish Republican Brotherhood
ILP	Irish Labour Party
IRSP	Irish Republican Socialist party
IWL	Irish Workers League
INLA	Irish National Liberation movement
NAI	National Archive Ireland
OC	Officer Commander
RIC	Royal Irish Constabulary
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
UPM	Unemployment Protest Movement

## **Introduction**

With the ending of the Civil War in 1923 and the defeat of the Anti-Treaty Forces, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), over the next the next twenty five years, remained on the periphery of Irish political life. This period also saw a steady decline in membership, while the organization struggled to define its relevance in wider society. The years between 1948 and 1962 saw the re-emergence of a new generation of young people who joined the organization. In 1956 it embarked on a military campaign in Northern Ireland that ended in failure in 1962. The objective of the campaign was to end partition and create a thirty-two county unified state in Ireland. Sinn Féin became the political front for the IRA and both organizations, which are regularly referred to as the republican movement within this thesis, attracted a renewed level of support and membership. This thesis examines the role that tradition and ideology played in the re-growth of the movement during the 1950s.

The historiography of the republican movement is divided on whether the movement is best understood as a reflection of a communal bonding tradition or as an ideologically motivated movement. The IRA in the 1950s is seen by some as the paradigm of non-ideological republicanism with its simple focus on the border campaign in ‘Operation Harvest’. Indeed, it has sometimes been suggested that militant republican groups such as the IRA derive from an inherited non-political sub-culture and motivation for joining has been primarily in order to be socially accepted. This thesis challenges that hypothesis.

Relatively little has been written about this period when compared to other periods of republican activity, including the 1916 Rising, the War of Independence, the Civil War and post-1969 in Northern Ireland. This is the first in depth study of this period which has been carried out using interviews with IRA members. This has made it possible to assess the importance of both tradition and ideology within the republican movement and the role that they played in motivating young people to become involved during the 1950s. Existing work by historians such as Fearghal McGarry and Tom Garvin have depicted the movement as an introspective tradition devoid of ideological motivation. This thesis will demonstrate that the roles of tradition and ideology are more complex and nuanced than has previously been thought and that ultimately the movement was an ideological organization and was seen as such by young people who joined it between 1948 and 1962.

The new manifestation of the IRA which emerged from the early 1950s signaled the first real breakthrough in terms of attracting a new generation of activists in the years after the Civil War. In the years after 1923 the organization was, at times, ideologically conflicted on a number of issues and was in gradual decline, albeit with occasional increases in membership in the early 1930s. The defeat of the organization by the Free State forces left the IRA in a disorganized state. In 1924 on paper it had 14,000 members.<sup>1</sup> In 1926 the numbers had fallen to 5,042. Sean Cronin estimated that in 1934 the IRA had 8,000 members.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> General report for executive meeting, 10 Aug. 1924, in (UCDA, Moss Twomey Papers, P69/179 /104-9).

<sup>2</sup> Brian Hanley, *The IRA: 1926-1936* (Dublin, 2002), p. 17.

Under its Chief-of-Staff Moss Twomey, between 1926 to 1936, the IRA's approach towards the forces of the State in the north and south was 'one of caution'.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, while there was no immediate plan to re-engage in an armed campaign with the authorities, a number of prominent political issues during the period gave the IRA a degree of political focus outside of its key objective which was the creation of a thirty-two county Republic. Remembrance ceremonies organized by the British Legion saw counter demonstrations of protest by republicans in the mid 1920s, which according to military intelligence contributed to an increase in support.<sup>4</sup> The rise of the Blueshirt movement which evolved from the Army Comrades Association (ACA) saw a number of clashes with the IRA. Hanley contends that the establishment of the ACA offered the IRA 'a boost, giving units a focus and leading to increased recruitment'.<sup>5</sup> The period was also significant in the IRA's history due to its involvement in social agitation campaigns initiated by Peadar O'Donnell. This also contributed to sporadic increases in membership as disillusioned young people joined at a time of economic depression.<sup>6</sup>

The IRA in the aftermath of the Civil War through to the mid-1930s struggled to define its role in Irish society. The period was also marked by internal division about the purpose of its existence. Militarists such as Seán Russell saw its role solely as a military organization whose objective was to dismantle the Free State and the state of Northern Ireland by force. Socialist activists such as Frank Ryan and Peadar O'Donnell attempted

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<sup>3</sup> Brian Hanley, *The IRA: 1926-1936* (Dublin, 2002), p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> A/Commandant Dan Bryan C/S Dec.1925, in (UCDA, Fitzgerald papers, P80/849 /11).

<sup>5</sup> Brian Hanley, *The IRA: 1926-1936* (Dublin, 2002), p. 85.

<sup>6</sup> Twomey to McGarrity, 26 June 1931, in (NLI, McGarrity papers, Ms 17,490).



to build the IRA in to an army which would, according to O'Donnell, be 'the most intense form' of class struggle.<sup>7</sup> In 1934 both men left the IRA to establish a socialist organization named Republican Congress. Chief-of-Staff Moss Twomey, while not a socialist, saw the role of IRA members as 'more than soldiers' and accepted that the organization needed to develop a social programme in order to survive.<sup>8</sup> Under his leadership, which lasted for ten years, he managed to hold the reins of the IRA together which was significant given the dichotomy of views within the organization. Nevertheless, the emergence of Fianna Fáil and its inexorable move towards exclusively constitutional methods, coupled with its ability to present itself as the true inheritor of the revolutionary tradition, witnessed the majority of post-Civil War republicans support the party. Combined with the forced departure of left wingers and the increased isolation of the IRA in Irish society, the way opened for militarists to seize control by the late 1930s.

The next phase of the IRA's existence was one marked by militarism. Fianna Fáil's success in winning over the vast majority of republican supporters saw the IRA move into a purely militaristic mode. The breakaway by Seán Mac Bride and his supporters to establish Clann na Poblachta saw the last vestiges of influential socially inclined IRA leaders leave the organization. By 1938, Seán Russell had been elected Chief-of-Staff. Under his tenure the social question was abandoned and a bombing campaign for England was devised known as the Sabotage Plan or the S Plan. Russell was also in contact with Nazi Germany in an effort to extract logistical support for the IRA. The bombing campaign was tactical disaster which resulted in the deaths of five civilians in

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<sup>7</sup> Brian Hanley, *The IRA, 1926-1936* (Dublin, 2002), p. 195.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.

Coventry in 1939, the hanging of two IRA prisoners and the imprisonment of many more. The fact that the IRA had issued a statement on the eve of the campaign which gave the British government four days to ‘signify its intentions in the matter of the military evacuation’ demonstrated the impractical thinking of an IRA leadership detached from wider society.<sup>9</sup>

The activities of the IRA during the Emergency and its involvement in the deaths of Gardaí not only furthered its isolation, but added to a growing sense of opprobrium felt towards the organization. World War Two, gave the Fianna Fáil administration the opportunity to crush the remnants of the IRA through internment and capital punishment. Imprisoned IRA members were deeply divided between a range of ideological positions which ran the gamut from communism to conservative traditionalist republicanism in the Curragh interment camp.<sup>10</sup> On the outside IRA structures and procedure gave way to paranoia and internal violence with the capture and torture of its Chief-of-Staff, Sean Hayes, by northern members who suspected him of being an informer. The deaths of IRA hunger strikers and the executions failed to raise the customary emotion which greeted previous acts of republican martyrdom among the wider population. As for the IRA as an organization, by the late 1940s ‘there was nothing outside the prisons, but a handful of demoralised and isolated individuals’.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Oglaigh na hÉireann, General Headquarters to his Excellency the Rt. Hon Viscount ‘Halifax’, 12 January 1939, quoted in, John Maguire, *IRA internments and the Irish government: subversives and the state 1939-1962* (Dublin, 2008), pp 23-24.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Quinn, *The making of an Irish communist leader: the life and times of Michael O’Riordan, 1938-1947* (Dublin 2011), pp12-19.

<sup>11</sup> Conor Foley, *Legion of the rearguard: the IRA and the modern Irish state* (London 1992), p. 208.

The late 1940s into the 1950s was a period marked by re-evaluation and re-organization. The years which followed World War Two saw the first generation to reach adulthood since partition. The impact of decolonization and the Cold War reverberated beyond the confines of countries directly affected, while at home the Declaration of the Republic in 1949 saw a new wave of anti-partition fervour engulf Irish politics. This added to an already existing feeling that the reintegration of the six northern counties into a united Ireland was the final piece in concluding the objectives set out during the revolutionary years between 1916 and 1921. Emigration and economic distress was another familiar feature of the period. It was in this environment that the IRA sought to become ideologically relevant and rebuild itself. Of seismic importance to the future success of the IRA were a number of strategic decisions taken in 1948 by the organization, as well as the appointments of key personnel which would lay the foundation for rebuilding of the IRA in the early 1950s.

The reorganization of the IRA began at an IRA army convention in September 1948.<sup>12</sup> Key figures to emerge were Tony Magan who was elected Chief-of-Staff. Magan who was from county Meath joined the IRA in the late 1920s and had been interned in the Curragh during the war. Another IRA Army Council member who was instrumental in the reorganization of the movement was Tomás Mac Curtain, son of the murdered Lord Mayor of Cork. Paddy McLogan from Armagh also joined the Army Council and became president of Sinn Féin in 1950.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> John Maguire, *IRA internments and the Irish government: subversives and the state, 1939-1962* (Dublin, 2008), p. 64.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, pp 64-65.

The 1948 convention decided to utilize Sinn Féin as the IRAs political front.<sup>14</sup> Sinn Féin pronouncements on a number of issues gave a voice to the emerging republican movement and demonstrated a marked advance from the purely military approach of the movement under Seán Russell. Another key decision agreed at the 1948 convention was the introduction of General Army Order Number Eight into the IRA constitution which prohibited military engagement with southern security forces. Removing partition was the key objective of the new IRA. Also crucial to the transmission of the IRA's objectives and its recruitment appeals was its propaganda organ the *United Irishman*. Launched in 1948, it sold 139,000 copies at its peak in 1954, its popularity gives an indication of the renewed level of interest in the IRA and Sinn Féin at the time among a section of the population.<sup>15</sup>

The early 1950s for the IRA was accompanied by a recruitment campaign of young activists in the run up to its military campaign code named 'Operation Harvest'. In the south, reorganization of the movement often went unhindered by the authorities with the first interparty government often turning a blind eye to IRA training or taking no 'action in respect to drilling with arms' by republicans.<sup>16</sup> A number of arms raids in Essex in 1953, Armagh in 1954 and Omagh in 1955, assisted the recruitment process by boosting the profile of the IRA. While not all successful and often resulting in the capture of the raiders, they all were nonetheless publicity coups which captured the imagination of young men. In 1955 Sinn Féin enjoyed electoral success in Northern Ireland when two

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<sup>14</sup>John Maguire, *IRA internments and the Irish government: subversives and the state 1939-1962* (Dublin, 2008), p. 65.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid, p .64.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, p. 66.

imprisoned candidates were elected to Westminster. The lead up to the outbreak of the border campaign was not without internal setbacks. In 1956 a number of IRA members followed Dubliner Joe Christle out of the IRA and joined another republican group called Saor Uladh which was led by Tyrone republican Liam Kelly. Nevertheless in the months preceding the launch of ‘Operation Harvest’ in June 1956, the IRA held an Army Convention. The organization stood in a healthy state with a membership of up to a thousand members with many of the activists trained in the use of firearms and military training.<sup>17</sup>

The campaign itself was launched in December 1956. A number of trained units crossed the border and attacked police stations, British Army installations and destroyed infrastructure in the border area. The IRA’s military operations, which was based on the plan drawn up by Seán Cronin, the organization’s Director of Operations, envisaged that the nationalist community in the north would support the insurgency once the campaign started.<sup>18</sup> As the campaign unfolded it was clear the new IRA faced with the RUC, B Specials and the British army stood little chance of success. Ironically, the botched Brookeborough raid which resulted in the deaths of two IRA members Seán South and Fergal O’Hanlon on New Year’s Day 1957, provided the republican movement with a huge amount of public sympathy. The general election in the south in 1957 saw four Sinn Féin TD’s elected. Nevertheless internment which was introduced both sides of the border coupled with the IRA’s inability to seriously militarily challenge the northern

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<sup>17</sup> John Maguire, *IRA internments and the Irish government: subversives and the state 1939-1962* (Dublin, 2008), p. 82.

<sup>18</sup> *United Irishman*, Bulletin 15 Dec. 1956.

authorities saw the campaign linger into the 1960s. In 1962 the IRA called of its campaign.

Existing work which examines the motivation of people joining the IRA in these aforementioned periods point towards a tradition of republicanism within a family or a local community and suggests that it was this, rather than ideological motivation, that prompted people to join the IRA. Garvin states that ‘Operation Harvest’ was ‘launched from the south by a resurgent IRA of young disillusioned men filled with the usual mixture of religious and irredentist nationalism’. He also comments that in north Kerry, for example, where the IRA had a degree of support, that there was a ‘naive, IRA tradition- a tradition many years later characterized wonderfully and accurately by Prof John Kelly of UCD as one carried forward by a bunch of demented hillbillies.’<sup>19</sup>

In *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland, 1858-1928*, Garvin argues that the transmission of this tradition from one generation to the next was an overriding factor in the perpetuation of militant separatism rather than ideology; he contends that republican political ideology derived from a ‘rabid anti-intellectualism’.<sup>20</sup> Garvin also maintains that ‘ideology was available but was rejected.’<sup>21</sup> In Feargal McGarry’s *Republicanism in Modern Ireland*, a collection of essays by different writers which examines republicanism in the twentieth century Ireland, some contributors such as McGarry argue that the republicanism of the IRA is an ‘introspective tradition’ rather than an ideologically

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<sup>19</sup> Tom Garvin, *News from a new Republic: Ireland in the 1950’s* (Dublin, 2010), pp 54-55.

<sup>20</sup> Tom Garvin, *Nationalist revolutionaries in Ireland, 1858-1928* (Oxford, 1987), p. 110.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

motivated organization.<sup>22</sup> Such a narrow definition of tradition leaves little room to discuss an ideology and this historiography does not consider the role of nationalism and the concept of the nation state within this tradition.

Seán Cronin identifies a number of different strands within Irish nationalism, describing the IRA in the 1950s as physical force traditionalists, adding that ‘Physical-force nationalism is traditionalist, sometimes radical, always romantic’.<sup>23</sup> This study will show that the role of tradition within a family or a locality is more complex than McGarry or Garvin suggest and that this tradition does encompass the ideology of the nation state, first cultivated in theory during the Enlightenment and developed in practice during the French and American Revolutions as well in the 1916 proclamation.

A considerable amount of material had been written about the IRA and Irish republicanism after the Civil War, examining the military aspects of armed republicanism as well as the ideological and political dynamics of the republican movement and its place in Irish society. There are a number of works which cover a broad sweep of the history of the IRA since the Civil War until the 1990’s, such as Tim Pat Coogan’s *The IRA*.<sup>24</sup> While not an academic tome, Coogan’s narrative is a useful history of the republican movement by a writer who had access to intimate knowledge of the clandestine nature of the IRA and its personnel over many decades. His work originally published in the 1960s and updated in the 1990s is augmented by primary material in the form of testimonies by high ranking IRA members often denied to many academics. For

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<sup>22</sup> Fearghal McGarry, *Republicanism in modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2009), p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Sean Cronin, *Irish nationalism: a history of its roots and ideology* (Dublin, 1980), p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA* (Glasgow, 1984).

any scholar interested in the overall history of the IRA after partition, Coogan's work is a valuable starting point, which also details key aspects of the border campaign. Coogan's study allows for a more rigorous investigation into how the political and social dynamics of Irish society enhanced or deterred the appeal of the IRA at different periods in Irish society such as in the 1950s.

Bowyer Bell's *The Secret Army*, is of a similar genre to Coogan's book on the IRA.<sup>25</sup> Again his work traces the organization's roots, its development and its activity throughout the twentieth century. Like Coogan, Bowyer Bell has also updated his work in tandem with seismic events in the IRA's history. The author was also granted access to the leadership of the IRA and his research is rich in primary material, notably based on interviews with leading members of the organization. Again this history of the IRA is a good starting point for a scholar to familiarize him or herself with the political and military trajectory of the IRA over the twentieth century.

A number of more recent academic studies as well as well as more popular histories of the IRA have shed light on different aspects of the republican movement in relation to the 1950s. Barry Flynn's *Soldiers of Folly: The IRA Border Campaign 1956-1962*, charts the various phases of the IRA's campaign. The book which is aimed at the general reader also alludes to some of the themes set out in this thesis by giving an insight in its introduction into the social and political environment which the author felt assisted the growth of a particular type of republicanism personified by the IRA at the time.<sup>26</sup> Dr John

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<sup>25</sup> James Bowyer Bell, *The secret army: the IRA* (Dublin, 1979).

<sup>26</sup> Barry Flynn *Soldiers of Folly: the IRA border campaign 1956-1962* (Dublin, 2009).



Maguire's academic tome *IRA Internments and the Irish Government: Subversives and the Irish State 1939-1962*, focuses on the use of internments in both the 1940s and the 1950s and its effect on curtailing the activities of armed republicanism. Maguire's work also chronicles the IRA's development during that period, while also examining a case taken by an interned 1950s republican Gerry Lawless, who took the Irish government to the Supreme Court over his incarceration, which in turn shaped government policy on tackling the IRA in the subsequent decades.<sup>27</sup> This work is a useful addition to scholarly research done on the 1950s IRA in its examination of how the Irish Government dealt with the threat it posed during the period.

The political fallout after the border campaign and the movement's move towards socialism has its origin in the failure of the border campaign. A number of the key actors involved in the internal rankling which beset the movement in the 1960s, joined in the previous decade, some dramatically moving away from the traditional republicanism that first attracted them. Their evolution into Marxist-socialists by the 1970s is investigated in Hanley and Millar's *The Lost Revolution: The Story of the Official IRA and the Worker's Party*.<sup>28</sup> This work not only traces the history of the Official IRA and the emergence of the Worker's Party in the 1980s back to the 1950s, it also explores the evolution in the thinking of key IRA leaders and their ideological transformation in the subsequent years. Therefore this thesis can add a new dimension to other examinations which chart the

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<sup>27</sup> John Maguire, *IRA Internments and the Irish government: subversives and the state 1939-1962* (Dublin, 2008), pp 141-172.

<sup>28</sup> Brian Hanley and Scott Millar, *The lost revolution : the story of the Official IRA and the Worker's Party* (Dublin, 2009).

ideological metamorphosis of individuals involved in armed republicanism over the course of their political lives.

Another relatively new addition that also adds to recent studies which explore ideological shifts and schisms within the republican movement is Matt Treacy's *The IRA 1956-1969: Rethinking the Republic*.<sup>29</sup> Again, like Hanley and Millar, the author places a particular emphasis on the internal political discourse within the IRA in the 1960s. The book also includes a detailed investigation into Catholic social teaching which was the favored template of the traditionalists within the IRA in the 1960s and which underpinned the social ideology of the IRA of the previous decade. Its introduction gives a political and military overview of the IRA during the border campaign. While this thesis examines why people were motivated to join the IRA in the 1950s, both *The Lost Revolution: The Story of the Official IRA and the Worker's Party*, and *The IRA 1956-1969: Rethinking the Republic*, use the IRA in the 1950s as the starting point in exploring the gradual evolution of the IRA, leading to its split in 1970. Therefore an academic examination into the initial motives and an examination of what role both tradition and ideology did play, that led some of these key people to join the IRA is timely.

Other important literature also chronicles the ideological evolution that took place within the republican movement while also touching on the organization in the mid twentieth century. Most notable among them is Patterson's *The Politics of Illusion: A Political History of the IRA*. Patterson looks at different examples over the course of the IRA's history where republican activists attempted to combine militant republicanism with

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<sup>29</sup> Matt Treacy, *The IRA 1956-1969: rethinking the Republic* (Manchester, 2011).

agitation along social lines.<sup>30</sup> Eoin Ó Broin's *Sinn Fein and the Politics of Left Republicanism*, also examines the same themes, although his conclusions contradicts Patterson's view that left wing politics and republican separatism are incompatible ideological positions. However, both authors' view of the IRA in the 1950s as being ideologically conservative.<sup>31</sup>

There are also a number of biographies and autobiographies of some of the key figures of the IRA during the 1950s. While at times subjective accounts of the period, they do nonetheless give an insight into the thinking of people who found themselves in the IRA. A biography of a former IRA Chief-of-Staff and leading activist during the border campaign called *Ruairí Ó Brádaigh: The Life and Politics of an Irish Revolutionary*, opens a window on the different influences that impacted on the thinking of the young Ó Brádaigh growing up in a republican home in Longford in the 1940s.<sup>32</sup> Seán Mac Stiofáin's *Memories of an Irish Revolutionary*, gives a valuable insight into the English born IRA member who became the Provisional IRA's first Chief-of-Staff and his reasons for involvement in militant republicanism.<sup>33</sup> Brendan Anderson's biography of another IRA Chief-of-Staff, *Joe Cahill: A life in the IRA*, not only chronicles Cahill's journey in the IRA, but again explores the social and political environment which Cahill experienced in his formative years.<sup>34</sup> Historian Anna Bryson's, re-publication of the prison diaries of Dublin IRA member Eamon Boyce in a book titled *The Insider: The*

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<sup>30</sup> Henry Patterson, *The politics of illusion: a political history of IRA* (London ,1997).

<sup>31</sup> Eoin Ó Broin, *Sinn Fein and the politics of left republicanism* (Dublin, 2009), p201.

<sup>32</sup> Robert White, *Ruairí Ó' Brádaigh: the life and politics of an Irish revolutionary* (Indiana, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> Sean Mac Stiofáin, *Memories of a revolutionary* (Edinburgh, 1975).

<sup>34</sup> Brendan Anderson, *Joe Cahill: a life in the IRA* (Dublin, 2002).

*Belfast Prison Diaries of Eamon Boyce, 1956-1962* is a lens in to the private and political thinking of Dublin IRA man imprisoned in Crumlin Road Jail in the 1950s.<sup>35</sup>

This thesis has also relevance to contemporary debates about what motivates individuals to join so called ‘terrorist’ groups or engage in political violence. Bruce Hoffman’s *Inside Terrorism* examines contemporary organizations involved in political violence and how these groups appeal and recruit young people.<sup>36</sup> Another recent study which was found useful was *The Psychology of Terrorism*, by John Horgan.<sup>37</sup> His work is largely based on interviews. There is a paucity of research in this field which actually uses the testimony of individuals involved in these groups. This study adds to it.

Chapter 1 investigates the impact of Anti-Partition League in the late 1940s through to the 1950s. The Anti-Partition League and its impact on the Irish society north and south had been covered in a number of studies. Indeed it is widely acknowledged that the Anti-Partition League gave a platform to the emerging IRA to articulate its objectives. Patterson, for example points to it as being instrumental in the growth of the IRA.<sup>38</sup> Brendan Lynn traces how it created the first coherent challenge to the northern state by the nationalist community since partition. While there is a broad consensus that this type of political discourse cultivated an interest among the wider population about ending partition, no study has scrutinized how different groups from the northern nationalists to Fine Gael to the IRA articulated an anti-partition position for their different reasons.

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<sup>35</sup> Anna Bryson, *The insider* (Dublin, 2007).

<sup>36</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside terrorism* (Columbia, 1998).

<sup>37</sup> John Horgan, *The psychology of terrorism* (New York, 2005).

<sup>38</sup> Henry Patterson, *The politics of illusion* (London, 1987), p.88.

What is examined, is the contrasting reasons why partition was seen as unjust across the political and social spectrum and how this was interpreted by young people who later joined the IRA. This thesis argues that the wider debate opened an opportunity for the republican movement to articulate their own ideological position around the issue.

In chapter 2 and 3 the role of tradition is discussed at length. By examining key areas beginning with a close analysis on early and late childhood influences, this study teases out how an ever-present militant republican tradition in mid-century Ireland, in many cases was the original stimulus that gradually evolved into IRA recruitment. Chapter 2 focuses on the importance of republican inheritance to political organizations three decades after the revolutionary years of 1916 through to 1921. This contest between the official State and subversives and between political opponents revolved around who were the rightful inheritors of the militant republicanism of the IRA from the 1920s. The period was underpinned with militant republican imagery and iconography, while living reminders of who had fought the British Army were used at official level to consolidate the southern state. Within family and local communities militant republican exploits were transmitted to the next generation, while in the north a similar tradition, while obviously not at official level existed within a section of the nationalist community.

What is explored is how the IRA managed to convince young people, already stimulated by an interest in republicanism from family or local accounts of the 1920s, that they were the rightful descendents of the 1916 generation. Ann Dolan's work on republican remembrance in the Republic of Ireland and her hypothesis that an ambiguity existed in

terms of attitudes towards militant republicanism in Irish society is advanced in this thesis, which explicitly hones in on how this added to the appeal of the new IRA by the 1950s.<sup>39</sup> A number of studies by historians such as Joost Augusteijn, that examine the IRA in the 1920s, have explored how family background can have a pervasive influence in recruitment.<sup>40</sup> No studies have been done using such methods of investigation and analysis, on the IRA after the Civil War, so it is timely that they be applied to the IRA of the 1950s. The responses from interviewees in chapter 2 opens a window into how an existing republican tradition varied in terms of motivation for joining the IRA.

Tradition is explored again in chapter 3. Representations of Irish history in terms of popular literature, the education curriculum and the print media are examined and set against the testimonies of the interviewees in order to tease out how much of a role this played in popularizing directly or indirectly the IRA at the time. A nationalist narrative of Irish history has seen diametrically opposing views among historians, in relation to what role it has played in the reproduction of militant republicanism. The complex and multilayered response by the people interviewed exposes the degree of influence it had on young people and how it varied from person to person.

Chapter 4 investigates the international context of the 1950s and how this complemented the IRA's reorganizing efforts and will demonstrate the relatively sophisticated ideological awareness that IRA members had of international affairs. John Maguire makes a fleeting reference to the fact that many new IRA recruits were encouraged by the

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<sup>39</sup> Ann Dolan, 'Our army of fenian dead', in Fergal McGarry, (ed.) *Republicanism in modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2003), p. 135.

<sup>40</sup> Joost Augusteijn, *The Irish revolution, 1913-1923* (New York, 2002).

anti-colonial movements that were taking place after World War Two.<sup>41</sup> The late 1940s and 1950s was a period when decolonization was taking place in Africa and in other places. The occupation of Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union and its attempts to crush Eastern European resistance movements was also a feature of the period. The republican movement championed the causes of many anti-colonial movements from Cyprus to Kenya as well as highlighting the plight of Hungarian and Polish resistance fighters. The topical nature of these events in Irish society and in the Irish media created an awareness among young people who saw the IRA as an extension of these independence struggles. Indeed, the responses of the interviewees and their general awareness of these international events sheds new light on external influences that encouraged the growth of the IRA at the time, while also challenging some of the more hostile contextualisation's mentioned previously which have depicted young men that became members of the IRA in the 1950s as backwards or insular.

Mid-century Ireland was one underpinned by mass unemployment and emigration. Ruan O'Donnell's book on the IRA in Wexford in the 1950s; *Vinegar Hill to Edentubber: The Wexford IRA and the Border Campaign*, highlights how many IRA members emigrated at the time and how this often had detrimental effect on the activities of the IRA due to the loss of numbers.<sup>42</sup> This thesis will show that initially the economic malaise of the period and the possibility of emigration drove some people towards the IRA. It will also disprove the view of academics that argue that the organization and its

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<sup>41</sup> John Maguire, *IRA interments and the Irish government: subversives and the state 1939-1962* (Dublin, 2008), pp 68-69.

<sup>42</sup> Ruan O'Donnell, *Vinegar Hill to Edentubber: the Wexford IRA and the border campaign* (Wexford, 2007), p. 20.

members in the 1950s were solely concerned with ending partition. Three decades after southern independence the fruits of the revolutionary years of 1916 to 1921 were not being reaped by the first generation who had reached adulthood in independent Ireland. This was a point continuously emphasized by the republican movement and one that had the potential to resonate given the complete lack of opportunity for many young people. The complete absence of any credible anti-establishment radical group to challenge the status quo coupled with the IRA and Sinn Féin's argument that ending partition was the first step in creating a Republic, elevated the IRA to being the most obvious organization in the eyes of some young people that could actually bring about radical change in a time of recession.

A number of primary sources have been exhaustively researched and used for this thesis. The republican movement's newspaper the *United Irishman*, from 1948 until the end of the 1950s has been investigated extensively. The paper was a crucial factor in the re-emergence of the IRA and was circulated nationally and by the mid 1950s had a high readership. The fact that many of the participants interviewed were encouraged to join the IRA through recruitment appeals in that paper, reveal the extent of its appeal to certain young people. The paper also set out the economic, social and political view of the movement as well as focusing on its own interpretation of Irish republican history. Other newspapers issued by the republican movement such as *Resurgent Ulster* and *Border Campaign News Bulletins* are also examined. Government intelligences files in the National Archives were vital in measuring the growth of the movement in different parts of the country at the time. Likewise archival material in PRONI in Belfast and Kew in



London that largely focus on the military aspects of the IRA during the period were also consulted. However the key objective of this thesis is ostensibly about exploring the attitudes of people who joined the IRA at the time, therefore oral interviews and republican newspapers were the key primary source material used.

Other primary literature from the period that is examined in chapter 2, looks at material produced by the school curriculum. The *Wolfe Tone Annual*, popular reading material at the time aimed at teenagers, as well as aspects of nationalist-inclined newspapers such as the *Irish Press* is also examined. Chapter 1 investigates how partition was viewed among a range of political parties. This part of the research involved trawling through the newspapers and political statements of different political groups from the Labour Party and the Irish Worker's League, to right wing organization as well as the mainstream political parties.

Finally the key primary source used for this thesis are the oral testimonies of twenty four former members of the IRA and the wider republican movement conducted over a two year period. In order to get more comprehensive and inclusive findings, it was decided that people from all ranks of the IRA would be spoken to. Those interviewed for this thesis included two former members of the IRA's Army Council as well as members of GHQ staff, Brigade Commanders, low level members and people on the periphery of the movement who gave considerable assistance to the IRA in terms of billeting its members, storing arms etc.

Oral history and personal testimonies as used in this study can offer a new perspective on minority groups such as the IRA. With the exception of Coogan and Bowyer Bell, the orthodox historiography of the IRA, has by and large failed to interview a large number of members of the organization. Oral history can sometimes present problems in terms of reliability and bias. Memory can often be prejudiced by secondary material written about events in the past. Hoffman argues that these problems can be overcome by choosing reliable participants as well as collecting a number of testimonies to ensure reliability.<sup>43</sup> This study chose interviewees from urban and rural backgrounds. This research has carefully chosen individuals who subsequently became members of different organizations, as well as those who left the IRA altogether, in order to get a more representative picture of what motivated people to join the IRA in the 1950s.

Ten years after the ending of the border campaign the republican movement had split between the Provisional IRA and the Official IRA, another split from the Officials led to the emergence of the Irish National Liberation Movement (INLA) in 1974. Former members of all three organizations have been interviewed as well as others who left politics completely after the border campaign. Dublin which had the highest membership at the time is represented also by the highest number of interviews. In Northern Ireland, Armagh and Tyrone which were the most active areas for the IRA are represented, while rural areas in the south such as Longford and Roscommon which were strong areas for the IRA are included. Members from counties Kildare, Cork, Leitrim and Kerry also contributed oral testimonies to this project.

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<sup>43</sup>Alice Hoffman, 'Reliability and validity in oral history', in, Hoffman (ed.) *Oral history, an interdisciplinary anthology*, (London 1996), pp 92-103.

While interviewing people involved in political activity always presents the danger of the respondent giving subjective or retrospective accounts of the past in order to justify their own particular actions or worldview, the nature of the questions asked in this study strongly inhibited the possibility of this occurring. The questions posed investigated early childhood and adolescent experiences and were not a probing of political influences, but rather the aim was to build up a profile of the interviewee's background and interests as a young person and then map the different motivating factors that led to their involvement in the IRA.

## Chapter 1

### **The Anti-Partition debate and the revival of Republican Separatism 1948-1956.**

The aftermath of the IRA's disastrous 1940s campaign required a radical restructuring of the republican movement, as well as a reappraisal of the relevancy of separatist republicanism by the IRA during the late 1940s. The re-organization of the movement began with the selection of a full time organizer to oversee to day to day re-structuring of the movement.<sup>1</sup> The period was marked by a significant degree of internal activity, from which emerged a new IRA leadership eager to engage the republican movement in the wider anti-partition political discourse during the period. The leadership elected at a General Army Convention in September 1948, selected a new IRA Chief-of-Staff, while a new Army Council was assigned the task of directing the IRA's military and political strategy.<sup>2</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, Anthony Magan became Chief-of-Staff, while another 1920s veteran Paddy McLogan as well as Tomas Mac Curtain assumed key leadership positions.<sup>3</sup> The IRA also restored its links with Sinn Féin in 1948. The party would act as the political front for the IRA, senior IRA figure Paddy McLogan became Sinn Féin party president.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Maguire, *IRA internments and the Irish government: subversives and the state 1939-1962* (Dublin, 2008), pp 62- 65.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

The new leadership was fundamentally wedded to a separatist form of Irish republicanism. The 1948 convention also decided that attacks on southern security forces were counterproductive; a motion calling for a military campaign in Northern Ireland was sanctioned, while the political party Sinn Féin was to be utilized for propaganda purposes and recruitment, as well as to promulgate the ideology of the republican movement.<sup>5</sup>

In many ways, focusing on removing the border had the potential to park previous ideological conflicts that had divided the organization since the aftermath of the Civil War. This is not to say that republican literature to emerge did not articulate clear economic and social policies based around the concept of the nation state and the right to self rule, as well as containing an international dimension, but ending partition became the spearhead of the republican movement's approach from 1948 onwards that harmonized potentially deeper ideological tension among a membership, where a consensus existed that ending partition was a stepping stone to a new society as part of its wider political strategy.

Irish republican ideology based on the idea of an independent sovereign Irish state was championed by a new generation of the IRA. It has been argued by some historians such as Tom Garvin that the concentration on ending partition by the IRA in the 1950s was the paradigm of non ideological republicanism with its focus on removing the border by armed struggle.<sup>6</sup> However, as will be demonstrated later, removing the border was seen as the gateway in Sinn Féin and the IRA's policy on national independence. Republicans

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<sup>5</sup> John Maguire, *IRA and internments and the Irish government: subversives and the state 1939-1962* (Dublin, 2008), p. 65.

<sup>6</sup> Tom Garvin, *News from a new Republic: Ireland in the 1950's* (Dublin, 2010), p. 55.

argued that ending partition would be the first step in the movement's project that also addressed a range of social and economic issues. Therefore it is no coincidence that young people who experienced social or economic distress or had an interest in anti-colonial struggles were attracted to an organization that articulated a type of republicanism that encompassed a view of a sovereign nation state.

This radical nationalist aspect of the republican movement's ideology had in the past been the driving force behind other manifestations of militant republicanism. In 1798 the United Irishmen represented the bourgeoisie as well as the peasantry with a similar type of radical nationalism.<sup>7</sup> Munck contends that 'Connolly's "nationalism" represented the interests of the Irish working class'; he also suggests that the IRA in the 1980s represented a section of small land holders and the urban working class with a radical nationalist form of separatist republicanism in Northern Ireland.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, the republican movement of the 1950s attempted to appeal to a whole new generation of Irish nationalists in Northern Ireland, but also to a section of the population disillusioned with the status quo thirty years after independence in the south of Ireland. It was also keen to be associated with this tradition that encompassed its own historical and patriotic appeal to a new generation of young people. However, this was underpinned by a sophisticated ideological critique of the continued existence of partition since 1921.

Republicans argued that partition and the creation of two states on the island of Ireland in 1921 left the country economically dependent on Britain and as a result the Irish people

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<sup>7</sup> Ronnie Munck, *Ireland, nation, state and class struggle* (Dublin, 1985), p. 133.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

as a whole were denied the democratic ownership of Ireland's resources.<sup>9</sup> The objective of creating a thirty-two county Republic happened in stages with an end to partition being the first objective to be fulfilled. It could be argued that its inability to look beyond this rigid ideological approach and its fixation with armed action resulted in the weakening of the organization by the late 1950s. However it could also be surmised that initially, given the failure of three decades of constitutional nationalism, north and south to end partition or alleviate a range of social and economic issues on both sides of the border, that it was in this context that young people were attracted to an organization with an anti-establishment tradition.

The republican movement categorically denied that it was solely concerned with ending partition, stating that 'The IRA and Sinn Féin and other elements of the republican movement do not constitute merely an anti-partition organization. The task is not simply one of removing the border, but of undoing the conquest'.<sup>10</sup> It condemned those who it felt espoused empty anti-partition rhetoric, while also appealing to workers and the wider population that they represented the vision of a new society based on social justice and invited them to their cause in a *United Irishman* editorial titled 'This is your Fight'.<sup>11</sup> They contended that the contemporary economic and social status quo in Ireland was a damning indictment of the political establishment and did not represent the sacrifices and aspirations of previous generations who had fought for independence, believing that; 'The insurrections while primarily aiming at political independence were fought on a much wider front. The theory that political independence would open the road to the

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<sup>9</sup> *United Irishman*, Feb. 1953.

<sup>10</sup> *United Irishman*, Jan. 1952.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

great and complex questions of social, economic and cultural independence was, and is the fundamental principle of republicanism’.<sup>12</sup>

Attempts were also made to address the unionist community within their literature, their position being that the interests of both Catholic and Protestants would be best served in an independent Ireland, where Irish people on a thirty-two county democratic basis would have control over economic, social and industrial matters. In a article entitled ‘An Appeal to Unionists’ they contended that ‘The Irish people as a whole suffer the problems, following the wake of partition, are as common to those south of the border than to those north of it. Unemployment in the north hit one man in ten, the figures in the south are high too and growing’.<sup>13</sup> It was stated that partition benefitted the industrialists in the north who were mainly British-owned as well as private capitalists and landlords to the detriment of ordinary people both Protestant and Catholic. The article further argued that the creation of the northern state was the real source of sectarianism where the police force was granted special powers to maintain the state, thereby fuelling and fostering tension between the unionist and nationalist communities.<sup>14</sup>

The IRA and Sinn Féin offered a range of social and economic perspectives as well as an anti-colonial outlook that will be explored in chapter 4 and 5. However, its contention that democratic values were aligned with the historical imperative of Irish separatism was constantly asserted by Sinn Féin and IRA spokespeople as being the ideological template of republican separatism in the 1950s. They stated that the 1919 Declaration of

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<sup>12</sup> *United Irishman*, Jan. 1952.

<sup>13</sup> *United Irishman*, Mar. 1958.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*



Independence issued by Dáil Eireann was the democratic basis for their existence. They endeavored to ‘adopt the same methods of the men of 1918, we must set up again a parliament for all of Ireland, to supplant both Leinster House and the Stormont administrations and make its writ run in all 32 counties in spite of British law’.<sup>15</sup>

A new campaign across nationalist Ireland from the late 1940s through to the early 1950s in the form of the Anti-Partition League, which demanded an end to partition, ran parallel with the IRA and Sinn Féin’s reorganization. Initially established in the late 1940s in Northern Ireland, by the end of the decade, the broad based campaign was supported and led by nationalist politicians in the north and by the political establishment south of the border. Political meetings and demonstrations across nationalist Ireland, was matched with frequent anti-partition rhetoric among its leading proponents. By the early 1950s it had become increasingly evident that the broad based campaign had no chance of effecting constitutional change.

The motivation for calling for an end to partition across a broad and diverse section of society that stretched from the official southern state, to Irish communists’ as well as middle class and working class northern nationalists was indeed diverse. It has been argued that the cultivation of this hegemony among the southern constitutional establishment, which by the late 1940s was expressed through denunciations of partition, was a convenient method to consolidate the constitutional status quo in the south. Kieran Allen argues that the issue ‘could help bind the southern community together by reinvigorating memories of past British oppression. It was not something the politicians

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<sup>15</sup> *United Irishman*, Feb. 1953.

of Dáil Éireann aimed actively to overturn. Their primary interest lay in building their own state and nurturing their population with active support'.<sup>16</sup> Given the severe economic crisis of the time, which had little likelihood of abating in the early 1950s, this encouragement of popular nationalism certainly had the potential to disguise fundamental flaws in terms of social and economic issues that the infant southern state experienced.

Obviously northern nationalists who were excluded from an equitable degree of influence within Northern Ireland as well as suffering institutionalised discrimination used the anti-partition campaign to challenge the basis of the northern state. Nonetheless, as a result of a renewed anti-partition political discourse from 1948 until the mid 1950s, Sinn Féin and the IRA's reassertion of separatist republicanism questioned the genuineness and motivation behind the constitutionalists' approach, while also articulating an ideological position that saw national independence as part of a much wider project. Within this political context the IRA and Sinn Féin emerged as a legitimate and attractive option for young people in the process of developing their political outlook.

### **Anti-Partition League**

Patterson argues that the increase in IRA membership in the early 1950s derived not from 'the stock republican litanies on the evils of 'Free Statism' but from the leaflets and pamphlets on the evils of partition produced by the southern state'.<sup>17</sup> While it is inaccurate to assume that all those who joined the IRA were motivated by the literature of the Anti-Partition League campaign in the late 1940s and early 1950s, it is fair to say that

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<sup>16</sup> Kieran Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour: 1926 to the present* (Dublin, 1997), p. 82.

<sup>17</sup> Henry Patterson, *The politics of illusion: a political history of the IRA* (London, 1997), p. 88.

the campaign highlighted a number of perceived wrongs with the continued existence of partition that resonated across nationalist Ireland both north and south. Michael Farrell takes a different view to Patterson and argues that it was not the southern anti-partition campaign which was the real catalyst for IRA recruitment in the early 1950s, but rather that the IRA was a ‘new northern organization born directly out of the frustration of the minority’.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, the propaganda which the wider campaign produced transmitted a number of different reasons why partition was wrong on either side of the border. The fact that ‘anti-partition’ became part of official propaganda in southern Ireland and among northern nationalists, exposed a new generation and new sections of society to its perceived unfairness. Universal calls for an end to partition supplanted the old civil war discourse and complimented the IRA’s new approach, which sought to draw activists from a new post-Civil War generation.

### **Anti-partition League Northern Ireland**

To understand the relatively politicised base that the IRA recruited from in Armagh, Tyrone and other nationalist areas in the early 1950s, it is worth briefly examining the emergence of the Anti-Partition League campaign in Northern Ireland. The broad based campaign in Northern Ireland was the first campaign of its kind among the nationalist population since the foundation of the Northern Irish state. It was within northern nationalism that the catalyst for the campaign to tackle partition initially came. In 1945 nationalist MPs such as Eddie McAteer and Malachy Conlon and over four hundred

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<sup>18</sup> Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: the orange state* (London, 1976), p. 202.

public representatives held a convention and established the Anti-Partition League, the new political movement which first met in Dungannon in county Tyrone attempted to create a broad front nationalist campaign in order to end partition.<sup>19</sup> The convention elected a committee which witnessed the beginning of the Anti-Partition League. The election of the Labour Party government in Britain in 1945, who were perceived to be more understanding of the Irish question than its predecessors, encouraged the efforts of the growing anti-partition activity.<sup>20</sup>

The amalgamation of different shades of nationalists for the first time since partition shaped the political discourse two decades later. The ending of World War Two presented the opportunity for raising the issue as well as harmonizing relations among northern nationalism. In terms of popular mass nationalist mobilization, the movement was in many ways a precursor to the civil rights movement a decade later.

Indeed, in the same way the failure of the civil rights movement was followed by the growth of the separatist Provisional IRA in the 1970s, the ultimate failure of the Anti-Partition League to deliver on its key demands or the unwillingness of the state to engage with at least some of the issues raised by the campaign, saw the IRA fill the void in the 1950s. Also the northern states repressive measures in the early 1950s, such as the 1951 Public Order Act which attempted to inhibit nationalist mobilization and sparked riots in

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<sup>19</sup>Brendan Lynn 'The Irish Anti-Partition League and the political realities of partition, 1945-49' *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 34, no. 135 (May, 2005), p. 321.

<sup>20</sup>Brendan Lynn, *Holding the ground: the Nationalist Party in Northern Ireland, 1945-72* (Aldershot, 1997), p. 27.

Derry, indicated the limited effect that constitutional nationalism or passive mobilization by the nationalist community would have.<sup>21</sup>

Since the formation of the Stormont parliament in 1932 nationalists had failed to create a unified political organization on behalf of its community, while the belief amongst Catholics, that they were victims of political discrimination had led to some of them withdrawing from northern institutions.<sup>22</sup> Activists from across the nationalist population which included MP's, senators, business people and the working class became part of the Irish Anti-Partition League, with the clear objective to end partition by consolidating northern nationalism in a broad front campaign. While northern nationalism had been split along ideological and class lines since the formation of the Northern Ireland State, a renewed effort was made to reconcile the political differences in 1945 with the establishment of the new campaigning movement. As a result of the creation of the Northern Ireland State all injustices experienced by the nationalist community had emerged according to campaigners.

Significantly it also had an empowering effect on a demoralized nationalist community in the late 1940s by exposing the issue of partition and its consequences to a new generation from different political and in some cases class backgrounds. Future IRA members such as Donal Donnelly, who described the anti-partition campaign as 'uplifting', reflected the sense of optimism that the campaign instilled among the nationalist community, who felt

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<sup>21</sup> Micheal Farrell, *Northern Ireland: the orange state* (London, 1976), p. 203.

<sup>22</sup>Brendan Lynn 'The Irish anti-partition league and the political realities of partition, 1945-49' *Irish historical studies*, vol. 34, no. 135 (May, 2005), p. 322.

that a united Ireland would emerge.<sup>23</sup> The flagging of the campaign by the mid-1950s saw the electorate transform its support to the republican movement. In 1955 two IRA prisoners were elected to the Westminster Parliament; Phil Clarke in the constituency of Fermanagh South Tyrone and Tom Mitchell in Mid-Ulster.

A number of new strategies were employed by the League in the late 1940s in an attempt to undermine the basis of the northern state. Nationalist MP's who led the campaign used Stormont to expose issues of discrimination and argued that the northern state needed to be abolished. In 1946 nationalist MP Malachy Conlon stated that 'We use this house here today as a method of recording the fact that our efforts are being directed not to vilify our country but to expose those people that are actually vilifying it. We will not rest until this ancient province of ours is part of the complete and united nation'.<sup>24</sup> Anti-partition pamphlets such as *Ireland's Right to Unity*, highlighted the widespread discrimination of the Catholic population. Gerrymandering, which resulted in unionism returning more councillors' in predominantly nationalist areas such as in Derry, Eniskillen, Omagh and Strabane was also covered in the pamphlet.<sup>25</sup> Other publications raised issues around housing and employment to emphasize that the northern state could not be rehabilitated and that partition needed to be abolished.

Highlighting cases of discrimination resonated among many young working class Catholics from traditional republican and non-traditional republican families in the north. While Patterson argues that the anti-partition campaign was the initial motivating factor

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Donal Donnelly (2 Dec. 2011).

<sup>24</sup> Conlon, H.C. deb. (NI), v. 31, c. 58.

<sup>25</sup> All party anti-partition conference, *Ireland's right to unity*, (Dublin, 1949).

in IRA recruitment, due to its propaganda focus on the ‘the evils of partition’ in the south of Ireland, discrimination was a very real experience for those interviewed in the north.<sup>26</sup>

The campaign for the first time vented the real grievances of the nationalist community and in doing so exposed the unequal nature of the northern state to younger nationalists. Indeed, the campaign articulated a discontent among nationalists, in particular young people. The radical separatist ideological position of the IRA, and its methods of using armed struggle to achieve this, always had the potential to resonate among young people given this context.

All those interviewed from Armagh and Tyrone, from both traditional and non traditional republican backgrounds pointed to childhood and adolescent experiences of discrimination. For a moment it is worth examining the experiences of a number of people who played significant roles in the republican movement in the subsequent years. Many were from non-traditional republican backgrounds and came from families who supported the Northern Nationalist Party. Some such as Bernadette O’Hagan from Lurgan, who married J.B O’Hagan the IRA OC in the area, came from a nationalist background, although she had had an uncle interned in the 1940s, she never remembers politics being discussed at home and pointed to discrimination as her initial political awakening. When asked if she remembered any particular instances of discrimination she recalled: ‘there was a particular lady’s shop leading up to our school gate, it was a small shop run by a woman herself. I recall seeing a notice in her window saying ‘Assistant Wanted No Catholic Need Apply’.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Henry Patterson, *The politics of illusion: a political history of the IRA* (London , 1997), p .88.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Bernadette O’ Hagan (2 July 2010).

Gerry Haughinn from a nationalist, but non IRA family in Lurgan, who was interned in the Curragh in 1957, also indicated the prevalence of discrimination among young nationalists: ‘I would say that we were protected in the sense that we worked, it didn’t impact on us. But you certainly heard stories of people not getting jobs because of their name, never mind qualification or anything like that. Even after I came home from jail, I even met it like.’<sup>28</sup> His brother Joe who also joined the IRA stated that:

There was a job advertised in the local *Lurgan Mail*, they were looking for a young strong lad to work in a mill. A friend applied for this job which had been advertised in the *Lurgan Mail* for umpteen weeks, so Pat went up and was asked your age, your name, where you come from, your school. Once they heard your school you never heard anything else. But he never heard anything more about the job. The job was advertised again still in the paper.<sup>29</sup>

The school experience of Art Thornbury, who was a member of the IRA’s youth wing of Fianna Éireann, illustrates how different forms of discrimination manifested itself:

When I was in school for instance. In the technical school, I began to get aware of it (discrimination). There were two teachers who I remember very well. There was a chemistry teacher, but he refused to teach me. One of the reasons was, we use to go to Warrenpoint on a day out. We use to buy little tri-colours, they were about the

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Gerry and Joe Haughinn (6 July 2010).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.



size of your finger nail and I began to wear it all the time. Well he didn't like this and he didn't like me. He refused to teach me and he would not correct any of my work or answer me, he just ignored me in the class and that was part of it.<sup>30</sup>

There was also a palpable sense among the interviewees that the career opportunities for young Catholics were limited in places such as Lurgan, where the majority of business owners came from the unionist community. Joe Haughinn felt that; 'your options here in Lurgan were the likes of Hagan's or weaving or labouring jobs, that would have been the sort of stuff that was open to you'.<sup>31</sup>

Davey Lewsley also from Lurgan, who began a prison sentence in Crumlin Road Jail in 1957 as a result of his involvement in IRA activity in county Tyrone, also pointed to a number of instances where he felt being from the nationalist community went against his chances of successfully securing employment.<sup>32</sup> Lewsley came from a nationalist background with no IRA tradition. When asked if republicanism was talked about at home he recalled:

Well there wasn't much talk about the IRA. The IRA was sort of dead at the time. It was very rarely talked about, not like the way it's talked about now or twenty or thirty years ago. No they did not talk along them lines.. it was....politics, the likes of McAteer in North Armagh.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Art Thorbury (22 June 2010).

<sup>31</sup> Interview with David Lewsley (6 June 2010).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

Lewsley who later joined the IRA primarily to end what he felt was discrimination against nationalists, demonstrates the success of the IRA in replacing the constitutional Nationalist Party as the favored option among young nationalists, as a means of challenging discrimination. The failure of the constitutional nationalist campaign to make tangible progress stimulated an interest in alternative politics among nationalists and younger people who ultimately were attracted to the IRA's more radically nationalist ideological position as the impact of the broad based campaign diminished.

Donal Donnelly from county Tyrone, also recalled the impact of the Anti-Partition League at the time. Even traditional republican families such as the Donnellys, who had a history of Irish separatism stretching back to the Fenians, actively supported the objectives and the methods of the campaign in the late 1940s. Donal Donnelly who was later imprisoned during the border campaign spoke about anti-partition meetings held in his grand-aunt's restaurant in Omagh. He felt that discrimination was the key motivating factor among his peers. While Donnelly came from a republican family he indicated that in the late 1940s, the anti-partition campaign was the main political approach supported by even republican families such as his:

When I was a small boy I saw Eamon De Valera, Sean Mac Bride, Alex Donnelly and many others in the (aunt's) restaurant taking part in Anti-Partition League meetings which were held during the 1940s all over the six counties. In later years following the successful election of anti-partition candidates Anthony Mulvey and

Paddy Cunningham to Westminster as abstentionist MPs, we believed that Tyrone and Fermanagh were on the brink of being given back to the Free State.<sup>34</sup>

While the republican movement in its propaganda was committed to the overthrow of the state, ending state discrimination was the most immediate reason for others. Davey Lewsley pointed to discrimination as the main reason why he joined the IRA in 1954. He felt that IRA involvement offered the; ‘chance of changing the whole system, even if we didn’t get a thirty-two county, even changing the whole way of living in the north and everybody would have equal say’.<sup>35</sup> Gerry Haughinn on the other hand, while signifying that he joined the IRA for a united Ireland, indicated that his participation in the organization had an empowering impact which encouraged his ideological development around social justice issues: ‘I would say that you certainly became aware of wee rights you should off had through your involvement. Your broadening your mind a wee bit instead of been closed a wee bit’.<sup>36</sup> While the IRA’s main objective was a united Ireland, some rank and file members had a vague idea of how this would happen or what this new dispensation would look like; nevertheless they did see the IRA as the most obvious group to join given the failure of the Anti-Partition League campaign by the mid-1950s.

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<sup>34</sup> Donal Donnelly, *Prisoner 1082* (Cork 2010), p. 32.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Davey Lewsley (6 June. 2010).

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Gerry and Joe Haughinn (6 July. 2010).

## **Anti-Partition League; Republic of Ireland and Britain**

In terms of the south, the Anti-Partition Leagues core objective was to make partition a key issue for the Dublin government. The Declaration of the Republic in 1948 saw the British respond with the Government of Ireland Bill which copper-fastened the union. The reaction to the bill south of the border saw the establishment of the Mansion House Committee. The Mansion House Committee was established to raise finance for the anti-partition campaign and included TD's from all the mainstream political parties in the south as well as northern representatives.<sup>37</sup> Conference meetings heard calls from southern politicians as well as northern nationalists, which demanded the end to partition.

The mobilization of the southern political parties and the Mansion House conference of 1949 have been described as 'a heavy weight championship fight for the titles of the real republican party. The previous September John A. Costello had outdone 'De Valerism' by declaring a Republic'.<sup>38</sup> While the Anti-Partition League benefited financially from southern political donations, a refusal to allow northern representatives speaking rights in the Dáil, indicted that partition was not an immediate concern among the southern political establishment, despite their constant denunciations of it.<sup>39</sup>

The League also attempted to internationalize the issue. The return of Labour to power in Britain in 1945 encouraged campaigners' to believe that a united Ireland was an achievable goal. While a group of Labour MP's called Friends of Ireland worked closely

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<sup>37</sup> Donnacha Ó Beacháin, *Destiny of the soldiers: Fianna Fáil, Irish republicanism and the IRA, 1926-1973* (Dublin, 2010), p. 221.

<sup>38</sup> *Irish Times*, 8 Sept. 1980.

<sup>39</sup> Brendan Lynn, *Holding the ground: the Nationalist Party in Northern Ireland, 1945-72* (Aldershot, 1997), p. 49.

with the League initially to highlight issues of discrimination by the Stormont government, no moves were forthcoming from the Labour administration to bring partition to an end.<sup>40</sup> Irish people in Britain were seen as another possible weapon to be utilized.<sup>41</sup> The League established a central committee to organize activities such as holding public meetings in Britain. Anti-partition campaigning was also conducted in America. A campaigning group of Irish emigrants called The League for a Undivided Ireland collected 200,000 signatures which were presented to President Truman highlighting the existence of partition.<sup>42</sup>

There was an awareness of the Anti-Partition League among many of those interviewed in the Republic of Ireland which undoubtedly fed an interest on partition among future IRA members. Eamon Boyce from Drimnagh in Dublin, who worked in CIE in the early 1950s was one example. Jailed in 1954 for taking part in the Omagh barracks raid, he was released from Crumlin Road jail in 1961. Boyce indicated how the prominence of anti-partition discourse filtered down. He pointed to his acquaintance with Mattie O'Neill, a fellow CIE worker and former IRA internee from the 1940s, as well as the pervading anti-partition activity, as having a bearing on his decision to join the IRA in 1951. Describing the political environment at the time of his recruitment he recalled: 'At the same time the anti-partition association was very strong. It had as its patrons, TDs councillors... It deteriorated in the late 40s, they had one strong Cumann in Craobh

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<sup>40</sup>Brendan Lynn, *Holding the ground: the Nationalist Party in Northern Ireland, 1945-72* (Aldershot, 1997), p. 50.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid, p. 27.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid, p. 52.

Parnell. They held meeting every Saturday night in Abbey street and O'Connell street'.<sup>43</sup>

Another Dubliner, Paddy O'Regan from a non political family, when asked if he had an awareness of republicanism growing up, stated: 'No, no, not until the Anti-Partition League'.<sup>44</sup>

Tony Hayde from Drimnagh joined the IRA in 1954 and was later interned in the Curragh. Hayde pointed to a number of influencing factors that first interested him in republicanism; such as his family's interest in history and politics. He also illustrated how the wider anti-partition campaign had the potential to cultivate these other influences: 'Yes, I would have read a bit about that in the papers and 1949. I would have been only been about eleven. I would have heard about Noel Browne and Sean Mac Bride and the Republic being proclaimed. And a big thing in the Phoenix Park'.<sup>45</sup>

Indeed the anti-partition feeling which was generated south of the border had a different impact on the thinking of southerners that joined the IRA, than it did among members from the north. In Dublin where the campaign was strongest, some of the interviewees pointed to a more nationalist ideological outlook than those in the north. Discrimination against nationalists was not, initially at least, the overriding motivating factor for some southerners. When asked if he had an awareness of anti-Catholic discrimination in Northern Ireland at the time Mick Ryan, originally for East Wall stated: 'no, no, nothing'.<sup>46</sup> The territorial unity of Ireland certainly seemed to have been a more

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with Eamon Boyce (9 Feb. 2010).

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Paddy O'Regan (2 June 2011).

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Tony Hayde (2 Feb. 2011).

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Mick Ryan (2 Jan. 2012).

overriding concern which resulted in recruitment south of the border. Tony Hayde's response reflected this view also. He stated that the main reason he joined was due to the fact: 'That we had the British still here and that the fourth green field was still occupied'.<sup>47</sup> He added: 'I wanted to join the IRA and take part in getting the British out of Ireland. I probably had a very romantic attitude towards things. That was it. You just zero in on something'.<sup>48</sup> Phil Donoghue from Ballyfermot, who joined the IRA in the early 1950s and was involved in a number of operations before being imprisoned in the Curragh indicated that he had little awareness of the political situation in the north prior to joining.<sup>49</sup>

Another view articulated by people in the south suggested that the anti-partition campaign generated an almost utopian view of what society would look like when partition ended. Tony Meade a Limerick recruit who was jailed in Crumlin Road Prison in Belfast, described a feeling that existed among people at the time who felt that with an end to partition; 'on that great day all would be well with the world'.<sup>50</sup> Proinsias De Rossa intimated that the mainstream propaganda at the time contributed to a more general feeling that an end to partition would see an improvement in social conditions south of the border. De Rossa grew up in Dublin's north inner city; 'where there was poverty all round'.<sup>51</sup> He stated that; 'a lot of people felt that because of the North, the economy wasn't working, I believed that'.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Tony Hayde (2 Feb. 2011).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Phil Donoghue (26 June 2010).

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Tony Meade, in 'The Patriot Game', TG4 Documentary (March, 2007).

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Proinsias de Rossa, 'One on One', RTE (22 Sept. 2012).

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Phil Donoghue (26 June 2010).

While the anti-partition sentiment which was espoused by the Anti-Partition League as well as the political establishment distracted the population from examining the social and economic situation in order to maintain the status quo after independence, it also enhanced the appeal of the IRA. Ironically in this case, it had the effect of encouraging younger people to embrace the methods of the IRA, whose existence challenged the very basis of the state. Other Dublin activists such as Seán Garland also reflected this thinking. Garland was shot during the Brookborough raid in 1957 and imprisoned in both the Curragh and Crumlin Road jail during the border campaign. Garland grew up in chronic poverty and had been interested in communist literature prior to joining, but pointed out that, his crucial motivating reason for his initial political activism was to remove the border.<sup>53</sup>

Undoubtedly the anti-partition campaign in the north and the south played a role in exposing the apparent wrongs of partition to different sections of Irish society. The IRA and Sinn Féin critically engaged in the wider debate and offered its own ideological position that challenged the constitutional approach of the Anti-Partition League from 1948 onwards. The demise of the League and the new methods of exposing partition and utilizing propaganda, left a political motivated core of young people increasingly receptive to the IRA and Sinn Féin's position as well as its methods. In many ways the debate could be described as a battle between constitutional and radical nationalism, where the IRA challenged the motivation and the methods of those outside of the republican movement who called for an end to partition. In doing so they also tapped into a growing cynicism of parliamentarianism.

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Seán Garland (12 Jan. 2012).



While the Anti-Partition League had reinvigorated the political discourse around partition, Sinn Féin and the IRA highlighted a number of perceived weaknesses. The subsequent failure of the League to make any tangible progress in removing the border confirmed many of their arguments.

The League was accused of being an impotent political campaign which was reluctant to seriously challenge the British government on the issue. The republican movement argued that the League was driven by a private political agenda and that both governments 'will maintain their present attitude to partition and forge quietly and calmly ahead in the direction that serves their own purpose and interests'.<sup>54</sup> Sinn Féin and the IRA challenged the dominant nationalist ideology of the southern establishment as well as the constitutional leadership of the League.

The League was accused by Sinn Féin of being another brand of parliamentarianism that ultimately achieved very little. Historical comparisons were made. Sinn Féin claimed that the Emancipation Act in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was granted as a result of the threat of popular uprising and not by constitutional nationalism. They argued that the Tithe War and the Land War was successful as a result of its radical non-constitutional approach, while the rejection of Redmond in 1918 and the subsequent popular support for the IRA was further evidence of the impotency of parliamentarianism. Additionally they maintained

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<sup>54</sup> *United Irishman* June 1948.

that the anti-partition campaign was motivated by an ‘anti-republican and sectarian’ agenda.<sup>55</sup>

Interestingly, Brendan Lynn’s assessment that one of the principle failures of the League was the diversity of its membership was articulated by Sinn Féin at the time. The party believed that conflicting views over the issue of abstaining from Westminster by elected anti-partition candidates confirmed the lack of cohesiveness of the campaign. It was accurately predicted in the *United Irishman* as early as 1950 that the League could not maintain its momentum.<sup>56</sup>

The Anti-Partition League’s proposition to have a border poll was condemned by the IRA and Sinn Féin as being an utterly futile effort. Such a move according to republicans’ would only consolidate the unionist bloc. Indeed the subsequent election results proved this to be the case. Republicans believed that that running on an anti-partition platform would simply turn the election into a competition between anti-partition candidates and unionists. The gerrymandered foundation of the northern state ensured a unionist majority and that little impression would be made in respect of removing partition.<sup>57</sup>

The 1949 Mansion House Committee which was attended by all the main political parties as well as northern members was also criticized by Sinn Féin. Also mass demonstrations in Dublin to protest at the Government of Ireland Bill in 1949, were judged to be a

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<sup>55</sup> *United Irishman*, June 1950.

<sup>56</sup> *United Irishman*, June 1950.

<sup>57</sup> *United Irishman*, June 1948.

politically motivated.<sup>58</sup> The mass mobilisation not only elevated the issue but the ultimate failure of the protests again gave a certain level of credibility to Sinn Féin's criticisms. The fact that future IRA members such as Eamon Boyce had attended these meetings, indicated that young people were receptive to other forms of political protest prior to joining the IRA.<sup>59</sup> Others such as Tomás Mac Giolla and Sean Mac Stiofáin began their political involvement as members of the Anti-Partition League.

The republican movement was however keen to attract possible recruits from the broad based campaign movement, it claimed that the majority of people involved were manipulated by political leaders and maintained that 'there are good men and women in the anti-partition league movement, quite a number of them, but it is a scandal that their energy and enthusiasm should be cynically and sordidly misused'.<sup>60</sup>

The anti-partition campaign was the first introduction to politics for two of the IRA's most senior members who would play key roles in the organization in subsequent decades. Sean Mac Stiofáin, later to become an IRA Chief-of-Staff, and one of the founding members of the Provisional IRA, grew up in England, where his introduction to political activism began as a member of the Anti-Partition League in London in 1949. He became its branch secretary in Camden Town.<sup>61</sup> Mac Stiofáin claimed that the League in England was dominated by supporters of constitutional political parties and that that younger more radical members were ignored, he felt that the League in England;

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<sup>58</sup> *United Irishman*, July 1950.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Eamon Boyce (9 Feb. 2010).

<sup>60</sup> *United Irishman*, May. 1952.

<sup>61</sup> Seán Mac Stiofáin, *Memoirs of a revolutionary* (Edinburgh, 1975), p. 37.

‘hoodwinked a lot of genuine people who left when they began to suspect it was fake’.<sup>62</sup>

While this is a personal view, it does indicate the tension within the organization in England and between conflicting motivating reasons behind calls for an end to partition. It also highlights a cynicism, as well as a suspicion among younger activists that radical constitutional change, such as ending partition may not have been in the interests of an older and conservative led organization.

Nevertheless, it was through the campaign that Mac Stiofáin came:

In contact in London with a number of people who were selling the *United Irishman* at the time, the official organ of the republican movement. It was quite a small paper at the time, but there was good stuff in it, its views were more in line with my own and its contents were closer to what I had been looking for and had failed to find in the League.<sup>63</sup>

Mac Stiofáin’s disillusionment with the constitutional approach was transformed into support for republican separatism after reading the *United Irishman*. He recalled: ‘my eyes had been opened to the desperate hypocrisy and make believe of the Free State politicians, but this material helped me to see them more clearly’.<sup>64</sup> Mac Stiofáin’s response indicates how the IRA and Sinn Féin’s articulation of its anti-partition position not only exposed the shortcomings of the wider campaign but also how the IRA’s more radical approach challenged the motivation behind other groups’ calls to end partition.

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<sup>62</sup> Seán Mac Stiofáin , *Memoirs of a revolutionary* (Edinburgh, 1975), p. 37.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

Tomás Mac Giolla, later to become Sinn Féin president in the 1960s and an IRA army council member and one of the founding members of the Worker's Party, also came from a non-republican family. His father was T.P Gill a member of the Nationalist Party in Tipperary and a Fine Gael supporter. His introduction to politics was as a member of the mainstream anti-partition movement: 'At the time I took no active part in politics at all, but was nevertheless interested in doing something and thus came to attend some anti-partition meetings in O'Connell Street'.<sup>65</sup> Mac Giolla who added: 'There was an number of people who constantly voiced their dissatisfaction with the lack of any definitive policy or objective and who were naturally looking for some more concrete efforts of pressing their political views'.<sup>66</sup> While the Anti-Partition League may have attracted people from different backgrounds who viewed partition as being wrong for a number of different reasons, the faltering movement made an organization with a clear purpose and methods such as the IRA appealing. Mainstream nationalists calls to end partition, was viewed among some young people as a tool of constitutional conformity rather than a genuine attempt to actually remove the border.

The anti-partition campaign in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and among the Irish diaspora was in many ways a broad church that appealed to different sections of nationalist Ireland, at home and abroad. The inability of the northern state to engage at any level with the demands of the group also contributed to its decline. Nonetheless, it did for some future IRA members stimulate or compliment an already existing interest in politics that would evolve in to full IRA membership by the early 1950s. Indeed, the

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with Tomás Mac Giolla, *United Irishman* (Jan. 1966).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

multi-dimensional reasons why partition was seen as unjust, as promoted by the League, was mirrored by many new members who joined the IRA. Removing partition was a key motivating factor for those who joined. However it could be surmised that, to those who lived in Northern Ireland, partition was viewed as the root cause of discrimination, while some of its southern members viewed it from a more nationalist ideological perspective, that the border needed to be removed before Ireland could prosper. Indeed the IRA's unconstitutional approach and its clear nationalist led ideological position was elevated in the wider anti-partition discourse which ultimately directed some with a motivation for removing partition, from a constitutional position towards the IRA.

### **Clann na Poblachta**

In 1946 a new political party, Clann Na Poblachta was established by former IRA Chief-of-Staff Sean MacBride. The party was 'made up of anti-treaty republicans no longer satisfied with either the IRA or Fianna Fáil'.<sup>67</sup> In the 1948 election, it received thirteen per cent of the national vote and saw ten of its candidates elected as TD's. In the same year it entered into a Fine Gael led coalition which lasted until 1951. In the 1951 general election the party suffered a devastating defeat, where its number of TD's was reduced to two. Clann na Poblachta never recuperated from this electoral setback and was later dissolved in the 1960s.

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<sup>67</sup> Eoin Ó Broin, *Sinn Féin and the politics of left republicanism* (New York, 2009), p. 142.

Clann na Poblachta's 1948 election success was the first significant backlash to Fianna Fáil since it entered the constitutional process in 1926. The rise and subsequent demise of the party exposed the limitations of constitutionalism to a traditional republican constituency. Clann na Poblachta offered what could be described as a left-wing type of republicanism where 'partition, underdevelopment, inequality and corruption were central themes'.<sup>68</sup> The emergence of former IRA members to establish Clann na Poblachta in 1946 also added to the reinvigoration of anti-partition sentiment across the political spectrum. F.S.L Lyons describes the political philosophy of the party as a combination of 'republican orthodoxy with social radicalism'.<sup>69</sup> The party's objectives of ending partition as well as a relatively radical social programme advocated by a younger generation of politicians not only offered a fresh perspective on economic and social conditions but also challenged other political parties approach and motivation in calling for the reunification of Ireland.

The verbal republicanism of others was genuinely challenged by the new post-Civil War party. The new party from 1946 onwards set forth a number of new initiatives to end partition. Ending it was part of a wider republican agenda which questioned the economic and social status quo both sides of the border. Speaking at a party meeting in 1948 in Cavan, Sean MacBride challenged the rhetoric of politicians such as De Valera whom he accused of 'giving lip service to it, on the other hand, for the last twenty five years or so they have consolidated partition'.<sup>70</sup> He also added that northern nationalists had been

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<sup>68</sup> Eoin Ó Broin, *Sinn Féin and the politics of left republicanism* (New York, 2009), p. 143.

<sup>69</sup> F.S.L Lyons, 'The years of readjustment 1941-51' in K.B. Nowlan and T.D. Williams (eds) *Ireland in the war years and after, 1939-1945* (Dublin, 1969), p. 69.

<sup>70</sup> *Irish Press*, 22 Jan. 1948.

deserted by southern politicians.<sup>71</sup> It should also be noted that Clann na Poblachta had links to a republican militant group Saor Uladh in the 1950s. Its leader Liam Kelly was appointed to the Seanad in 1954 by Sean MacBride, which further illustrates a genuine motivation and pro-active position on national reunification by the party.

Prospective IRA leaders, such as Tomás Mac Giolla, were initially interested in the new constitutional republican party. Mac Giolla stated that: ‘I was to the extent of attending their meetings and listening to what they said and discussing it with others and saying what should be done’.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, the ultimate failure of the new party to utilize the constitutional process to achieve tangible gains on partition or on other issues, accentuated the appeal of the IRA approach to young people such as Mac Giolla, who had no association with militant republicanism up to this point.

One Leitrim person interviewed, whose father had established a local Fianna Fáil cumann in his locality in 1926, had supported Clann na Poblachta in 1948.<sup>73</sup> The Clann’s relatively radical social programme combined with its genuine anti-partition stance was endorsed by a disillusioned rural and working class republican constituency. They also challenged the motivation behind the dominant nationalist ideology of the other main political parties, such as Fianna Fáil who had taken no practical steps while in office to remove the border.

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<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth Keane, *Sean Mc Bride: a life* (Dublin, 2007), p. 98.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Tomás Mac Giolla, *United Irishman* (Jan. 1966).

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Leitrim Person (2 Mar. 2012).



The party also reflected new thinking on what ways the border could be brought to an end and how an improvement of social conditions on a thirty-two county basis could supplement this approach. In opposition the party advocated allowing northern representatives access to Leinster house.<sup>74</sup> MacBride tried to alleviate unionists fears about the southern state by offering to guarantee civil and religious liberties.<sup>75</sup> It should be noted that MacBride also spoke in favor of having some level of cross border cooperation with Northern Ireland in a more gradual approach to lessen the effects of partition.<sup>76</sup> When in government MacBride with others established the Irish News Agency to publicize the issue of partition internationally.<sup>77</sup> The party also believed that unless the social welfare system in the Republic of Ireland improved and equaled the system north of the border, a united Ireland was unlikely.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless when in government from 1948 to 1951, Clann na Poblachta's influence and innovative thinking in regards to partition was impotent in making any practical inroads in removing the border. The party did represent a genuine ideological position that combined both a left of centre outlook in terms of economic thinking with a strong nationalist position, in stark contrast to some of the other mainstream political leaders whose anti-partition rhetoric was not matched with practical ways to remove partition and improve living standards for the people on the island.

The failure to make an impact on partition was an index of how limited the constitutional process was in effecting radical change in terms of partition or on a range of other issues

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<sup>74</sup> Elizabeth Keane, *Sean MacBride: a life* (Dublin, 2007), p. 98.

<sup>75</sup> *Irish Times*, 8 March 1949.

<sup>76</sup> Elizabeth Keane, *Sean MacBride: a life* (Dublin, 2007), pp 130-131.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p. 134.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, p. 98.

by a modern republican constitutional party. The republican movement identified this and tapped into any dissatisfaction which existed among a new generation about the ability to effect any meaningful change within the constitutional process. By and large, there seemed to have been a relative degree of sympathy among some of those interviewed with Clann na Poblachta, which was seen as representing the interests of working class people, small farmers and grass root republicans. By becoming a constitutional party Sinn Féin argued that the Clann had immediately become powerless in any campaign to end partition or indeed to effect radical social change. MacBride was accused of being subsumed in to a parliamentary establishment that could never remove the border.<sup>79</sup>

The republican movement criticized much of the party's new thinking. MacBride as Minister for External Affairs was condemned for not using the southern army to attack the border. MacBride who was instrumental in establishing the Mansion House Committee was also ridiculed for achieving absolutely no progress on the issue but simply collecting petitions to fund an impotent campaign north of the border.<sup>80</sup>

The development of attractive social conditions in the south which was advocated, not just by Clann na Poblachta, but also the Labour Party was, according to Sinn Féin was pointless. Innovative thinking on the partition issue was simply dismissed out of hand. Sinn Féin stated that no inducement was needed to attract one third of the population into a united Ireland. It added that the rest of the people living in Northern Ireland who did enjoy a better social service were from the unionist community and 'taking in to account

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<sup>79</sup> *United Irishman*, June 1950.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

what is know of the attitude of these people and the influence and mentality behind it towards an all Ireland government, it is surprising to seriously suggest, that even were they free to choose their opposition to a united Ireland, would be overcome or even lessened in the event of social services in the Free State rising to the same level as those obtain in the six counties'.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, Sinn Féin did not question the motivation behind Clann na Poblachta's calls to end partition, what they did do however, was to highlight how they had been subsumed into a constitutional process that neutralised their radical position. Their abject failure to make an impact on partition being attested to this according to the republican movement.

Micheal Farrell argues that Clann Na Poblachta's social policies 'were vague but radical'.<sup>82</sup> While they may have been vague in policy detail, they did attempt to articulate a type of left wing republican position which obviously included an end to partition.<sup>83</sup> Their evolution into the constitutional arena certainly challenged the established parties and in particular Fianna Fáil's position as the unchallenged constitutional republican party, as well as magnifying party political opportunism behind calls for an end to partition among the political establishment parties.

However, their loss of support can be viewed as a result of tactical immaturity by entering into coalition with the nemesis of traditional republicanism Fine Gael in 1948, rather than the evaporation of a left of centre republican constituency.<sup>84</sup> The fact that

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<sup>81</sup> *United Irishman*, June 1948.

<sup>82</sup> Micheal Farrell, *Northern Ireland: the orange state* (London, 1976), p. 182.

<sup>83</sup> Eoin Ó Broin, *Sinn Féin and the politics of left republicanism* (New York, 2009), p. 143.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, p147.

some young people such as Tomás Mac Giolla as well as others initially flirted with the idea of joining the party, coupled with the significant vote they got in the 1948 election, offered an attractive option for pursuing an anti-partition position which also embodied an egalitarian aspect to it. Nevertheless, the political system neutralized the relatively radical republicanism of Clann na Poblachta, as it had with Fianna Fáil beforehand.

The failure of the party was one of the most significant factors in the emergence of Sinn Féin and the IRA in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Ireland. Some future members, who shared similar ideals, ended up being attracted by the arguments of republican armed separatism. Had the party cultivated its radical republican appeal after the 1948 election, it possibly could have taken the gun out of republican politics for another generation. Instead, the IRA's arguments about the failure of the constitutional process to effect change were vindicated in regards to partition, which in turn made their ideology and their methods an attractive political alternative.

### **Fine Gael**

Fine Gael which led the inter-party government between 1948 and 1951, illustrated how anti-partition became part of southern political environment by the late 1940s. The party which originated from Cumann na nGaedheal, had according to John Regan, ultimately been concerned with maintaining the status quo and that their election manifestos in the 1920s rarely mentioned the partition issue.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> John Regan, *The Irish counter revolution , 1922-1936* (Dublin, 1999), p. 147.

Therefore the Declaration of the Republic by Fine Gael Taoiseach John A. Costello in 1949, witnessed a significant shift towards a new public manifestation of republicanism. According to Ó Beacháin, the announcement of the Republic was calculated to ‘achieve maximum advantage to Fine Gael in the conflict as to who were the better republicans’.<sup>86</sup> The Declaration of the Republic coupled with their ongoing anti-partition rhetoric, was it could be argued, yet another exercise in political opportunism. The fact that the former pro-commonwealth party was now seen as leading anti-partitionists’ undoubtedly helped nurture an anti-partition sentiment.

The case could also be made that ending of partition would obviously challenge the status quo, therefore challenging the interests of a section of the Fine Gael constituency. As a result, the existence of partition was not a central issue in the eyes of the Fine Gael elite, but that an evolving political discourse particularly after the rise of Fianna Fáil in 1932, demanded a degree of verbal anti-partition rhetoric by the party. Certainly, being anti-partition, may have been a key ideological tenet for the more radical republican policies of Clann na Poblachta, but it was also part of a dominant political discourse among the southern political establishment parties such as Fine Gael, who it could be argued condemned it out of political necessity rather than genuinely wanting to see it abolished.

Nevertheless, among grass roots and in particular rural Fine Gael supporters the perceived unfairness of partition was reinforced at the time. One Leitrim member who had a vague recollection of Anti-Partition League described how he felt a general feeling

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<sup>86</sup> Donnacha O Beacháin, *Destiny of the soldiers: Fianna Fail, Irish republicanism and the IRA, 1926-1973* (Dublin, 2010), p. 219.

prevailed in the early 1950s among his neighbors who were mainly Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael supporters that ‘Ireland was one unit’ and that partition was wrong.<sup>87</sup>

It is also worth noting that some IRA members such as Tony Hayde and Paddy O’Regan came from backgrounds where they had a parent who was a Fine Gael supporter. Sean Ó Brádaigh who became one of the republican movement’s ideologues latter on, indicated that in rural areas in particular, the IRA often had the use of safe houses provided by Fine Gael grassroots supporters.<sup>88</sup> While the Fine Gael leadership’s new anti-partition position may have been motivated for strategic interests, or as a reflection of a conservative nationalism, there was a sneaking regard for the IRA among some of its supporters. Nevertheless, the IRA and Sinn Féin’s criticism that only armed separatism could end partition and not the constitutional approach, resonated among at least a small section of a Fine Gael constituency, who had conflicting views about armed republicanism by the 1950s.

Therefore it was in the interests of the republican movement to expose the leadership of the party and their motivation for calling for an end to partition, rather than attacking its rank and file. Sinn Féin criticized the Fine Gael leadership’s reinvention of itself in the early 1950s. The Declaration of the Republic and the celebrations to mark it was described as a charade to deceive the public. The *United Irishman* contended that despite rhetoric of the government about partition, Ireland was not a Republic and partition was

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<sup>87</sup>Interview with Leitrim Person (2 Mar. 2010).

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Seán O’Brádaigh (2 Feb. 2010).

as entrenched as ever.<sup>89</sup> At a Fine Gael function in county Cavan, it was claimed that the party had successfully internationalized the issue. This was ridiculed by Sinn Féin, which maintained that the Declaration of the Republic was the limit of Fine Gael's republicanism. The fact some from Fine Gael backgrounds joined the IRA and others gave logistical support demonstrates a degree of disillusionment with constitutionalism by the 1950s, caused by establishment parties using the issue of partition out of political opportunism.

### **Fianna Fáil**

Fianna Fáil was established in 1926. Its membership and support base was originally drawn from the anti-treaty IRA from the Civil War. Its success in becoming the biggest political party in the state, as well as the fact that it governed between 1932 and 1948 was quite an astonishing feat given the condition that anti-treaty republicanism found itself in the aftermath of the civil war.

In opposition from 1948 to 1951, Fianna Fáil's main objective was to reassert itself as the only republican party that could end partition. Evidence of practical ways to end it was secondary to an avalanche of rhetoric by De Valera in opposition. In this respect Fianna Fáil mirrored Fine Gael's approach where the issue of partition became a political football. While it could be argued that Fianna Fáil had in 1932, won an election on the basis of a relatively radical economic and republican program for government, it could also be judged that by the 1940s, it had become the greatest defender of the constitutional

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<sup>89</sup> *United Irishman*, Jan. 1949.

southern state, the execution of IRA prisoners in the 1940s by a Fianna Fáil government being the most obvious example of this.

Fianna Fáil had become part of the ruling elite by the 1940s. An end to partition challenged Fianna Fáil hegemony which had consolidated the southern state by the end of the war. Therefore partition suited the party, in that its existence enabled Fianna Fáil to flex its verbal republican muscle, while its superficial obsession with partition, masked deeper faults with the southern state three decades after independence.<sup>90</sup> Ironically, calls for national reunification by Fianna Fáil, it could be argued, were used to forestall change in Irish society and prevented a deeper economic and social questioning about the nature of southern Irish society three decades after independence. While Fianna Fáil's anti-partition populism may have subdued its working class and rural bases to a degree, some younger people from Fianna Fáil backgrounds who had an awareness of its anti-partition rhetoric, gradually saw the IRA and Sinn Féin as a more genuine alternative.

Mairín De Burca whose parents were Fianna Fáil supporters pointed out that her motivation for joining Sinn Féin in 1954 and later Cumann na mBan was a 'Brits out' attitude, while also stating that she had huge admiration for De Valera as a child.<sup>91</sup> The anti-partition rhetoric espoused by De Valera certainly impacted on her thinking as a young person, however she joined Sinn Féin in Newbridge in county Kildare as a result. When asked why she didn't join Fianna Fáil, she stated: 'I don't know, I quite liked Dev for a while, I don't know, I suppose, I felt they were not quite as serious as Sinn Féin. De

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<sup>90</sup> Kieran Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour, from 1926 to the Present* (Dublin, 1997), p. 82.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Mairín De Burca (2 June 2011).



Valera was always going on about partition and that. I don't know, that's a good question, it never occurred to me to join Fianna Fáil, not once'.<sup>92</sup> An organization with a clear method of removing partition such as Sinn Féin and the IRA had a receptive audience among teenagers from Fianna Fáil backgrounds.

De Valera's anti-partition posturing was far-reaching. He commenced on a world tour in 1949 where he publically condemned the continuation of partition at every available opportunity. Lee and O'Tuathaigh states that the tour was for all intents and purposes cynical electioneering.<sup>93</sup> The party's dubious position about a broad front campaign suggests that the existence of partition served the interests of Fianna Fáil.<sup>94</sup> Visits to America, India, Australia, New Zealand and Britain witnessed De Valera use emotive rhetoric on the issue in contrast to demonstrating tangible ways to create a united Ireland. For example in 1949 he stated; 'the phrase "partition must go" must henceforth be on every Irishman's lips, to be used on every appropriate occasion, that is, in season and out of season, until the continuing crime against our country shall have ceased'.<sup>95</sup>

On regaining office in 1951, Fianna Fáil offered no practical proposals for ending partition. Independent TD Jack McQuillan described the Fianna Fáil government policy with regard to removing the border as 'hoping for a miracle'.<sup>96</sup> Despite its perpetual rhetoric, the party at times acted as an obstacle to the efforts of the Anti-Partition League.

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<sup>92</sup> Interview with Mairín De Burca (2 June 2011).

<sup>93</sup> Joseph, Lee and Gearoid Ó Tuathaigh, *The age of De Valera* (Dublin, 1982), p. 109.

<sup>94</sup> Kieran Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour, from 1926 to the present* (Dublin, 1997), p. 82.

<sup>95</sup> Donnacha O' Beacháin, *Destiny of the soldiers: Fianna Fáil, Irish republicanism and the IRA, 1926-1973* (Dublin, 2010), p. 221.

<sup>96</sup> *Parliamentary Debates: Dail Eireann; Official Report*, 126/2024 (19 July 1951).

Funds which had been given to the League were stopped by the new administration. Allowing northern representatives speaking rights was rejected out of hand, while De Valera refused to give any type of leadership to those agitating around the issue.<sup>97</sup> De Valera's outright rejection of other attempts to end partition was also matched with ambiguous rhetoric on how the issue could be brought to a successful conclusion. At the 1951 Ard Féis De Valera stated: 'It can be done by our saying that it is our national duty to do it and to make whatever necessary sacrifices are entailed in the effort'.<sup>98</sup>

While the ritual condemnations of partition were a feature of Fianna Fáil Ard Fheiseanna, any practical means to end it were absent. Ambiguous pronouncements by De Valera offered no clear alternative. Ó Beacháin states that in opposition 'partition became the subject of auction politics and that the party simply sought to outbid its opponents'.<sup>99</sup>

De Valera's and Fianna Fáil's anti-partition rhetoric while in opposition from 1948 to 1951 was ferociously challenged by the republican movement who claimed that the partition issue was used for political gain. Indeed it was important for Sinn Féin and the IRA to expose the failure of the leadership of Fianna Fáil to make progress on the issue considering a significant section of its grass roots membership may have felt strongly on the issue.

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<sup>97</sup> Donnacha O' Beacháin, *Destiny of the Soldiers: Fianna Fáil, Irish republicanism and the IRA, 1926-1973* (Dublin, 2010), p. 225.

<sup>98</sup> *Irish Times*, 7 Nov. 1951.

<sup>99</sup> Donnacha O' Beacháin, *Destiny of the soldiers: Fianna Fail, Irish republicanism and the IRA, 1926-1973* (Dublin, 2010), p. 380.

The letters page of the *United Irishman* illuminated the degree of contempt that some of its readers had towards the Fianna Fáil leadership and how they viewed De Valera. A northern contributor attacked De Valera's motives. Neil Gillespie from Derry argued that in opposition De Valera went 'here there and everywhere. The theme of the talks in those places was the partition of Ireland. Now back in office he tells us he can do sweet all about it'.<sup>100</sup> De Valera was accused of using the issue for political benefit alongside Costello and being more concerned about maintaining the status quo. The same contributor argued that an almost cult status had developed around De Valera among many nationalists who were oblivious to his lack of genuine commitment.

It is worth noting that many of those interviewed came from Fianna Fáil backgrounds. However it was the executions of IRA prisoners in the 1940s that raised the first serious misgivings over Fianna Fáil's republican position in the eyes of a younger generation, who increasingly saw them as defenders of the southern state rather than being a genuine republican party committed to a united Ireland. For example Mairín De Burca stated that, while she initially has an admiration for De Valera, the execution of republican prisoners unmasked his real intentions of stabilizing the status quo: 'When I read about him executing Republicans in the 40s, it was hard to take him serious as a republican when he was killing republicans'.<sup>101</sup> Her comments also magnify a generational chasm between her parents generation and a new generation whose disillusionment with constitutionalist nationalism saw support evolve towards republican separatism.

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<sup>100</sup> *United Irishman*, Sept. 1951.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Mairín De Burca (2 June. 2011).

In other cases some of the older generation also lost all confidence. Tony Hayde recalled that his mother was; ‘was sympathetic to Fianna Fáil when it was founded. When they executed republicans in the war she was anti De Valera’ .<sup>102</sup> De Valera and Fianna Fáil were seen among some as the arch traitors who used republican rhetoric as well as the executions of IRA prisoners in order to stabilize the southern state. Also the demise of Clann na Poblachta was significant in that it left a void that would be filled by a younger generation committed to armed struggle. Hayde stated: ‘we were going to use the gun, we were going to get the Brits out. We weren’t too fond of politicians, we saw politicians as De Valera and people like that, Frank Aiken, who all fought the Tans now they were stopping us from doing what they used to be doing’.<sup>103</sup> The separatist ideology of the republican movement which did not recognize Leinster house and was committed to an armed campaign offered a form of political activism that was uncorrupted by the constitutional process in the eyes of young people.

Seán Lynch from Longford, who was interested in the issue of partition as a young person also demonstrated an absolute disillusionment with the mainstream political parties in the aftermath of the anti-partition campaign. While there may have been a widespread belief that the large political rallies and pronouncements instigated by political leaders about partition were genuine, many young people felt this was not the case. Indeed the arguments made by Ó Beacháin about the ‘auction politicians’ of partition was reflected in the thinking of some young people at the time. Sean Lynch dismissed the motives of political parties of the period: ‘Well sure I wasn’t long realizing

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<sup>102</sup> Interview Tony Hayde (2 Feb. 2011).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

it was only talk. We heard about the stepping stones from Fine Gael but nothing ever happened. Fianna Fáil got in and the same nothing ever happened'.<sup>104</sup> The re-emergence of the IRA and Sinn Féin, exposed the dominant thinking of southern establishment parties and their motivation for constantly referring to partition. Thirty years after independence a new generation fed on a diet of anti- partition sentiment was now looking back to the promise of the revolutionary generation of the 1920s to achieve its end. The new IRA and Sinn Féin claimed they offered an avenue to achieve this and one that was not corrupted by former revolutionaries turned constitutionalist nationalists.

## **Labour**

The goal of Irish reunification was also enthusiastically embraced by the Irish Labour Party by the 1950s. The party was first established in 1912 by James Connolly and other members of the Irish Trade Union Congress. While it remained neutral during the Civil War, Gallagher argues that by 1957 Labour was strongly opposed to partition.<sup>105</sup> Despite the wide diversity of opinion within the wider Labour movement, the emerging anti- partition discourse in the late 1940s not only became a feature of Labour policy, but also had consequences for Labour politics across the island. The party which had been organized on an all Ireland basis had split in 1924, which saw the formation of the Labour Party of Northern Ireland and the Irish Labour Party. Both preserved a degree of cooperation through the establishment of a joint council which operated intermittently over the subsequent twenty five years.<sup>106</sup> The increased focus that the Irish Labour Party placed on partition witnessed the LP (NI) seeking to become a regional council of the

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<sup>104</sup> Interview with Sean Lynch (4 Apr. 2011).

<sup>105</sup> Michael Gallagher, *The Irish Labour Party in transition* (Dublin 1982), p. 128.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, p. 131.

British Labour Party.<sup>107</sup> By 1949 the Irish Labour Party embarked on establishing an all Ireland party with branches in Northern Ireland where the party's social policy was matched with an increasingly anti-partition bent. Under the leadership of William Norton Labour Party spokespeople had become an outspoken critic of partition.

In contrast the LP(NI) were in favour of maintaining the union. The ideological and religious polarization which existed in the north between the two communities coupled with the fact that the LP(NI) supported partition resulted in nationalists withdrawing support for the party. However, Arran Edwards maintains that the party did attract membership from Catholic backgrounds in the 1950s. This view is challenged by Brian Feeney who argues that 'there was never any loyalty to the party among nationalists because it repeatedly let them down on critical identity issues'.<sup>108</sup> It should be noted that in the constituency of West Belfast, that had a strong tradition of republicanism was represented by Harry Diamond, an independent socialist republican who had no association with the LP(NI). Diamond also refused to take part in a meeting in 1945 to establish the Anti-Partition League and described the Nationalist Party candidates during the anti-partition period as a 'middle-class party with no regard for the full rights of workers'.<sup>109</sup>

Some of those who ended up joining the IRA came from Labour Party backgrounds. Tony Hayde described his mother as a 'republican minded' person who had initially

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, p. 132.

<sup>108</sup> Aaron Edwards and Erskine Holmes, *History Ireland*, vol.17, no.5 (Sept. Oct. 2009), pp14-p15.

<sup>109</sup> Brendan Lynn 'The Irish anti-partition league and the political realities of partition, 1945-49' *Irish historical studies*, vol. 34, no. 135 (May, 2005), p. 326.

voted Fianna Fáil but later supported Labour. Hayde was also close to his uncle Bill Gannon who was a communist and had a significant influence on his developing interest in politics. Labour politics and republican politics were regularly discussed at home. Hayde later followed Seamus Costello into the socialist organization the IRSP and the INLA in 1974. Nevertheless, it was the IRA and Sinn Féin whom he felt were the most genuine political activists at the time because of their willingness to use armed action.<sup>110</sup>

Rita Whelan who joined Sinn Féin and later Cumann na mBan came from a Labour Party background. She stated that: ‘Our family always voted Labour’.<sup>111</sup> She said that her father; ‘was very much a Jim Larkin man and a Connolly man. He was not a very political man. The first thing he asked you when you got a job was did you join the union. Jim Larkin to him was great man and Connolly and my mother was the same’.<sup>112</sup>

Indeed, others from working class areas in Dublin such as Mick Ryan, also remembers listening to his father speaking about Jim Larkin as a child: ‘my father would talk about James Larkin and was great admirer of him’.<sup>113</sup> Indeed with the prevalence of poverty in Dublin at the time, one would think that the Labour Party would have produced a natural home for would be political activists. Yet it was the IRA who they chose to join. In Kildare Paddy O’Neill also came from a family where his father was a strong Labour supporter.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Interview Tony Hayde (2 Feb. 2011).

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Rita Whelan (2 June 2011).

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Mick Ryan (2 Jan. 2012).

<sup>114</sup> Interview with Paddy O Neill (2 Sept. 2011).

At times the rhetoric from some of the Labour Party was indistinguishable from republican rhetoric espoused by other political parties in terms of partition. Officially the Labour Party shared the predominant belief that Ireland was a thirty two county nation and that partition was undemocratically imposed by the British government. This position was often articulated by party leader William Norton in the late 1940s. Norton's view of what represented the legitimate Irish nation echoed the thinking at the time. In 1947 Norton stated 'Geographically and historically Ireland is one nation the six north eastern counties are indissolubly united geographically. Economically, Derry City is essential to the prosperity of Donegal as London is essential to Kent. Cave Hill is a much part of Ireland as the McGillicuddy Reeks'.<sup>115</sup> However unlike the rhetoric of other political parties such as Fianna Fáil, the Labour Party did try and present the aspiration to end partition as part of a wider class struggle. Norton described the Northern Ireland state as a 'Tory Fortress' and an instrument of British imperialism that worked against the interests of the working class.<sup>116</sup>

The *Irish People*, which was the official organ of the Labour movement raised the issue of partition on several occasions in the late 1940s. The paper offered some fresh perspectives. One edition in the late 1940s, dedicated most of its coverage to the causes and removal of partition. Harold J Laski, a British Labour activist contributed an article on partition. Many of his views were endorsed by other contributors to the paper. Laski claimed that partition resulted in the creation of two reactionary states in both in the north and the south of Ireland. He felt its continued existence inhibited the development of the

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<sup>115</sup> *Irish People*, 5 Apr. 1947.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*



natural economy and corrupted the education system.<sup>117</sup> Laski also claimed that the border had created a plutocracy in both states whose real objectives was to maintain the status quo and that religious differences were manipulated by the establishment in order to maintain their position.<sup>118</sup>

It should be noted that some within the Labour Party did dissent from the strong anti-partition rhetoric of the party leadership. In 1948 an article appeared in the *Irish People* which warned that that the constant anti-partition rhetoric only served to prolong the partition of Ireland. The contributor stated that the goal of uniting the working class across the Island had been damaged by calls for an immediate end to the border, and that this type of rhetoric frightened the Protestant working class. It was stated that every pronouncement and speech about partition ‘added another brick on the border wall’.<sup>119</sup> The contributor argued that the job of Labour was not to regurgitate anti-partition rhetoric, but rather to reach out to working class Protestants by talking about ‘economic security, and the right of every man women and child to a state supplied loaf of bread’.<sup>120</sup>

As part of the inter-party government from 1948 until 1951, the Labour Party supported a number of anti-partition initiatives. The focus on working class solidarity as part of the party’s anti-partition stance declined and was replaced with a more mainstream approach to resolving the issue. In 1949 William Norton attended the Anti-Partition League conference along with other political leaders. The Ireland Act in 1949, which enshrined

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<sup>117</sup> *Irish People*, 5 Apr. 1947.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Irish People*, 6 Mar. 1948.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

consent in to the Northern Ireland constitution, witnessed a strong reaction by southern politicians. A joint Dáil motion was also signed by all the main party leaders which condemned the act.<sup>121</sup> In August 1949, Norton used the Council of Europe meeting to highlight the continuation of partition and condemned the British governments hypocritical role in Ireland describing it as a ‘hundred years of persecution’, he added that the ‘territory belongs today as it did in the past fifteen hundred years to the Irish people and no others’.<sup>122</sup>

It could be argued that its failure to remove partition was reflective of its inability to address a range of social and economic issues which effected working class people in the eyes of some younger activists. Rita Whelan had began her political activism in Labour Youth. ‘I was in the Labour Youth with Dominic Behan and all, for a good while’.<sup>123</sup> Yet by the late 1940s she had become a member of the republican movement. Rita Whelan described herself ‘as always Labour minded’ and indicated that joining the republican movement was a radical step given the political and social context of the time. She maintained that: ‘There was a lot of very radical people in it and a lot of ultra nationalists’.<sup>124</sup>

The rhetoric of the Labour Party in terms of partition is another example of Ó Beacháin’s view, that over a number of years all the political parties tried to present themselves as

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<sup>121</sup> *Irish Times*, 10 May 1949.

<sup>122</sup> *Irish Times*, 17 Aug. 1949.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Rita Whelan (2 June 2011).

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

the most vociferous anti-partition party.<sup>125</sup> Initially they tried to present partition as part of a working class struggle but ultimately ended up espousing populist rhetoric. The debate which took place within the Labour Party highlights the degree of ideological confusion which had beset the party. On one hand some of its membership were strongly opposed to partition, while on the other some argued that the partition debate was a distraction from the real issues which affected the working class.

The fact that those from working class backgrounds, who would possibly had been attracted or whose parents were attracted to the politics of the Labour Party emphasised how partition was elevated as the key injustice in Ireland in the 1950s. Indeed it could be argued that along with Clann na Poblachta, sections of the Labour Party did at times attempt to present ending partition as part of a wider programme which benefited the working class and when this failed the IRA and Sinn Féin filled the void.

### **Radical right and radical left**

Groups on the radical right and radical left also offered a critique against the continuation of partition up until the 1950s. It should be noted that those in the republican movement who were members of these radical groups consisted of a tiny section of the membership. Nevertheless, the IRA and Sinn Féin attracted some members from these diverse political extremes. Tom Doyle, who was party president of Sinn Féin, as well as other members, were influenced by the ideological right wing fascist group *Altirí na hAiséirghe*, in the

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<sup>125</sup> Donnacha Ó Beacháin, *Destiny of the soldiers: Fianna Fail, Irish republicanism and the IRA, 1926-1973* (Dublin, 2010), p. 380.

1940s.<sup>126</sup> The group was opposed to partition and it has been argued offered a ‘uniquely Irish variant of radical right wing ideas’.<sup>127</sup>

The communist organization the Irish Workers League, which was established after the release of socialist republicans from the Curragh in the late 1940s, offered a strong anti-partition stance. Partition was seen as preventing the establishment of a socialist based society on the island of Ireland. Indeed, in the early 1950s, the Irish Workers League examined ways of creating a broad front with republicans. While the republican movement rejected these approaches, it does give an indication of how radical groups viewed the potential radicalism of republican separatism as part of a wider struggle to bring down the constitutional arrangements both sides of the border.

The Irish Workers League was led by Irish communist and former IRA member Micheal O’Riordan. From the early 1950s they raised partition as the key issue impeding the establishment of a communist society in Ireland. An editorial in its monthly bulletin in 1951, called for ‘unity with Republican forces’.<sup>128</sup> Publications by the Workers League constantly placed a focus on the importance of removing partition. In 1952, P. Carr called for ‘the establishment of a united independent Ireland and a democratic Republic for all Ireland. We shall see this as a necessary step in the road to socialism’.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Matt Treacy, *The IRA 1956-1969: rethinking the Republic* (Manchester, 2011), p. 33.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>128</sup> IWL, *Education bulletin*, January 1951. Box 3 CPI

<sup>129</sup> IWL, *Education bulletin*, January 1952 Box 3/065 CPI.

Despite the republican movement's stated anti-communist position, some members of the IRA who joined in the 1950s were also members of the communist Irish Workers League. Seamus Murphy from Kildare, who was jailed in 1955 for his part in the Arborfield raid, was also member of the IRA, as well as the IWL.<sup>130</sup> The appeal of the IRA to elements from the radical left and right, demonstrates the possibilities of how a nationalist led republican movement which existed outside the confines of the constitutional process, presented a viable route to a variety of individuals and groups, who wanted to see an end to partition for a range of different reasons.

### **Approach to ending partition and its attraction to a new generation.**

While partition meant different things to different groups and while it may have suited some and not others it had by the beginning of the 1950s been elevated as the ultimate issue facing the Irish nation. A rejuvenated Sinn Féin which entered the political debate from the late 1940s exposed the motivation behind some of its most vocal opponents. It also demonstrated the limited degree of change that constitutional nationalism had achieved on the issue. In Northern Ireland, the failure of the anti-partition campaign to make any progress simply saw its support transfer to imprisoned IRA candidates by 1955. Mick Timoney an IRA member from Derry articulated the frustration of young activists at the time who felt that the anti-partition campaign; 'provided Irish politicians of all parties, north and south with material for speeches and excuses for either an unwillingness or inability to solve emigration, unemployment and a seeming lethargy'.<sup>131</sup> The ideology of a free thirty-two county nation state and the idea of 'The Republic' as

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<sup>130</sup> Interview with Seamus Murphy (2 Feb. 2011).

<sup>131</sup> Sean Cronin, *Irish nationalism: a history of its roots and ideology* (Dublin, 1980), p. 174.

the beginning of a radical transformation of society was the underpinning motivating factor in Timoney's case. While different strands of new recruits saw partition as a malignant force for a variety of reasons, a collective consensus formed around the idea of the creation of a new Republic.

The nationalist emphasis of the republican movement also had an added appeal to youth which constitutionalism had not, which was its resort to arms. As in the 1920s many that joined the IRA in certain areas were young people whose parents supported constitutional nationalism. Armed action seemed like a more tangible or exciting form of political activism for the younger generation.<sup>132</sup> The same phenomenon was replicated in the 1950s. This does not necessarily mean that young people who joined the IRA were devoid of ideological motivation. However, the use of armed struggle in the eyes of impatient youth seemed a quicker and tangible way of ending it, while undoubtedly the appeal of a republican militant tradition added to this. Nevertheless, it should be said that the political and social context in which a new generation of republican separatism emerged in the early 1950s, certainly indicates a significant apathy about the constitutional political system both sides of the border for a variety of reasons. The IRA and Sinn Féin vigorously challenged mainstream nationalism, and it was its willingness to engage in military operations between 1949 and 1955 which was a crucial factor in recruitment.

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<sup>132</sup> Joost Augusteijn (ed.), 'Motivation; why did they fight for Ireland, the motivation for volunteers in the revolution', *The Irish revolution, 1913-1923* (New York, 2002), pp110- 111.

Recruitment advertisements for the IRA appeared in almost every edition of the *United Irishman*. The simplistic message of using force to end partition and the IRA's focus on young people was constantly repeated. The failure of politicians to end partition was often reiterated in the IRA's propaganda. One particular advertisement read as follows: 'This generation of Irish youth will strike a blow for freedom, just as in every generation republicans have fought against the British occupation forces. Today young Ireland is preparing for action. Could it be that they will fail because you failed to prepare with them. This is a good reason why you should join the republican movement' <sup>133</sup>

The *United Irishman* carried advertisements which were unapologetically militarist. Recruitment appeals hammered home this message. 'Smash Partition the way it is maintained by force'.<sup>134</sup> 'Drive England out'.<sup>135</sup> The focus on militancy parked for a period the more nuanced ideological differences among the membership, where the immediacy of a military campaign became the most pressing objective.

A number of highly-publicized arms raids benefitted the IRA's new approach from 1948. In 1953 the IRA raided a British army barracks in Essex. In July 1954, it raided army barracks in Tyrone and Armagh, while in 1955 the Arborfield barracks in England was also raided. While not all the raids were a military success, the events demonstrated a willingness on behalf of young men in the IRA to risk imprisonment or death for a future armed campaign to ending partition.

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<sup>133</sup> *United Irishman*, Feb. 1949.

<sup>134</sup> *United Irishman*, Oct. 1953.

<sup>135</sup> *United Irishman*, Nov. 1954.

The IRA and Sinn Féin's criticism that political opportunism motivated the mainstream rhetoric on partition was reinforced when some of their young activists were raiding barracks and in some cases receiving lengthy jail sentences as a result. The republican movement's propaganda emphasized this. A raid in Essex in 1953, saw a number of IRA men captured and sentenced to lengthy prison sentences. A headline in the *United Irishman* titled 'A Striking Contrast' condemned politicians who were accused of paying lip service to partition, while it was stated that 'the IRA believes in action, not talk'.<sup>136</sup> The *United Irishman* stated that the IRA's action was the only answer to defeatism and despair, which it felt had set in as a result of the anti-partition campaign.

The Armagh Raid in June 1954, where the IRA escaped with weapons from a British military barracks was headline news in the *Irish Times* where it was described as 'The most spectacular raid of arms from British forces in Ireland' and as 'a daring daylight swoop on Gough military barracks'.<sup>137</sup> It was praised in the pages of the *United Irishman* with a headline 'Daring Armagh Raid; Arms Will Be Used Against British Forces, IRA'.<sup>138</sup>

Although the Omagh Barracks raid in October 1954 was a military failure with the capture of the IRA unit, it again emphasized a willingness on behalf of the IRA to take risks in order to end partition. The event attracted huge news coverage with the headlines of the *Irish Times* declaring 'Running gun battle, when 12 men raid military barracks in

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<sup>136</sup> *United Irishman*, Dec. 1953.

<sup>137</sup> *Irish Times*, 14 June 1954.

<sup>138</sup> *United Irishman*, July 1954.



Omagh'.<sup>139</sup> The trial of the men led by Eamon Boyce from Drimnagh, who were charged with treason and their statements in court, again demonstrated a willingness to sacrifice personal liberty for a political ideal. Their motives were viewed by some as admirable in contrast to a cynicism that had crept in about politicians' attempts to end partition, coupled with a more general apathy with the political system.<sup>140</sup>

IRA recruitment meetings accentuated the comparison between the older political generation who were depicted as corrupted by the political system in comparison to young men raiding barracks who were elevated as heroes. At a meeting in Cork in the aftermath of the Omagh raid, IRA speakers such as Tomás Mac Curtain condemned the failure of politicians to end partition, while praising the men arrested at Omagh, stating that 'The blandish comments and soft talk counselled by Mr De Valera and Mr Cosgrave would not end partition', at the same meeting a Mr Ó Laoi stated that 'the cringing attitudes of southern politicians today would not achieve a thirty-two county Republic'.<sup>141</sup> He also appealed to young people to follow the men of Omagh. At the Sinn Féin Ard Féis that year Tom Doyle described the raid as 'an exhilarating tonic to our people', while adding that politicians admitted to having no solution to partition.<sup>142</sup> The raids were depicted by the *United Irishman* as saving the country from political malaise as a result of careerist politics. The men that took part were eulogized for their bravery and were portrayed as resurrecting a noble objective, which had been poisoned by constitutionalism. A poem written in honor of the men who carried out the Arbourfield

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<sup>139</sup> *Irish Times*, 18 Oct. 1954.

<sup>140</sup> Interview Tony Hayde (2 Feb. 2011).

<sup>141</sup> *Irish Times*, 25 Oct. 1954.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

raid in England reflected this: ‘Ireland is living and cannot be killed, while honor is treasured and freedom is willed, God bless our proud people, they stand not in vain, by Oglaiġ na hÉireann and faithful Sinn Féin’,<sup>143</sup>

For some young men who had limited political affiliations, the barracks raids and the way they were depicted in republican propaganda had a significant impact in their motivation for joining. The simplicity of the IRA’s approach did appeal to some working class Dubliners, who had little interest initially in political activism. The IRA’s way of ending partition undoubtedly offered a sense of adventurism that the Anti-Partition League or constitutional politics could never have. Phil Donoghue from Ballyfermot from a non-political background admitted to having little interest in the politics or events in Northern Ireland as a teenager.<sup>144</sup> It was the activities of the IRA in raiding barracks that sparked his initial interest. While Donoghue was later involved in the most famous ambush of Operation Harvest in 1957, as well as remaining a member of the republican movement for most of his life, it was the barracks raids that initially stimulated his awareness about partition which in turn developed in to a broader political and social outlook.

Others who joined in Dublin such as Mick Ryan, who by the end of the campaign was on the IRA’s Army Council, also indicated a similar appeal for the IRA’s methods of removing partition. In Ryans case, the barracks raids nurtured a growing interest in politics. Ryan was one of the founding members of the Worker’s Party in the 1970s. He stated: ‘In 1954 came the Armagh and the Gough barracks raids, that was the first time I

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<sup>143</sup> *United Irishman*, Sept. 1955.

<sup>144</sup> Interview with Phil Donoghue (26 June 2011).

learned that the British were in the north really. I was fired up by it. The chap that was selling *The United Irishman* in the area came out more openly and the papers were full of it'.<sup>145</sup> While the actual parameters of what a new republican society would look like may have been absent initially among some new activists, the activities of the IRA did demonstrate a degree of personal selflessness which triggered an enthusiasm about the methods of the organization among some teenagers more so than as a result of any close scrutiny of republican separatism.

In the case of Tony Hayde from Drimnagh, who as a teenager became disillusioned with the mainstream attempts to end partition, it was the raids that demonstrated to him that young people from backgrounds similar to his own were willing to do something to resolve the issue. It should be noted that Hayde had indicated a number of different influences which attracted him towards the IRA, however he stated it was the raids that 'tipped things for me'.<sup>146</sup> The fact that two of the men arrested for the Omagh raid were from Drimnagh, resonated with him. The added excitement of barracks raids also added to the appeal of the IRA:

I'd say the way I got in to politics...there was a raid on an army barracks in the north, the Omagh raid and the Armagh raid. There were two guys from Drimnagh that were arrested. One of them was Eamon Boyce the other was Phil Clarke. That was the big news story them days. It wasn't like the big stories now when there is international news every half hour. In them days that was a very big story, about the

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<sup>145</sup> Interview with Mick Ryan (2 Jan. 2012).

<sup>146</sup> Interview Tony Hayde (2 Feb. 2011).

gun battle and the guys around the corner being captured. Only for those couple of jobs that they done, I might not have joined the republican movement.<sup>147</sup>

In the case of Seán Lynch from Longford, the raids finally brought the issue of partition back on to centre-stage. The nature of the IRA's methods in contrast to political efforts to end partition were followed eagerly by the young Longford man. Like Hayde, his disillusionment with mainstream politicians was replaced with enthusiasm for what the IRA were engaged in:

I found out in the 50s then, that there was a raid on Omagh on a military barracks and a raid in Armagh. I remember going to a football match in Mullingar real well and there was nine or ten people selling the *United Irishman*, carrying accounts of the raid on the barracks and they were not able to hand out the paper fast enough. All them things have an effect'.<sup>148</sup> Lynch also stated: 'They were doing something about it, the border was being made an issue of you know. Now something was happening'.<sup>149</sup>

In Northern Ireland, the raids were seen a part of an anti-colonial insurrection by some youngsters. For people like Donal Donnelly from Tyrone, the raids in Armagh and Omagh had a huge galvanizing effect on many northern nationalists. The dwindling Anti-Partition League campaign was by the mid-1950s replaced by the republican movement

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<sup>147</sup> Interview Tony Hayde (2 Feb. 2011).

<sup>148</sup> Interview with Sean Lynch (4 Apr. 2011).

<sup>149</sup> Interview with Sean Lynch (4 Apr. 2011).

whose barracks raids had a degree of community support in nationalist areas. To a politically-aware nationalist population Donnelly felt that the raids; 'brought to the fore the natural latent leanings towards physical force'.<sup>150</sup> Indeed, the republican militant tradition which had effectively lain dormant in the north for a generation was always an option for young nationalists given the failure of the anti-partition campaign; the raids simply resurrected it as new site of political activism among some young northern activists.

The Omagh raid and the subsequent trial of the men saw many nationalists in Donnelly's home town, many of whom had supported the Anti-Partition League campaign supported the prisoners and then the IRA's campaign. The raids had a significant impact in Donnelly's decision to join the IRA:

'I remember my father comforting me as I cried on hearing the news on the radio of the sentences handed down to the men, who were in my view fighting for us. Little did I think I would be with those men in prison within three years'.<sup>151</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The re-emergence of separatist armed republicanism in the early 1950s witnessed the adoption of a policy suited to the existing needs of the situation by focusing on partition. Indeed, as has been shown, it was the political exposure of the failures of the northern

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<sup>150</sup> Donal Donnelly, *Prisoner 1082* (Cork 2010), pp 44-45.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*, p. 45.

state, by the Anti-Partition League, which in some cases saw the politicisation of young people in challenging the status quo. In many ways, the IRA and Sinn Féin later benefitted from this in terms of recruitment. In fact the Northern Irish state's inability to address some of the issues raised by the campaign saw the IRA separatist model become a viable political alternative. While initially most of the nationalist population, including some of the interviewees would have been satisfied with civil rights reform, the denial of any practical ways of alleviating discrimination led a section of the nationalist population which included young people who joined the IRA to embrace both the ideology as well as the methods of that organization.

Additionally, the failure of constitutional nationalism, which elevated the issue of partition, rather than removing it, also enhanced the appeal of the IRA and Sinn Féin. Within this vacuum the idea that a thirty-two county democratic nation state which could only reach its full potential with the removal of partition, which the republican movement articulated, resonated across different levels of Irish society. While this view has been held by republicans, generation after generation, this is not to say the IRA is a non-ideological tradition inherited by each generation or as Tom Garvin describes as a 'persistent, if naïve IRA tradition'.<sup>152</sup> As has been demonstrated in this chapter a number of different and nuanced considerations led young people from both non-traditional and traditional republican backgrounds to embrace this ideology. Removing partition was not the conclusion of the republican movements project, but the beginning of some form of transformation of Irish society in the eyes of some of its activists.

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<sup>152</sup> Tom Garvin, *News from a new Republic, Ireland in the 1950's* (Dublin, 2010), p. 55.

Economically and socially southern Ireland in the 1950s was in crisis, and the partition issue was a veneer used by some within the political establishment to conceal its failure to eradicate a number of social and economic problems which the War of Independence in 1919 until 1921 set out to achieve. The post-colonial crises in southern society at the time best personified by former revolutionaries who had been subsumed into a constitutional system where a radical ideological outlook had been replaced with political careerism. Ending partition was not part of a wider republican ideology of the establishment parties but in most cases just a form of populist rhetoric. The IRA and Sinn Féin's belief that an end to partition and self determination on a thirty- two county basis was a stepping stone to a new society was part of a wider ideological position that resonated more and more with younger people as the establishments efforts to end it waned and a new generation of young IRA men attempted to remove it.

The emergence of young men prepared to risk life and liberty in an attempt to end partition as the first step in creating the Republic had many of the same attractions that a nationalist led republican movement had in the 1920s. A militant republican tradition of armed action in some cases certainly added to the appeal of the IRA and Sinn Féin. The methods of armed action as a political weapon had a certain attractiveness to young people that constitutionalism did not, therefore in some cases tradition may have played a stronger role in motivating some individuals than others. In some cases it may have been an overriding factor in a person's initial decision to join.

While each individual's reasons for joining were nuanced and while a militant republican tradition may have assisted the re-emergence of the IRA at the time, the republican movement was led by a clear nationalistic ideological outlook based on the idea that Ireland could not reach its full potential as a nation as long as partition existed. The failure of the mainstream parties to do anything concrete to end partition and their use of the issue as political football was exposed by the mid-1950s. This opened the way for a authentic ideological motivated group determined to achieve self-rule and independence, thus empowering its citizens to tackle some of the issues raised by the interviewees.



## Chapter 2

### **‘From the soldiers of yesterday to the soldiers of today’: The inheritors of the Fenian tradition.**

John Horgan characterizes nationalist separatist groups such as the IRA as prime examples of how group and family influences play a part in the recruitment of a new generation of activists.<sup>1</sup> Indeed the same could be said of separatist groups in different places around the world, whether they be in the Basque country, Cyprus or a Latin American liberation movement or in South Africa during apartheid. While tradition did play a role in terms of recruitment in local townships or rural areas it would be inaccurate to describe these groups as being totally non-political or non-ideologically motivated movements.

The role of tradition in the revival of armed republicanism in the 1950s cannot be denied and was vital in stimulating an initial interest in politics. However this chapter argues that while a local and family tradition played a role in rekindling an interest in the IRA and acted as a bridge from one generation of the IRA to the next, it was not a defining influence in many cases but rather one of a number of reasons why people were attracted to the IRA. In fewer cases it was the most obvious motivating reason and this will be explored also. Tradition within a family or a community was often important in exposing young people to militant republicanism which existed in families and in local

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<sup>1</sup> John Horgan, *The psychology of terrorism* (New York, 2005), p. 91.

communities for generations, however it will be argued that those who came from within this tradition often reflected an awareness of history, international issues and current political affairs when growing up, sometimes more so than those from non-political family environments, therefore they were more likely to be open to ideological positions than many of their contemporaries. This chapter gauges to what extent a militant republican tradition resulted in motivating young people to join the IRA at the time and examines if an existing tradition within local communities makes ideology redundant as a factor in the motivation of those who joined the IRA. This chapter, and indeed this thesis, will also show that while it was not insignificant, a family or a local tradition alone was not the single motivating factor in this generation becoming politically active under the umbrella of 1950s republicanism.

### **New IRA**

By 1945 the IRA was closer to being an anachronism rather than the vibrant and active separatist movement it had been in 1921. A number of splits weakened the organization in each decade after 1921. The establishment of Fianna Fáil in 1926, the emergence of the Republican Congress in 1934, the breakaway by some members to form Clann na Poblachta, as well as the abject failure of its campaign in the 1940s (largely due to the Fianna Fáil government's emergency legislation) left the republican movement reduced to a small number of families and former activists.

Robert White contends that, ex-veterans going back to the 1916 Rising were role models who were 'also the core around which the republican movement was reorganized' in the

late 1940s through to the 1950s.<sup>2</sup> The years between 1948 and 1957 saw the re-emergence of the IRA with the influx of a new young generation of recruits. Indeed crucial to this success was family and local involvement in militant republicanism from the 1920s. Not only did those from traditional IRA families produce another generation of recruits but the organization also attracted young people whose parents by the 1950s, supported the mainstream political parties. The IRA appealed to a new generation from both traditional and non-traditional IRA backgrounds by claiming that it was the inheritor of the 1916 generation that would continue the task of removing the British from Ireland and establishing an all Ireland Republic.

By examining the residual influences of the 1916 Rising, the War of Independence, Civil War and militant republicanism in the years that followed, in counties Dublin, Longford, Roscommon and in Northern Ireland, what will be assessed is how the new IRA in the late 1940s through to the 1950s successfully tapped into a latent regard for militant republicanism. These counties were selected due to the fact that they were strong areas for the IRA, in terms of both activists and sympathizers.

### **The endurance of the separatist tradition.**

From 1948 onwards, IRA propaganda represented the organization as the unbroken upholder of the flame of Irish separatism stretching back to the Fenians. Placing itself as the true inheritor of the separatist tradition provided a historical continuity going back to the United Irishman in 1798, and which was ultimately based on the premise that armed

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<sup>2</sup> Robert White, *Provisional Irish republicanism: an oral and interpretive history* (Westport, 1993), p. 37.

action was required in achieving its objectives which was the creation of an independent Ireland.

One could argue that the objective of various expressions of republican separatism represented a section of society which held a shared view of an independent Ireland however differently they interpreted what this new society would look like. Indeed, while different manifestations of armed republicanism emerged over the generations from the United Irishmen, to the Fenians, through to the IRB of the 1916 generation, the IRA in the 1950s was keen to place itself as the contemporary manifestation of the armed struggle, attempting to be the generation which would finally break the connection with British imperialism in Ireland. The new generation which came to adulthood in the 1950s were often in everyday contact with veterans of the IRA campaign of the 1920s through family and social networks. The republican movement could benefit from the everyday living reminders of the conflict from the 1920s, as the events of 1916 to 1923 still resonated.

Indeed the reasons why the tradition of armed republicanism or separatism has endured or has been reproduced in each generation, has been a contentious topic in Irish historiography particularly since the 1980s. Some commentators, such as John Regan argue that at times there has been a determined effort among some historians, notably Peter Hart, to feed a particular agenda which has sought to depoliticize the motivation behind Irish militant republicanism.<sup>3</sup> Certainly the debate has on occasion had a polarizing effect within Irish historiography which has witnessed a school of Irish

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<sup>3</sup> *History Ireland*, Jan/ Feb, 2012.

historiography largely disregard the political motivation behind manifestations of Irish separatism against those with a differing view. Indeed it is incumbent that any study of the generational reproduction of Irish armed separatism must acknowledge and take note of the dichotomous interpretations of the role that tradition as well as the role other factors has played.

Vincent Comerford's seminal *Patriotism as a Pastime* is one of the clearest examples of how the historian can apply significant weight to a range of factors in order to make the case that separatism in the mid to late nineteenth century, was more of a localized inherited tradition and where motivation was ultimately about seeking a sense of belonging. His hypothesis depicts the Fenian movement of the nineteenth century primarily as a social organization, where membership was based on leisure pursuits or as a vehicle for social status. Comerford's academic tome largely disregards the possibility that young people who joined the Fenians may have had some degree of ideological motivation for involving themselves in political activism. He states that the Fenians were 'by and large, trying to find, through the innovation of nationalism, a more significant place for themselves in the world'.<sup>4</sup> Comerford contends that the Fenians were ultimately a non-politically motivated sub culture and that the reasons for joining was akin to joining a 'gang' in order to be socially accepted and relevant.

In his book *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland 1858-1928*, Tom Garvin takes up this same theme. Again, like Comerford, he places an emphasis on non-ideological reasons for the appeal of separatism or militant republicanism, stating that 'family history and

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<sup>4</sup> R.V Comerford, *The Fenian's in context: Irish politics and society, 1848-82* (Dublin, 1998), p. 249.

genealogy were vividly present in people's minds', while describing the type of history imparted from one generation to the next as mythic, backwards and often inaccurate.<sup>5</sup> In his book *News from a new Republic: Ireland in the 1950s*, Garvin applies quite a negative contextualization to the mid-twentieth century IRA when he concurred with John Kelly's description of the IRA as 'demented Hillbillies'.<sup>6</sup> Joost Augusteijn's *The Irish Revolution: 1913-1923*, also attributes little political motivation to those who joined the IRA in the 1920s, preferring to point to local social and cultural grounds.<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that examining the level of political or ideological commitment that motivated involvement, always presents the danger of the historian being selective in what sources he or she chooses to use to emphasize a particular phenomenon and is open to academic interrogation. Other historians have challenged these interpretations.

John Newsinger, has criticized Vincent Comerford's historiography stating for example, that making parallels between the Fenians and the Football Association in England ignores the political and historical context and Ireland's relationship with Britain in the nineteenth century, he accuses the author of reflecting a school of history in England and in Ireland which has always diminished non-constitutional movements or groups.<sup>8</sup> Owen Sheridan in his book *Propaganda as Anti History* challenges Peter Hart's interpretation which contends that a factor in the republican movement's growth in the 1920s was a result of inherited sub-parochial loyalties.<sup>9</sup> Robert White's, *Provisional Irish*

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<sup>5</sup> Tom Garvin, *Nationalist revolutionaries in Ireland, 1858-1928* (Oxford, 1987), pp 110-111.

<sup>6</sup> Tom Garvin, *News from a new Republic: Ireland in The 1950's* (Dublin, 1955), p. 55.

<sup>7</sup> Joost Augusteijn, 'Why did they fight for Ireland, the motivation of volunteers', in Joost Augusteijn (ed.) *The Irish revolution, 1913-1923* (New York, 2002), p. 103.

<sup>8</sup> John Newsinger, *Fenianism in mid-victorian Britain* (London, 1994), p. 87.

<sup>9</sup> Owen Sheridan, *Propaganda as anti history: Peter Hart's 'The IRA and its enemies examined'* (Cork, 2008), p. 77.

*History: An Oral and interpretive History* examines how tradition intertwined with wider political currents from the mid 1950s onwards saw the emergence of the Provisional IRA in the 1970s. White examines how the fusion of tradition and political events gave armed republicans of that period a renewed appeal and vigor.<sup>10</sup>

Certainly the militant republican tradition and its transmission within a home environment or in the wider social context of the time needs to be examined when looking at the influence it had on young people in the 1950s. Indeed, while a militant republican tradition may have existed in some families, this is not to say that it was the defining reason in a young persons decision to join the IRA. Many of those interviewed pointed to an awareness of both international and domestic issues. Also within these families other siblings often had little, if any, interest in militant republicanism.

Neither does a history of militant republicanism within a family or a local community automatically suggest that young people who joined the IRA were devoid of any type of ideological motivation. For example, two of the key figures to emerge from the border campaign period were Cathal Goulding and Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, both of whom became Chief-of-Staff of the organization at different periods. While both of these individuals came from families drenched in the republican, separatist tradition stretching back to the Fenians, their pivotal role in the development of the outlook and ideology of the movement in subsequent years illuminate the difficulty with attributing motivation to a simplistic choice between tradition and ideology. Indeed political or ideological

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<sup>10</sup> Robert White, *Provisional Irish republicanism: an oral and interpretive history* (Westport, 1993), pp 33-63.

adversaries of either men could hardly suggest that they were not driven by some degree of ideological commitment.

On the other hand, other leaders to emerge from the IRA in the 1950s such as Seán Mac Stiofáin and Tomás Mac Giolla, who articulated their own particular ideology, albeit diverse by the 1960s, had absolutely no militant republican tradition to point to within their families. Indeed it is also worth noting that if one was to carry out a study of other groups such as those who joined mainstream political parties similar patterns emerge. The Lenihan and Haughey families in Fianna Fáil produced another generation of family activists, as did the Cosgraves in Fine Gael, as well as the Springs in Labour along with many more.

Nevertheless what stands out regarding the Irish separatism of the 1950s IRA, was the paucity of alternative outlets for political activism other than armed struggle, coupled with its determination to be seen as the true inheritor of the men of 1916, which was used to attract recruits. Indeed the use of force to remove the British in many ways acted as common denominator which had the potential to park differences on economic or social matters or diversity between urban or rural members. While it is a matter of opinion if the use of force to achieve independence denotes a limited ideological movement, the republican movement's propaganda certainly accentuated the militancy of the Fenians, the United Irishman and 1916, more so than it had in previous generations, such as in the early 1930s, when the organization was under a left-wing influence of Peadar O'Donnell



and Frank Ryan. Under their leadership, the IRA largely focused on social issues.<sup>11</sup> It could be argued that the cultivation of an almost separatist mysticism, which transcended time and nuanced ideological positions, and which was to a degree bound by the martyrdom and militancy which emphasized the need for force in republican propaganda, was a crucial factor in making the new IRA of the 1950s relevant in broader Irish society.

For example, at a 1952 commemoration, the speaker Joe McGurk claimed that the IRA in the 1940s and 1950s were the direct descendent of the 1916 to 1923 generation and all separatist manifestations all the way back to 1798. He stated that those IRA members who were killed in the 1940s were the ‘generation that proved to the Irish nation that the link that was forged in 1798 never had been broken and never would be broken until Ireland becomes a sovereign nation’.<sup>12</sup> What was common to the United Irishmen in 1798, the Fenians of the 1860s, and the men of 1916, was that they all possessed a separatist tradition that was now safeguarded by the re-organized IRA. The diversity in the approaches of these historical groups to republicanism was a secondary factor.

Padraig Pearse served as a link between previous separatists and the generation of the 1950s. Much of Pearse’s writings were published in the *United Irishman*, including *Ghosts*, to bolster the idea that every generation had a moral responsibility to take up arms. In many ways his words were used to throw the gauntlet down to the first generation that had reached adolescence since the 1916 Rising. The opening line, ‘There has been nothing more terrible in Irish history than the failure of the last generation’ was a

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<sup>11</sup> Brian Hanley, *The IRA, 1926-1936* (Dublin, 2002, ), pp55-56.

<sup>12</sup> *United Irishman*, July 1952.

compelling challenge to young people not to be the generation to let down the separatist tradition and use armed force to remove the British from Northern Ireland.<sup>13</sup>

The relatively fresh memory of the 1916-23 revolutionary period, and the fact that so many former volunteers from that time were still alive three decades later, created a living awareness of these dynamic events among the younger generation. Augusteijn states that the 1920s was a period of ‘popular militancy’.<sup>14</sup> The late 1940s and early 1950s was one marked by remembering and recollecting that period. The militant republican idolatry that marked the era in Irish society, demonstrated how inheritance of the separatist tradition was a much sought after accolade among competing political groups at the time. Garvin contends that having a military background from the 1920s was crucial to political success in mid-twentieth century Ireland.<sup>15</sup> Hanley argues that having a military record with the IRA ‘has always been crucial in asserting ones republican credentials’ against other opponents.<sup>16</sup>

Hanley applies this to different ruptures among militant republicanism from the establishment of Fianna Fáil in 1926 and its break with the IRA, to the tension between Sinn Féin and the dissident IRA in the twenty first century. Anne Dolan maintains that celebrating the role of armed republicanism from the previous generation who participated in the War of Independence was simply a basic regard ‘to remember that

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<sup>13</sup> *United Irishman*, Feb. 1957.

<sup>14</sup> Joost Augesteijn, ‘Why did they fight for Ireland, the motivation of volunteers in the revolution’ in Joost Augesteijn (ed.) *The Irish revolution, 1913-1923* (New York, 2002), p. 103.

<sup>15</sup> Tom Garvin, *News from a new Republic: Ireland In The 1950's* (Dublin, 1955), p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> Brain Hanley, ‘The rhetoric of republican legitimacy’, in Fergal McGarry (ed.), *Republicanism in modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2003), p. 175.

men died fighting for Ireland, for a freedom that we have come in our smug complacency to consider misused'.<sup>17</sup> Despite various interpretations of why past republican militancy was consistently remembered and revisited, it had a huge bearing in Irish society in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and one that all political groupings were keen to claim given its potency a generation after. For example, state commemorations and party political events were often saturated in militant imagery.

Easter commemorations to mark the fortieth anniversary of the rising around Ireland in 1956 witnessed similar manifestations of militancy. A plaque unveiled by the president in March 1956 celebrating Countess Markievicz, involved a contingent of IRA veterans.<sup>18</sup> A group of former IRA members marched alongside the FCA from Dundalk to Dublin to mark the anniversary of the rising.<sup>19</sup> The sight of city councillors and TD's taking part in IRA colour parties was not unusual during the period. In Limerick in 1956 an IRA firing party included the Mayor, G.E. Russell and members of the Corporation.<sup>20</sup> In other cities such as Cork, a party of IRA veterans was led by Ald. P. McGrath.<sup>21</sup>

All political parties' were keen to stress their militant republican origins, most notably Fianna Fáil. Old IRA members were integral features of Fianna Fáil events. The Arbour Hill Easter commemoration often included former comrades and relatives of the dead. In 1950 the procession demonstrated the continuity between the old IRA and the Irish Army

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<sup>17</sup> Anne Dolan, 'Our army of Fenian dead', in Fergal McGarry (ed.), *Republicanism in modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2003), p. 135.

<sup>18</sup> *Irish Press*, 28 Mar. 1956.

<sup>19</sup> *Irish Press*, 14 Mar. 1956.

<sup>20</sup> *Irish Press*, 2 April 1956.

<sup>21</sup> *Irish Press*, 2 April 1956.

where ‘military honours rendered by a firing party of 1916 and ex-service men of the emergency years’.<sup>22</sup> Fianna Fáil public meetings often involved elaborate guards of honour by War of Independence veterans, such as one in Cork in 1950, where De Valera was met by a ‘big detachment of IRA, wearing their service medals’.<sup>23</sup> Fianna Fáil election campaigns were saturated in militant republican iconography and symbolism. In an election rally in Killarney in county Kerry, De Valera ‘began his triumphal drive to the platform, a huge welcoming procession, comprising of over one hundred torch bearers, many of them lorry-borne, a cavalcade of fifty horse men, two bands and a big contingent of IRA and Cumann na mBan formed up to escort him along the route’.<sup>24</sup> In the 1957 general election, a Fianna Fáil election rally involved ‘a guard of honour for the chief’ by old IRA members, who were instructed to wear their service medals.<sup>25</sup>

Old IRA veterans were used by the establishment and the mainstream political parties’ to reinforce the point that they were the inheritors of the IRA from the 1920s and that anything else was an imitation. The survivors of the War of Independence and their physical attendance at official commemorative occasions was a powerful symbol that linked the previous revolutionary generation with the thirty year old political dispensation in the south. The idea of the old IRA was far enough in the past to be praised by the establishment, while also reinforcing the idea that former IRA combatants accepted the status quo. Any doubts about the legitimacy of the southern institutions could be assuaged by the presence of former fighting men at such events.

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<sup>22</sup> *Irish Press*, 6 April 1950.

<sup>23</sup> *Irish Press*, 19 June 1950.

<sup>24</sup> *Irish Press*, 26 May 1951.

<sup>25</sup> Handbill in Fianna Fail Archives (ff/797).

The fixation of the political establishment with utilizing the imagery of former IRA veterans to reinforce its legitimacy, certainly indicated its potency a generation on. It's obsession also intimated at a deeper insecurity that it actually was not the authentic descendent of the revolutionary period. Indeed, the fact that Ireland remained partitioned and was plagued by economic failings and emigration raised doubts about the mainstream parties' understanding of the objectives of the previous generation despite its aforementioned militant republican posturing.

Official remembrance was also coupled with a nuanced pride in republican militancy within many local communities and among different shades of republicans. Anne Dolan argues that 'the lines were not as clearly drawn as many might have liked' with regard to militant republicanism in independent Ireland.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, this environment allocated a space for an alternative version as to who inherited the separatist tradition. Indeed, if the IRA and Sinn Féin managed to harness this with other ideological and political strands which it was cultivating simultaneously, it had the potential to appeal to people from traditional republican backgrounds as well as those from constitutional political backgrounds.

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<sup>26</sup> Anne Dolan, 'Our army of fenian dead', in Fergal McGarry (ed.), *Republicanism in Modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2003), p. 135.

### **The new IRA's appeal to a new generation to continue the tradition.**

Barry Flynn states that by the late 1940s the IRA needed to evolve or 'else it would die'.<sup>27</sup> While the years between 1939 and 1945 not only saw the military defeat of the IRA it also resulted in the republican movement becoming an obsolete political force in Irish society.

This new generation that grew up, often with family members and neighbours involved in the events of 1916-23, was a reservoir of potential recruits which the IRA would draw from. During the period a number of ex-internees from the 1940s campaign began this process. All had a strong republican lineage and pedigree. It is worth pointing out that the new IRA leadership from 1948 consisted of Paddy McLogan who was a War of Independence veteran, while Tomás MacCurtain was a former hunger striker and son of the Cork Lord Mayor Tomás MacCurtain who was killed by the British army in 1921. Just as Fianna Fáil was keen to highlight the role of war veterans such as Frank Aiken, and just as Fine Gael were with General Sean MacEoin, so too was the new IRA.

For the IRA to justify the use of armed struggle it needed to accentuate the point that it drew the same justification for their methods as the organization did in 1921. The consequences of political killing ensured that this needed to be done, to prevent the organization being viewed with opprobrium in Irish society. Indeed, this debate about who were the legitimate descendants of the IRA of the 1920s was one that re-surfaced during the conflict in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1994 and still is rehashed between the current dissidents and Sinn Féin. In November 1950, the *United Irishman*

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<sup>27</sup> Barry Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly* (Cork, 2009), p. 16.

featured an article titled ‘Only One Irish Republican Army’.<sup>28</sup> It stated that ‘time and time again in our country we have heard people speaking about the old IRA and the new IRA’.<sup>29</sup> The republican newspaper contended that the term old IRA had been cleverly conceived by politicians in the south to give the impression that the authentic IRA had ceased to exist and that any organization that claimed it were imposters and politically irrelevant. The *United Irishman* declared that there was only one IRA and that it was the exact same organization in 1950 as it was in 1920, with the same objectives and if needs be using the same methods. They insisted that the term the new IRA ‘that you hear so much about was only invented by the Fianna Fáil and the Free State government to further their own political ends, to fool the people and to dishonor the gallant soldiers who had remained loyal to the Irish Republic’.<sup>30</sup>

The annual Bodenstown and Easter commemorations were used as focal points in an effort to rebuild the organization, while also spelling out the objectives of the movement. The message was uncomplicated, that a new generation of young republicans was needed to complete the task of the previous generation. It should be noted that most of the people interviewed never attended the Bodenstown commemorations. Nevertheless it was a significant event in the republican calendar which clearly articulated the key objectives of the movement. In 1949 the commemoration heard calls from an IRA spokesperson Cristoir O’Neill appeal to young people to join the IRA ‘and take your stand with the men who never ceased to resist, the men who are determined to complete the job’.<sup>31</sup> At

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<sup>28</sup> *United Irishman*, Nov. 1950.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *United Irishman*, Nov. 1950.

<sup>31</sup> *United Irishman*, July/Aug. 1949.

the Easter commemoration in 1950, Tomás MacCurtain stated that ‘we must rebuild the republican movement, again in to the strong virile organization it was in 1919-1921’, adding that ‘we need the support of every man woman, every boy and girl for there is work to be done in our movement’.<sup>32</sup> MacCurtain embodied the connection from the 1920s which gave a degree of legitimacy to the contemporary IRA.

The reinvigorated propaganda in the *United Irishman* constantly produced advertisements appealing to young people to join the republican movement. Advertisements in the *United Irishman* emphasized how the contemporary IRA was the succeeding generation from the 1916 period and that the objectives of the republicanism from this period could be completed by joining this new group. The traditional appeal of becoming a soldier in the minds of young people, was thus enhanced by the possibility of joining the same organization that was celebrated in 1950s Ireland for its military opposition to British rule from 1919 to 1921. One such recruitment message led with a caption titled ‘Join the IRA’, and quoted a war of independence veteran stating ‘I ask you to be a soldier, because Ireland has a need of soldiers today, from the soldiers of yesterday have been reviving the fight for the cause’.<sup>33</sup>

An editorial in the *United Irishman* in January 1956 again laid emphasis on how the new generation had grown to adulthood since the 1920s. Republicans contended that not since 1921 had the Irish republican movement been as strong. It was stated that the youth of

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<sup>32</sup> *United Irishman*, May 1950.

<sup>33</sup> *United Irishman*, Nov. 1952.



Ireland had embraced the struggle of their parents' generation 'Their hands now grip the banner of the old cause. The cause for which their fathers, grandfathers and forefathers bear'.<sup>34</sup>

In 1955 the *United Irishman* published an article entitled 'Take Your Choice'. The article consisted of two columns, one a recruitment advertisement for the Irish army the other for the IRA. The Irish army advert appealed to young men to join the army which provided 'good pay, ample holiday and leisure time, sport and recreation'.<sup>35</sup> The IRA's advert included an IRA veteran appealing to young people to continue the fight that he had been involved, in order to highlight that the same political justification for armed action still existed. Again, emphasizing the generational link with the 1920s the veteran was quoted 'Things are looking better today, I have grown old in the republican movement, you I hope will grow old in the Irish Republic. The lads of today are nothing different to what they were when I was one myself, they're still good stuff'.<sup>36</sup>

The IRA and Sinn Féin propaganda was particularly resentful of former IRA members who had been critical of the new IRA in the battle over republican inheritance in the early 1950s. War of Independence veterans who were opposed to the use of physical force were attacked for being hypocrites and for betraying the republican movement. The rhetoric of *The United Irishman* offered young people the opportunity of salvaging the revolution of 1921, which had been abandoned by many of the older generation,

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<sup>34</sup> *United Irishman*, Jan. 1956.

<sup>35</sup> *United Irishman*, March 1955.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

according to them. In 1955 the *United Irishman* published an open letter to War of Independence veterans who were sharply condemned for being fooled by political leaders and hankering ‘after the whims and catch cries of individuals instead of remembering the great principle’.<sup>37</sup> Regardless of their militant past, War of Independence veterans who accepted the status quo were depicted as traitors. It was argued that their republican principles had given way to a defeatist attitude and their objection to physical force was completely hypocritical.

The prelude to the border campaign in 1956 saw a number of military actions by the IRA such as the barrack raids in Omagh in County Tyrone. Those arrested and subsequently jailed were heralded as the new generation of the IRA that had grown up since partition and were continuing the struggle of 1921. A *United Irishman* article titled ‘They are worthy of their generation’, again stressed the continuity in republican militancy.<sup>38</sup> It also attempted to assuage any fears among the general public that political violence in the 1950s was unjustified by pointing to other generations. Comparisons were made with the captured prisoners and historical militant events in Irish history to illuminate the point that every generation in Irish history had asserted itself in armed action. The events were depicted as involving the new generation of the IRA which had been handed down the torch from the men of 1921.

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<sup>37</sup> *United Irishman*, Sept. 1955.

<sup>38</sup> *United Irishman*, Aug. 1956.

### **Family and Community memories of militant republicanism.**

The events in specific local areas during the 1916 to 1922 period, often retold by relatives of future IRA members, had a profound effect on many young people who were later attracted by the IRA's re-emphasis of completing the task of uniting Ireland by armed action. White states that personal and family connections were a crucial life support machine to the survival of militant republicanism in Ireland after the Civil War.<sup>39</sup> The IRA's new approach not only tried to harness these connections but also appealed to the post-Civil War generation.

Those from families who continued to support the IRA and those from old IRA backgrounds, whose parents' supported the mainstream political parties, in many cases had an awareness of family involvement with the IRA in local events from the 1916-23 period. In fact, the impact of family involvement in a previous generation of republican militancy was for many the initial influence that formed their historical perspective. The IRA's approach appealed to a young generation regardless of their parent's views of the contemporary IRA. Whether parents supported the IRA, Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael their children were nonetheless often products of highly politicized home environments three decades after southern independence, where the fusion of history and politics permeated social discourse.

Indeed the residual influence of the 1912 to 1923 period was not confined to people who joined the IRA. Others who became opponents of physical force republicanism such as Conor Cruise O'Brien, pointed to his family involvement in nationalist politics as being

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<sup>39</sup> Robert White, *Provisional Irish republicanism: an oral and interpretive history* (Westport, 1993), p. 37.

crucial in developing his political perspective. ‘I shared, or rather inherited, my parent’s feelings about the transactions of 1912-14 (as distinct from their intellectual interpretation of the source of their grief). I am their son, after all, and my grandfather’s grandson’.<sup>40</sup> Future Fine Gael Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald whose mother and father participated in the 1916 Rising was also influenced by his parents’ involvement. O’Callaghan describes the effect of this in Fitzgerald’s formative years: ‘the decidedly political milieu of his home life acted as a stimulus to him during his time in secondary school’.<sup>41</sup> While it is difficult to ascertain whether young people inherited their parent’s historical perspective or it merely served as another influencing factor, it certainly at the very least awoke an interest in Irish republicanism.

The argument could be made that at times deeper ideological conflicts which permeated the IRA in the 1920s and 1930s and indeed the 1960s, were to a degree, set aside and replaced by a simplistic or even populist approach in republican propaganda which appealed to a prevailing sentiment that the objectives of the War of Independence had yet to be achieved. This is not to say that the IRA were a non-ideological movement, but rather that the key ideological objective of the IRA at the time was to establish an independent Republic. It was around this idea that the IRA could draw support. The IRA presented themselves as a bridge from the unfinished revolution of the 1920s. The fact that the period between 1916 and 1923 was often discussed locally and within the home provided the IRA with a considerable base which could be cultivated, Coakley argues

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<sup>40</sup> Conor Cruise O’ Brien, *Memoirs, my life and themes* (Dublin, 1998), p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> John O’Callaghan, *Teaching Irish independence: history in Irish schools, 1922-1972* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 57.

that ‘social memories, like individual ones can be selective, but they are more likely to be preserved if they retain a social relevance.’<sup>42</sup>

For a moment it is also worth examining John Horgan’s view of subversive organizations and their appeal to young people. He argues that involvement and engagement in a subversive organization ‘is best thought of as a process’.<sup>43</sup> It is impossible to define any single influence which prompted an individual’s decision to join the republican movement; but the evidence suggests that in some cases, it was a process which started at a young age by an exposure to family involvement in militant republicanism.

Therefore tradition did actuate an interest among some of the next generation. While some IRA members may have been exposed to this sort of discourse within the home, often their parents were opposed to them joining the IRA. Similar to Conor Cruise O’ Brien and Garret FitzGerald, often the original stimulus came from family recollections from the previous generation of republican militants. However it was the mixture of this type of formative influences with the reinvigorated IRA propaganda which directed many young people towards the IRA.

Horgan also believes that within ‘nationalist separatist’ groups such as the IRA, family or community involvement can be a persuasive influence.<sup>44</sup> As with the IRA in the 1950s family involvement certainly acted as a form of authoritative legitimacy in some families that supported the IRA. In other cases young people from Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael

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<sup>42</sup> Mauice Coakley *Ireland in the modern world: a history of uneven development* (Dublin, 2012), p133.

<sup>43</sup> John Horgan, *The psychology of terrorism* (New, York, 2005), p. 80.

<sup>44</sup> John Horgan, *The psychology of terrorism* (New York, 2005), p. 91.

backgrounds with a history of militant republicanism from the 1920s may not have been given parental approval to join the IRA, but pointed to an awareness of family involvement in militant republicanism from the 1920s.

Being an IRA veteran in some parts of the country also had a certain amount of social capital attached to it which further enhanced the appeal of the new IRA. The activities of old IRA men during the War of Independence, in some cases saw them elevated as role models which benefitted the IRA's recruitment drive. Seán Ó Brádaigh from Longford described a 'type of mystique' which surrounded IRA veterans in his childhood.<sup>45</sup> While many of these former combatants may have opposed the IRA in the 1950s the fact that they had at one time been engaged in political violence inadvertently justified the methods of the new IRA in the eyes of some young people.

Sean Lynch from North Longford emphasizes this point. His family remained IRA supporters after the Civil War. He maintained that while his community was made up predominantly of Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil supporters, most people were 'republican minded'.<sup>46</sup> Asked if there was a high regard for veterans he said: 'There was. They were looked upon as great men'.<sup>47</sup> He also stated that: 'My grandparents were the Lynch's they lived across the fields so it was common to meet people who were involved'.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Seán O'Brádaigh (2 Feb. 2010).

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Sean Lynch (4 April 2011).

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Sean Lynch (4 April 2011).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

One person who grew up in Leitrim whose father was in the IRA from 1919 until 1922 and later helped establish Fianna Fáil in his local area in 1926, also spoke about how local events from that period were regularly discussed by his father and in the community, he also reflected Seán Lynch's comments about how veterans were held in high esteem. Constant talk of the 1920s unquestionably kept a form of militant republicanism alive in county Leitrim. Speaking of his father he said: 'He wasn't reluctant to talk about it at all, I heard him talking about it to other people other comrades of his'. He added: 'I'd say all his friends were in it (the IRA), I didn't know any of them that wasn't in it'.<sup>49</sup>

The Leitrim respondent also spoke about how the new IRA were certainly not viewed with any degree of opprobrium in the 1950s by Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil families in his rural locality. While his father was not a member of the IRA by the 1950s, and had voted for Fianna Fáil and Clann na Poblachta at different times, he alluded to a basic respect that his father had for young people willing to remove the border by force. While tactically some of the older generation may have been doubtful about the possible success of an armed campaign by the new IRA, the morality of armed action was never questioned.

The statement from both Lynch and the Leitrim man give an insight into a certain ambiguous mentality which existed within some communities in mid-twentieth century

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Leitrim person (2 March 2010).

Ireland with regard to militant republicanism. The response of both demonstrates how people's attitudes were extremely nuanced at the time. While political groups wrestled over the mantle of republican inheritance, in local areas there were subtle variations in attitudes.

An examination of certain geographical areas which had a strong militant tradition demonstrates how a historical identity was conceived out of family and local discourse which sowed the seeds of a new generation. For some it sparked an initial interest; for others it was the beginning of their socialization into the IRA. Nevertheless, an examination of specific counties' demonstrates how the IRA's assertion that it was the same IRA, that fought in the War of Independence, capitalized on the prevalence of a social discourse inherent in many families and local communities in the early 1950s.

### **Sample Areas.**

#### **Dublin**

A militant republican tradition in Dublin City which dated back to the 1916 Rising and the Fenians often stimulated an interest in the contemporary IRA. However, it should be noted that some notable names from Dublin who went on to play a leading roles in the IRA such as Phil Donoghue had no militant republican tradition within his family. When asked if there was a family history of republicanism he stated: 'No, none that I was aware of'.<sup>50</sup> Others such as Paddy O'Regan who grew up in the prison warders' quarters beside Mountjoy Prison, not only had no republican background, but came from a British army

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Mick Ryan (2 Jan. 2012). Interview with Phil Donoghue (26 June 2011).



and prison officer tradition. His father also served in World War One. He described his family as non political; 'they didn't vote for anybody, they were completely non party, they never discussed politics'.<sup>51</sup> He also stated that he had an awareness of World War One and the British army growing up through his family tradition, but had no awareness of republicanism: 'I was very aware of the First World War, to a lesser degree the Second World War, most of the fathers had fought in the first World War'.<sup>52</sup>

Nevertheless, Dublin city had witnessed the tumultuous years of militant republicanism from the 1916 Rising through to the Civil War and was the strongest area for the IRA in the south of Ireland. While this may have had varying degrees of influence in each individual case, the IRA's new focus succeeded in places such as in the capital, where recruitment dramatically increased from 1948 onwards.

Therefore it is probably no coincidence that Dublin recorded the highest number of new recruits during the period according the Garda Special Branch files. Garda reports indicated that Dublin was the strongest area for the republican movement in terms of Sinn Féin, Cumann na mBan and IRA membership from 1948 to 1962. Reports stated that Dublin and Cork were the main areas where the IRA was active. It estimated that the Dublin Brigade had two hundred members and that 'in Dublin there is constant training and activity'.<sup>53</sup> From the early 1950s its membership steadily grew. A report in 1954 stated that half of the IRA's membership of five hundred was situated in Dublin.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Paddy O'Regan (2 June. 2011).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Memorandum on IRA organization, 11Dec. 1953 (NAI, DFA A/12).

<sup>54</sup> Memorandum on IRA organization and activities, 27 Oct. 1954 (NAI, DFA A/12).

The annual Bodenstown commemoration also reflected the strength of the republican movement in the city. For example at the event in 1959, Dublin was represented in the parade by over five hundred members of Sinn Féin. Éamon Mac Thomáis and Robert Russell led two hundred and forty members of Sinn Féin from the city. Bartholomew Murphy led another two hundred and forty. One hundred members of the youth wing of the IRA, called the Fianna Éireann were from Dublin and forty eight Cumman na mBan members, which was the women's section of the IRA were also present.<sup>55</sup> While a number of reasons may have contributed to the increase in recruitment in Dublin, such as migration into the city and the fact that Dublin had the highest population in the country, the exposure to family and local involvement in the IRA of 1916 and the 1920s catalyzed for some their interest in militant republicanism.

Tony Hayde from Drimnagh, who joined the IRA in 1954, stated that his father was a Fine Gael supporter while his mother although 'republican minded' was a Labour supporter.<sup>56</sup> His uncle Bill Gannon from north county Dublin was an IRA activist in the War of Independence, the Civil War and was part of a group which killed the Minister for Justice Kevin O'Higgins in 1926. Bill Gannon was also a member of the communist group in Ireland, then called The Irish Workers League. Hayde's close relationship with his mother and uncle and the topical nature of history and politics within the family undoubtedly left an impression on his as a young person.

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<sup>55</sup> Garda Report, 23 Jun 1959, (NAI Jus 8/900).

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Tony Hayde (2 Feb. 2011).

Indeed family members who were former IRA activists in Dublin, in Hayde's case his uncle, in many ways became role models in the future IRA members' formative years. His mother's recollection of stories from the War of Independence and her reciting of songs about the period that celebrated the role of former militants was an integral feature of the Hayde's household. However it would be inaccurate to depict his decision to join the IRA as simply following a family tradition or as a rite of passage. Hayde stated that he often disagreed with his uncle over communism.<sup>57</sup> He also pointed to the IRA barracks raids in the early 1950s, as being pivotal event which propelled him to join the IRA.<sup>58</sup> He states:

My father would have been Fine Gael. My mother would have been very republican minded. Her brother fought in the War of Independence. She adored him, Bill Gannon. She hid guns back in the Tan War and that; he took the republican side in the Civil War. So that meant my mother would have took the republican side in the Civil War. She was sympathetic to Fianna Fáil when it was founded. When they executed republicans during the war she was anti De Valera.<sup>59</sup>

When Hayde was asked did his mother speak about politics, he replied:

She talked about her brother Bill. If there was a party in the house, there was a lot of parties' in the house. If she was asked to sing a song, she would sing 'Bold Robert Emmet' or 'Down by the Glenside'. My father wasn't that way at all.... He was a

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Tony Hayde (2 Feb. 2011).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

Fine Gael man. Not an active Fine Gael man, but I would say that my mother's brother had a big influence on my mother. He was a real IRA man back in the 20s'.<sup>60</sup>

He also recalls listening to his communist uncle Billy discuss politics and points to the aforementioned political influences within the home environment as sparking his initial interest: 'He would have been giving out about the clergy and that, I would have heard that from a young age, probably the seed was from that'.<sup>61</sup>

Hayde's account certainly gives an indication of how a politicized home environment created the conditions where there was constant political discussion similar to Conor Cruise O'Brien's or Garret FitzGerald's family backgrounds. For Tony Hayde, the different influences at home from his communist uncle to his Fine Gael father to his mother were diverse and varied. Nonetheless, from examining Hayde's statement one could argue that undoubtedly his upbringing impacted on his thinking. However, it would be inaccurate to describe his decision to join as simply an adherence to a tradition. If anything, Hayde, as a young person was exposed to a number of different ideological positions at home, more so than most children his age, and did point to an awareness of the anti-partition discourse at the time. He also had to opportunity to join the communist IWL or Fine Gael.

Eamon Boyce who joined the IRA, also came from a similar republican background to Tony Hayde. Boyce's mother was a Fianna Fáil supporter initially, he pointed to his

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with Tony Hayde (2 Feb. 2011).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

family tradition of republicanism in Dublin, which was prevalent growing up, as being the catalyst in stimulating his interest in republicanism. While Boyce indicated that his decision to join the IRA was the culmination of a number of factors, such as his association with a work colleague and also due to the anti-partition discourse of the time, his response does suggest that this process began from an early age due to his family involvement in the Dublin IRA in the 1920s.

Boyce was originally from St Joseph's Terrace in the north inner City. His family later moved to Drimnagh; he came from an area that had witnessed frequent IRA activity from 1916 up to the Civil War. His father had served in the British army while his mother's family were republicans'. From a young age Boyce had an awareness of militant republicanism within his family stretching back to the Fenians. Involvement with the Dublin IRA on his mother's side from before 1916 was often discussed at home. Indeed the injustices that family members endured as a result of their involvement was transmitted and shared by the next generation. While Boyce was introduced to the reorganized IRA in 1951 by his republican work colleague, like Hayde, the exposure to family discussions about the previous generation of the IRA was the embryonic factor in his political development:

My father was different. My father died in 1945. I was quite young, but my mother's family, my grandparents, who I never knew were all Fenians. This atmosphere was in the house. There was an uncle of mine living in the house with us, my mother's brother, my mother had been in Cumann na mBan. Her medal is inside there. One of

her brothers John was taken away by the Black and Tans from the house in St Josephs Terrace, he had a bad time his hair was all gone, and mentally he was never the same again. Another brother Tom was in King Street in 1916...He was in the Four Courts with Rory O'Connor. Now, he was shot in the stomach in the Four Courts, the bullet was in his spine, he carried it to his death in 1964 or 65, I Think. His trade was a harness maker which was regarded as a good job then..... He worked for O'Callaghan's in Dame Street and Smiths in Marlborough Street, but everywhere he worked the Free State soldiers would come in and wreck the shop and say to the owner of the shop, "as long as you have that fella there, we will come back". Like many others after a year or so he went to America but mentally he never left Dublin...But, it was in this atmosphere in my formative years, they talked about noting else, you don't throw that off'.<sup>62</sup>

Like many families at the time the Boyce's family's involvement in the War of Independence and other manifestations of separatism such as the Fenians, was passed on to the next generation. Indeed, the very act of challenging British rule in Ireland through armed separatism was ingrained in the family. The fact that Boyce stated you don't 'throw that off' gives an indication of the powerful influence that tradition did play and how he was receptive to the IRA's claim in the 1950s that they were the contemporary manifestation of this tradition. As will be examined in other chapters, Boyce primarily saw joining the IRA as a way of challenging the economic crisis of the 1950s. However, undoubtedly the emergence of an organization willing to finish the job of a uniting Ireland, resonated with him given his background.

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<sup>62</sup> Interview with Eamon Boyce (9 Feb. 2010).

Seamus Graham, originally from Raymond Street in Dublin, pointed to his mother's family involvement in militant republicanism in Dublin as stimulating his interest in history. At one stage Graham was Quartermaster General of the IRA. Graham, who's father was a Protestant and his mother a Catholic, joined the IRA in 1951. He was arrested and interned in the Curragh. His mother's family, the Coatley's, had a militant republican tradition stretching back to before the Rising which he was aware of as a child. He pointed to the family history of involvement in the Dublin IRA as a contributory factor in his decision to join. Describing how his initial interest was stimulated he said: 'It was very much part of the family tradition. The family were very helpful to the republicans way back to the 1900s, from the time before the Rising and during the Rising and later'.<sup>63</sup>

Unlike Boyce's and Hayde's family, the Graham's were active IRA supporters after southern independence. Joining an illegal organization was perceived as a less drastic decision given the family background of republicanism. Also republican propaganda did not have to convince somebody such as Graham that they were the same IRA as in the 1920s. It should be noted that while his family did support the IRA, they did not attend commemorations and Graham's brothers never got involved. However, like Hayde and Boyce, his formative years growing up in a family that had a republican history from the 1920s made him receptive to the IRA appeals in his youth.

The republican movement's new direction appealed to those from family backgrounds in Dublin with a history of militancy regardless of what political side their parents took after

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<sup>63</sup> Interview with Seamus Graham (2 May 2010).

the Civil War. Nevertheless, crucial to the regeneration of the IRA at the time was a new generation of young people from a small nucleus of families that supported the IRA up to the 1950s. These families, though a minority, had a lifelong unwavering dedication to the IRA and its cause from the 1920s onwards. While some of those interviewed from Dublin pointed to family backgrounds as being important in stimulating their interest in militant republicanism, the response from those members who came from 'IRA families' suggest that their childhood to adolescent years was, in some cases, a process of gradual socialization into the republican movement. These types of families often provided support and safe houses to the IRA in the lean years after independence. Attending commemorations organized by the IRA from a young age was also a feature of growing up in this type of environment. Although they were a minority they could be viewed as being the core of the IRA post-Civil War.

A number of these families were located in Dublin in the late 1940s. The Goulding family from North Strand had a history stretching back to the Fenians. The family home of former Chief-of-Staff Sean Russell, in Nottingham Street, also in the North Strand was part of an unbroken separatist tradition from the 1940s and before. The Russell home was also a safe house for Army Council meetings at the time.<sup>64</sup> Their neighbors, the Murphy's on Leinster Road, produced a number of family members who became involved in the border campaign. The McLaughlin family from East Wall, who later moved out to Whitehall, also was a family setting immersed in republican activity for decades after the Civil War.

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<sup>64</sup> Garda report on IRA organization , 27 Oct. 1954 ( NAI, DFA/10/ A/12).



For young people who grew up in families such as these, joining some branch of the republican movement was almost a natural progression. The case of May McLaughlin, wife of IRA leader Thomás Mac Giolla, who joined Cumann na mBan in Dublin in 1956, illustrates how a strong family tradition within some families was inherited by some future activists. Her parents supported the IRA throughout the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>65</sup> From a staunchly republican background, both her parents were members of the Citizen Army and served in the 1916 Rising. Her father Laurence McLaughlin was an active member of the IRA's Dublin Brigade during the War of Independence and the Civil War. In the case of May McLaughlin, early childhood stories marked the beginning of her socialization into the republican movement. She stated that: 'My father was in the Citizen Army and my mother. I was born a republican, I didn't know anything else. That's the way I was reared'.<sup>66</sup>

The fact that May Mac Giolla stated that she was 'born a republican' indicates that tradition played a much stronger role than it did among other recruits from non-IRA family backgrounds. In this specific case it could be argued that family history and tradition certainly played a key role in her being subsumed into a new manifestation of republican separatism. Recollections of emotional and traumatic events from the 1916 to 1923 period were part and parcel of life growing up in the McLaughlin household. It could be surmised that the impact of these events actuated recruitment which transcended deeper ideological reasons for joining initially.

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with May Mac Giolla (6 June 2011).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

The Murphy family, from Leinster Road in North Strand in Fairview also had a tradition of militant republicanism from 1916, similar to the McLaughlin's. Republican activity such as attending commemorations was common among family members. Marion Steenson (nee Murphy) joined Cumann na mBan and remained a republican all her life. Both of her brothers, Bartholomew and Eamon, were interned in Crumlin Road jail in the 1950s. Her parents fought in the 1916 Rising, her father was the OC of the Dublin Brigade's first Battalion and her mother also played a role with the Citizen Army in the 1916 Rising, looking after injured republicans in the Pro-Cathedral during Easter week, she stated: 'He was in Kilmainham and she was in jail, that's how they met'.<sup>67</sup> Her parents remained active supporters of the republican movement after the Civil War. She also indicated that recollections of family involvement during the 1916 to 1922 period was the beginning of her introduction into the republican movement. Conventional children's stories in some instances were substituted with recollections of the 1916 period. When asked if her mother spoke about her republican past she replied: 'she always talked about it, nothing else went on in our home'.<sup>68</sup>

In the case of both the Mc Laughlin and the Murphy families, the IRA's campaign in the 1940s also had a pervasive influence growing up. Marion Steenson, for example, recalls IRA members on the run staying in her house as a child.<sup>69</sup> In many ways the experience of both women's upbringing illuminated how some people were gradually socialized into the republican movement as children in the 1930s and 1940s.

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with Marian Murphy (4 June 2011).

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Marian Murphy (4 June 2011).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

Horgan believes that ‘the legitimization of one’s decision to engage in violent protest, as well as involvement in a more general way may within the context of local circumstance, can be seen as a rite of passage, a movement towards consolidation of one identity within a broader community’.<sup>70</sup> The parents of Marion Steenson and May McLaughlin not only supported their decision to join the women’s section of the IRA, but also enlisted their children in the republican movements youth wings such as the Fianna and Cumman na gCailíní when they were children. When they reached their early teens their pastimes were spent in language classes and sporting organizations run by the republican movement. Marion Steenson traces how the process of socialization into the republican movement worked in her family: ‘As soon as we were old enough we went into the movement. There was Clann na Gael the girl scouts and the boys went in to the Fianna. They always had Irish classes and dance classes, we played camogie .....After the 40s then, ex internees set up the football club called Maurice O’Neill’s’.<sup>71</sup>

While a number of factors contributed to the growing republican movement in Dublin between 1948 and 1962, undoubtedly the events from 1916 to 1923 and family involvement in them assisted this revival. In many ways there were different degrees to how this influenced young people. For some it stimulated an initial interest for others it was following a family tradition. Nevertheless the tradition of militant republicanism in Dublin from 1916 until 1923 had a profound effect on some young people in their formative years, one which the republican movement successfully cultivated a quarter of a century later.

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<sup>70</sup> John Horgan, *The psychology of terrorism*, (New York, 2005), p. 91.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Marian Murphy (4 June 2011).

## **Longford/ Roscommon.**

The impact of the 1916-1923 period among some young people in county Longford and Roscommon was similar to that in Dublin. Maire Coleman described Longford during the War of Independence as being ‘one of the most important theatres of the Irish revolution.’<sup>72</sup> She added that ‘proportionately to its population, Longford was more violent than any other county in Leinster (excluding Dublin) during the period 1917-1923, and was also the most violent in the country outside of Munster’.<sup>73</sup> During the War of Independence a number of incidents in North Longford took place in which the family members of future IRA activists participated. In Aughnacliffe in April 1919, a gun battle took place between the RIC and the IRA. In November 1920 the IRA was involved in an ambush on the RIC in Ballinalee,<sup>74</sup> while in February 1921 at Clonfin the Auxiliaries surrendered after two of their members were killed in an IRA ambush.<sup>75</sup>

Parts of county Roscommon also experienced a highly active republican movement from 1916 until the end of Civil War. In county Roscommon, IRA ambushes in Kilronan and Keadue involving their parents and uncles sowed the seeds in the emerging generation. The IRA’s re-emphasis on appealing to a new generation to finish the revolution of 1921 was complemented in both counties where the events of militant republicanism of the 1920s had an influence.

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<sup>72</sup> Marie Coleman, *County Lonford and the Irish revolution* (Dublin, 2003), p. 5.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 123.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 127.

The IRA in county Longford established a unit led by Ruairí Ó Brádaigh who became Chief-of-Staff in 1958. Ó Brádaigh along with an IRA veteran of the 1920s, Terry McDermott reorganized the IRA in the Longford, South Roscommon area in the years leading to the outbreak of the border campaign in 1956. In 1957 while imprisoned Ó Brádaigh was elected to the constituency of Longford Westmeath. The fact that a crowd of over a thousand attended a rally in Longford town in support of the imprisoned IRA TD indicated a significant level of support for the renewed wave of IRA activity in the county.<sup>76</sup> Roscommon and Longford saw a revival in the republican movement in terms of IRA membership and a degree of popular support. Again this illuminates Anne Dolan's contention that a latent regard for militant republicanism was nuanced in certain local areas after the Civil War.

Sean Lynch from Augnaclyff in north Longford, who joined the republican movement in 1955 pointed to the everyday reminders of the War of Independence by family members while growing up. Social pastimes in a rural community in the 1950s facilitated the transmission of local history. The absence of television and the practice of céilí which involved neighbours meeting in certain homes in the community to discuss politics and local history was a common form of social gathering in rural Ireland at the time. The Lynch's home was a céilí house, and often witnessed discussions about politics and history.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Maire Coleman, *County Longford and the Irish revolution* (Dublin, 2003), p. 75.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Sean Lynch (4 April 2011).

However it was family involvement and recollections of the period which first stimulated his interest in republicanism. His father Sean F. Lynch was a member of the Sinn Féin courts in 1919 and elected to the Granard urban council in the 1920s, while his uncle Paddy was a member of the North Longford flying column.<sup>78</sup> His mother's family were also heavily involved in the republican movement during the early 1920s. Lynch pointed to the culmination of a number of factors which resulted in him joining the republican movement such as the barrack raids in the early 1950s. However, he traces his decision to get involved in the republican movement back to his early childhood and his grandmother's recollection of the 1916 to 1923 period:

There was nothing happening at the time with Sinn Féin. There was nothing about. Then I use to go on holidays to my grandmothers, she was a school teacher. It was all republican. The first poem I ever learned was from her and it was about Thomas Ashe. The lines that I remember real well were 'another hero kneels to toll, another martyr on the honors roll, brave Thomas Ashe'. Thomas Ashe was arrested for a speech in Ballinalee.<sup>79</sup>

He went on to state that: 'She told stories about all that. Her family were all involved and that. At the ambush at Clonfin, I had two uncles one on my fathers side and one on my mothers sides and two first cousins of my mother'.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Interview with Sean Lynch (4 April 2011).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

Lynch pointed out that neither his parents nor his grandmother encouraged him to join the republican movement and that his grandmother had told him to carefully consider his decision before getting involved.<sup>81</sup> His family's support for the IRA and their attendance at republican commemorations throughout his youth exposed him further to the renewed message of the IRA. The fact that his father was a War of Independence veteran and took him to IRA commemorations in the 1950s confirmed for him the continuity of the republican struggle and also gave, in his view, a legitimacy to the new generation of the IRA. His response illustrates how this worked:

My father used to go to commemorations, The Longford commemoration. I think it was set up in 1924. The first one I was at was in 1955. I went to it with my father, there was a fella from Cork speaking, he was a great speaker. It was in Newtown Forbes. I was getting more interested as the thing went on and it all kept in the way I was thinking. I said to you there about my grandmother. Well things were beginning to move on. There was something happening the thing was alive.<sup>82</sup>

Ruairí Ó Brádaigh and Sean Ó Brádaigh joined the republican movement in the early 1950s. Similar to Sean Lynch their father was a key member of the republican movement in Longford in the early 1920s. In April 1919 their father Matt Brady was shot five times in a confrontation with the RIC in Aughnaccliffe.<sup>83</sup> Their mother May Caffery was a member of Cumann na mBan.<sup>84</sup> Both parents rejected the Anglo Irish treaty in 1921 and

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with Sean Lynch (4 April 2011).

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Robert White Ruairi Ó Brádaigh: *The life and politics of an Irish revolutionary* (Indiana, 2009) p8.-9.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

supported the IRA subsequently. Ruairí Ó Brádaigh pointed to his family involvement in the 1920s as initiating his interest in republicanism:

My father died when I was ten. He had been filled full of bullets by the RIC in 1919, so he was quite crippled, I suppose they say the most impressionable period in a youngster's life is between seven and nine, and he died when I was ten. But he was a very uncompromising republican.<sup>85</sup>

Like Sean Lynch's father, the fact that Ó Brádaigh's father empathized with the IRA after 1923 again gave a form of authoritative legitimacy to the IRA in the 1950s. While Ó Brádaigh's father died before he joined the IRA, his father's support for the organization after independence and his attendance, along with his children, at republican events such as the funeral of an IRA hunger striker in the 1940s, heavily influenced the young Ó Brádaigh's. He clearly recalls his father's reaction to the execution of two IRA members in England in 1944 and how it influenced his political development in the subsequent years.

Before we went to school he was standing looking at the clock in the room and had his watch out. And when the clock struck nine, he said, 'Kneel down and say your prayer. Two Irishmen now lie in to quicklime graves in Birmingham.' I suppose you

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<sup>85</sup> Interview with Ruairí Ó Brádaigh in, Robert White's, *Provisional Irish republicans* (Connecticut, 1993), p. 38.



move on and you kind of forget about these things, but then when the whole thing starts happening (again) you remember all that.<sup>86</sup>

Tommy Cull from Arigna in county Roscommon joined the IRA at the age of sixteen in 1956. Again a familial tradition stretching back to the 1920s was something he was aware of from an early age. Cull joined the IRA with his friend Tom Lavin, also a son of an IRA veteran. Cull considered the area quite sympathetic to the IRA despite the fact that most people were Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil supporters. He contended that while some people would not join the IRA many were prepared to assist them: ‘A lot of people didn’t join but would help out and do anything for you and say nothing about it’.<sup>87</sup> This latent sentiment for militant republicanism was drawn upon by the new IRA in county Roscommon in terms of recruitment and support.

The Cull family played an influential role in key events in the 1920s. Tommy Cull’s father Eoin Cull was arrested after the Keadue ambush in 1920 in which three RIC men were killed.<sup>88</sup> His maternal uncle Tom Lynan from Ballyfarnan was also involved in IRA activity. His uncle Seamus Cull led an IRA Flying Column during the civil war and was killed by the Free State army, while his uncle Michael was also killed on IRA activity in January 1923.<sup>89</sup> While he insisted that his father rarely spoke about events of the period he does recall certain occasions when they were discussed: ‘A lot of people would have

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<sup>86</sup>, Robert White, *Provisional Irish republicanism: an oral and interpretive history* (Westport, 1993), p. 38.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Tommy Cull (2 July 2011).

<sup>88</sup> Kathleen Hegarty Thorne, *They put the flag a flying* (Oregon, 2007), p. 83.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, p. 194.

spoken to my father about things. That's when I use to hear it. When someone came to the house they be chatting about it, as I was saying that's only when you would hear him talking about it'.<sup>90</sup>

The combination of family involvement in the Roscommon IRA as well as the local tradition of republicanism in the North Roscommon area was pointed out as the catalyst which made him join the IRA with his friend Tom Lavin. It should be noted that Cull never told his father he was joining the IRA, while his mother opposed his decision for fear he would be killed or injured.<sup>91</sup> When asked why he joined: 'I was listening to people..... We went up to Ballinamore, but you can guess where it went after that. But I was only sixteen'.<sup>92</sup>

Similar to Dublin, the IRA's appeal to a new generation to complete the objectives of 1921 resonated with young people that had an awareness of militant republicanism. The seemingly high regard that former IRA activists were held in these communities, regardless of their political affiliations in the 1950s supports Horgan's view that certain role models in communities can justify in the eyes of young people their own decision to engage in armed groups. While it would be inaccurate to describe the decision of all those who joined the IRA, as a result of a non-ideological tradition, undoubtedly those interviewed confirmed that their initial interest in militant republicanism was through a family history of militant republican experiences. The IRA in the 1950s, successfully harnessed these formative influences in counties Roscommon and Longford.

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<sup>90</sup>Interview with Tommy Cull (2 July 2011).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

### **Armagh , Tyrone and Belfast.**

While the activities of the IRA of the 1920s had a pervasive influence among some of the younger generation in the south, the continuity of Irish separatism in Northern Ireland was also important component in the re-emergence of the new IRA from 1948 onwards. However it should be noted that in places such as Lurgan in North Armagh, the influence of the separatist tradition which was transmitted from the older generation to the next was possibly not as pronounced as it might have been in the south or in rural areas where the militancy of the 1920s was widely celebrated three decades after southern independence. The way the separatist tradition in nationalist areas of the north impacted on people's thinking is nuanced.

Some members such as Davey Lewsley and the Haughinn brothers from Lurgan had little recollection of growing up listening to stories about the Black and Tans or the 1916 Rising within the family environment. While they both came from nationalist backgrounds and listened to republican songs at parties, there was no IRA tradition in their families. They also indicated that the education curriculum in the north never covered Irish history in any great detail and both pointed to a sense of alienation from the state, recalling issues of discrimination as being one of the key motivating factors for why they joined.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, the separatist IRA obviously challenged the whole basis of the northern state; therefore young disillusioned men were attracted to it.

Bernadette O'Hagan, who grew up in Lurgan, also pointed out that politics was discussed very little at home. When asked if there was much discussion about the IRA of the 1920s,

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with Gerry and Joe Haughinn (6 July 2010). Interview with Davey Lewsley (6 June 2010).

her reply was: ‘I would not have heard of that. The first involvement or awareness I would have had of that, was my mother’s brother, Charlie Lavery... He would have actually lived in Edgeward street, he would have been in the IRA’.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, while her uncle was an IRA prisoner in the 1940s, it certainly did not seem to have had a considerable influence on her as a child. She stated that her mother’s brother or the local IRA had little contact with her family in terms of IRA activity: ‘they never would have involved my mother or father’.<sup>95</sup> It could be construed from her response that within her home environment as a child, there was an awareness of the IRA through family connections more than a pervasive IRA tradition. Bernadette O’Hagan never attended republican commemorations or IRA functions as a child and indicated that while there was a degree of respect for IRA members, the organization was very much on the margins of the nationalist community when she was growing up. While there was always some form of separatist tradition in Lurgan in the 1940s, in her case it did not seem to have been the overriding reason why she supported and became involved in the republican movement.

Nevertheless it was loyalty or a latent regard towards militant separatism that the IRA sought to build upon in the town in the early 1950s. The tradition was also carried from one generation to the next in Lurgan by charismatic or respected local people. J.B O’Hagan, a veteran from the 1940s was in many ways the link in the separatist chain that spearheaded the training of the local unit in the 1950s. The town had a link with previous

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<sup>94</sup> Interview with Bernadette O’Hagan ( 2 July 2010).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

campaigns even as far back as the 1920s, indeed after the border campaign some of the key IRA people such as O'Hagan remained with the Provisional IRA.

Disillusionment with the status quo alone was not enough to draw on a new generation to the IRA. This was, as Michael Farrell argues, assisted by the unwillingness of the northern government to address institutionalized discrimination.<sup>96</sup> The republican movement, which placed such a strong emphasis on the continuity of separatism, was helped in areas like Lurgan, where there was an informal structure through the existence of IRA men from previous campaigns, that had the potential to challenge the state through armed action.

The fortunes of the IRA were boosted by the funeral of Thomas Harte from Lurgan who was executed in the most recent campaign of the 1940s and whose body was reinterred in 1948. Also at this time a number of IRA internees had been released and were welcomed back to Lurgan, where they were greeted by local celebrations. Harte's funeral was organized by the local IRA and was reminder or a wake up call to a new generation, that the separatist tradition was still alive. The release of internees from the Curragh in the late 1940s, also actuated an interest in the IRA among some young people. Joe Haughinn suggested that the funeral and the release of the prisoners had an influence on his thinking and made him aware that an IRA tradition existed in the town, he stated: 'This is me only. But the 40s was not long past and the people that were interned, some of them were getting out', he added that; 'the local man here was executed in Dublin,

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<sup>96</sup> Micheal Farrell, *Northern Ireland, the orange state*, (London, 1976), p. 202.

Tom Harte and he was reinterred here'<sup>97</sup> He spoke about a big parade which accompanied the funeral, while Joe his brother vividly remembers it as a 'massive funeral'.<sup>98</sup> Young people who were not from traditional IRA families were exposed to a display of solidarity for the dead IRA man which in all probability contributed to a renewed interest in republicanism in Lurgan.

Another area in the north where the republican separatist tradition endured was in east and mid-Tyrone. The area became one of the greatest strongholds of militant republicanism over the twentieth century. Tyrone had the highest number of prisoners jailed by the end of the border campaign. The area became a hotbed of republican activity again with a fresh generation of eager recruits. Indeed Tyrone had produced thousands of republican activists over the years, hundreds of prisoners and many IRA activists who were killed in armed action. Its geographic location included republican strongholds such as Coalisland, Pomeroy and Carrickmore near Omagh.

The tradition of militant republicanism in the area went back centuries. According to James McElduff who was the leader of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Northern Division in 1921, a unit had met in Carrickmore in 1916, prepared to go to Dublin to fight in the rising, only to receive orders that it had been cancelled.<sup>99</sup> McElduff was involved in a number of military operations in the 1920s and was in many ways the embodiment of the continuity of separatism in the county. He became active again in the IRA in the 1930s, working with a new generation of recruits such as J.B O'Hagan from Lurgan. Both men from different

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<sup>97</sup> Interview with Gerry and Joe Haughinn (6 July 2010).

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Uniseann, MacEoin, *Survivors* (Dublin, 1980), p. 172.

periods supported the IRA throughout the twentieth century. Indeed many of the names in the area such as McElduff's or the Grugans from Carrickmore kept the tradition alive in the leaner years for the organization in the 1930s and 1940s.

Donal Donnelly, from Omagh, had a strong tradition of republican involvement in his family. Family circumstances would have influenced his decision to join. An IRA tradition within republican heartlands may in some cases have been inherited, however, some who came from this background, such as Donnelly, may simply have come from a more politicized home environment that stimulated an interest in wider politics. When asked to describe the republican tradition in his family, he stated:

My granny's people, the Gallaghers came from outside Dromore, they would have been involved in the Land League and subsequently to that, my granny's brother Mick Gallagher who was my grand uncle Red Mick Gallagher, was on the IRA Army Council in the 1930s and in fact was captured in a (infamous or famous, whatever word you want to use) ambush by the RUC called the Crown entry..... they caught, what you could call the cream of the IRA in the north, including Jim Killia, who formed the national cycling association and a young Charlie McGlade who later became very famous in the provisional movement or republican movement. They were all sentenced to imprisonment. My granduncle Michael Gallagher did time in Crumlin Road jail, where I subsequently went and my father's other brothers Paddy, Tommy and Francis all were in the IRA.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with Donal Donnelly (2 Dec. 2011).

While some historians may point to this as evidence that separatism was simply a non-political tradition inherited from one generation to the next, it should be noted that the Donnelly's in the late 1940s, were supporters of the Anti-Partition League campaign. This indicates a receptiveness to other sites of political struggle. His father had also participated in the rail workers strike of the 1930s. He also pointed to a having a deep interest in anti-colonial movements from an early age which will be examined further in chapter 4.

Nevertheless, family ties and social networks in Tyrone in the 1940s and 1950s ensured that social discourse was inextricably linked to republicanism in Tyrone, which always had the potential to manifest itself in support for a renewed IRA campaign. When asked was he aware of a republican tradition in the family he stated: 'very aware of it'.<sup>101</sup> He described his home as an 'Céilí' house, where locals visited regularly. Within this environment, history and political discussions took place:

There was always republican songs sang and that would have been one feature and there was always talk around the dinner table. And of course our local paper the *Ulster Herald* edited by a native Irish speaker called Pádraig Mac Giolla from Donegal, he highlighted the abuse of the unionist gerrymandered situation.<sup>102</sup>

In Belfast the republican tradition also extended back centuries, mainly in the west and north parts of the city as well as Catholic enclaves in East Belfast. Some of its members

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<sup>101</sup> Interview with Donal Donnelly (2 Dec. 2011).

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.



in the 1950s in Belfast, came from strong republican families such as Joe Cahill who became a leading member of the IRA. The 1940s campaign launched by the IRA also resulted in the imprisonment of a number of Belfast men in Crumlin Road jail. Seamus Steele was a leading member of the IRA in the city and remained so up until his death in 1970. In 1942 the 19 year old Belfast IRA member Tom Williams was executed for the killing of an RUC man. Also, in the 1946 an Ardoyne IRA man Seán McCaughy had died on hunger strike in Portlaoise Prison.

Joe Cahill had been involved in the IRA campaign of the 1940s. Cahill who was older than most new recruits in the late 1940s and early 1950s joined the IRA at the end of the 1930s. He remained a member of the IRA until the 1990s. Again a separatist tradition existed in his family. This coupled with bad social conditions in the 1930s appear to have contributed to his decision to become a member. However, ultimately the IRA and its strong position within the Cahill family was crucial in attracting him towards it. He stated that he:

Was born in 1920 and born in Belfast. I grew up in the heart of Belfast, in a working class district. And when I started to take notice of things. I noticed the terrible poverty there was about then. That sort of thing. I suppose my first thoughts on the whole thing were more from a social point of view. When I saw the condition that people lived under. All that type of thing you know. And I read quite a lot. I saw what was happening around me. Saw the terrible poverty. Saw the system that was working then in Belfast. And it was a natural revolution within me against this

particular thing. I just couldn't give you any clue as to how this built up within me. Whether it came from reading or what, I don't know. But I started then to delve into history that sort of thing. Now it is fair to say.. It is fair to say that I come from a republican background. Both my father and mother had Republican sympathies going back on both sides, on my father's side and my mother's side. Republican sympathies are bound to rub off.<sup>103</sup>

While Cahill's response reveal a number of different formative influences, the IRA was seen as the most obvious group to join, given its history of tangible action in physically challenging the northern state from within the nationalist community. While his response demonstrates a receptiveness to social issues, the belief among many northerners that joined the IRA, as demonstrated by Cahill, was that the only tried and tested political radicalism against the state had come from the separatist republican tradition. While Cahill did not suggest that he was encouraged by his family to get involved, given the tradition in his family, it did have some impact, he stated: 'It probably did make it easier for me, You know, that ..eh, it was a natural thing with me, if you like'.<sup>104</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the role that tradition in a local and family context played in the reproduction of republican separatism in the 1950s. While a number of academics have pointed to tradition as inherited sub-parochial loyalties, it has been argued that this is far too simplistic a view of why republican separatism re-emerged in the 1950s. Within

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<sup>103</sup> Robert White's, *Provisional Irish Republicans: an oral and interpretive history* (Westport, 1993), p 43-44.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

a small number of families who supported the IRA after the Civil War, tradition did override ideological considerations for involvement. Certainly within some families there was a type of socialization process where young people were enlisted in the Fianna by their parents, and this often evolved into IRA or Cumann na mBan membership. As discussed, prior to the re-organization of the IRA, there was a very small community of IRA supporters who kept the separatist tradition flickering through informal networks and certain activities such as commemorations and some of the offspring of these families ended up playing a role in the IRA's border campaign in 1957.

It is impossible to say for certain whether tradition outweighed ideological considerations in the minds of some of these young people. It should also be noted that, in some cases, children from these families played no role in the IRA. However, it is fair to make the case, that if one looks at the pattern of membership from one generation to the next within some families, tradition certainly had a significant role in recruitment. Nevertheless, it should be noted that some from such backgrounds also saw their political outlook evolve over time. One could argue that future IRA leaders such as Cathal Goulding and Ruairí Ó Brádaigh demonstrated the capacity to tailor their politics to the contemporary political situation regardless of their opposing political world views throughout their lifetime and both always demonstrated deep ideological convictions.

The main upsurge in membership in the 1950s did not come from 'IRA families'. The 1950s reorganization saw a new generation of young people from backgrounds which had a republican military tradition often from the 1916-1923 periods and in some cases before

hand. These young people often came from Fianna Fáil, but also Fine Gael and Labour backgrounds in the south. Many had a parent an uncle or an aunt who had been involved in the republican movement in the 1920s. Indeed, the same was true for young people that joined mainstream political parties at the time also.

Undoubtedly, from a young age many of those were exposed to stories of how family members played active roles in armed republicanism. The absence of TV, social media and advanced technology, coupled with close family circles and now redundant forms of social gatherings such as meeting in neighbour's houses or what was known locally as Céilí houses often saw the transmission of an oral history that was decoded by a new generation. Again this does not necessarily signify that those that joined the IRA simply followed a tradition, the nuanced responses from those interviewed has demonstrated that it was one of a number of formative influences.

In Northern Ireland the influence of previous manifestations of armed separatism also played a role. The IRA campaign in the 1940s may have been a military disaster but it did preserve a separatist tradition, particularly through displays of solidarity at deceased IRA men's funerals. These ceremonies promoted and revived the IRA in the late 1940s and early 1950s as a vehicle in challenging the status quo. In places such as Belfast, Armagh and Tyrone, certain families kept this tradition alive.

However, as will be examined in the following chapters, some of those from these family backgrounds were also receptive to a number of different influences and did for a period

embrace or court constitutional nationalist efforts to end partition. It can also be argued that the unequal nature of the Stormont state also helped preserve a tradition of armed republicanism.

What was significant in reviving the fortunes of the IRA from 1948 onwards, was that it managed to convince a section of a new generation that it was the legitimate inheritor of the republicanism from the 1920s and beforehand. This tradition was celebrated widely in 1950s Ireland. In a time when the establishment parties were obsessed with being seen as the inheritors of the 1916 generation, the IRA steadily established themselves. In doing this, the republican movement in many ways by-passed the Civil War discourse of the time, by representing themselves as the bridge to 1921. The organization that had remained loyal to the principles of 1916, and the organization that allocated a role to young people to complete the objectives of a previous generation, who were ironically often role models due to their previous incarnation as militant republican separatists.

## Chapter 3

### **‘The story without an End’. Representations of the Irish Historical narrative 1932-1959.**

This chapter will examine the role of a militant republican tradition through representations of Irish history by both the republican movement and in wider society. One of the key features which contributed to the republican movement’s reemergence from 1948 onwards was the prominence it placed on Irish history in its propaganda. Given the fact that many young people already had an awareness of militant republicanism through family or local tradition, this obviously had the potential to resonate among some of its future readers. A noticeable aspect of the reinvigorated *United Irishman* was the emphasis it placed on a particular version of Irish history which dominated its monthly editions. A tradition of unbroken resistance by separatist movements to British rule in Ireland was a recurring theme. This preoccupation with Irish history also permeated other aspects of southern society after independence, such as in popular literature, adolescent magazines, as well as elements of the print media. A tradition of armed action and sacrifice intertwined with a religious dimension was one of the attractions of the IRA at the time, however, it should be noted and as will be examined elsewhere in this thesis, motivation for joining the IRA cannot be put down to this alone. While many of the interviewees in this chapter highlighted a certain appeal that this aspect held for them, by and large their responses also demonstrate a developing ideological awareness around national and international issues. Nevertheless, a type of

history which elevated a separatist tradition and those involved in it as noble, brave and daring soldiers held many attractions for adolescents during the period.

While the IRA's historical narrative promoted in the *United Irishman* may have differed with the mainstream's historical interpretation of Irish history in some aspects, it shared the same teleological perspective, which saw Irish history as centuries of struggle with a united Ireland being its predestined outcome. The cultivation of this type of nationalist ideology in the south of Ireland was used to create a type of consensus in the new Free State. It could be argued that it reflected the establishment's shallow political denunciations of partition at the time. Donnacha Ó Beacháin maintains that the actual determination by the political establishment parties such as Fianna Fáil to see a united Ireland was questionable.<sup>1</sup> Therefore like the establishment parties' political posturing around partition, it elevated and promoted an objective in a society, where a group willing to bring about what it saw as a noble resolution, had the potential to resonate among young people

What needs to be looked at is how the IRA's interpretation of history in its re-energised propaganda had a currency in Irish society in the late 1940s and early 1950s, while also analyzing the study of Irish history in the school curriculum. The *Wolfe Tone Annual*, a popular magazine read by some young people in the 1950s will be examined. The emergence of a range of popular autobiographical accounts about the War of

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<sup>1</sup> Donnacha Ó Beacháin, *Destiny of the soldiers: Fianna Fáil, Irish republicanism and the IRA* (Dublin, 2010), p. 229.

Independence, by former IRA members in the late 1940s and 1950s, as well as the *Irish Press* newspapers will be looked at.

The global backdrop needs also be considered, where Irish teenagers had lived through the emergency while their British counterparts had lived through World War Two and read about the military exploits of the British armed forces of the time. Irish teenagers found their own heroic wartime equivalents through this new republican literature. The concept of the teen idol in literature, films and popular culture had emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War. It was within this global environment that a young generation of Irish nationalists began to be exposed to this type of literature. This chapter will essentially examine the influences that these interpretations of Irish history had on future IRA members and how the republican movement capitalized on them.

### ***The United Irishman***

One of the most significant aspects of the republican movement's reorganization was the launch of its paper *The United Irishman* in 1948. The paper was read by most IRA people interviewed and was often purchased in order to find out how to join Sinn Féin or the IRA at the time. By the mid 1950s the *United Irishman* was selling over 130,000 copies per month.<sup>2</sup> As well as the *United Irishman*, other republican publications were also circulated in the north, such as a paper called *An Glór Uladh (The voice of Ulster)*. One of the most striking aspects of these publications was the emphasis they placed on Irish history. While this was done in order to justify the republican movement's existence, it

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<sup>2</sup> John Maguire, *IRA interments and the Irish Government: subversive and the state 1939 1962* (Dublin, 2008), p. 64.



also had the potential to tap into an existing view in southern independent Ireland that the main theme of Irish history was one of centuries of struggle and that Ireland's destiny as an independent country would only be fulfilled when a united Ireland came about. The IRA continued to use the appeal of a militant tradition

This certainly was nothing new to the IRA. In the late 1920s when the organization was under the leadership of ideologically left wing activists such as Frank Ryan, the continuity in militant separatism was also claimed and championed. For example in 1929, on the hundred anniversary of the Catholic Emancipation Act, Frank Ryan as editor of *An Phoblacht*, condemned the celebrations to mark it, claiming that the act simply appeased middle class Catholics at the time and that the same struggle which the IRA were involved in the late 1920s was centuries old: 'The issue in 1829 (or at any time previously or subsequently) was not for privileges for any creeds within the British Empire, it was the plain issue of Ireland's freedom, the same issue which has been since 1169 and will be until Irishmen achieve emancipation'.<sup>3</sup>

The continuity of militant separatism according to the IRA and Sinn Féin was also underpinned with a religious dimension. By examining the *United Irishman's* interpretation of history, two themes are illuminated: the continuity of separatist struggle with a religious underpinning, as well as an emphasis on the need to complete the objectives of the War of Independence. As has been looked at in the previous chapter, given the degree of awareness that certain young people had about family or community involvement among the previous generation of republican militants, the IRA's

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<sup>3</sup> Seán Cronin, *Frank Ryan: the search for the Republic* (Dublin, 1980), p. 29.

perspective of Irish history had the potential to further cultivate this growing interest. Yet again republican propaganda had the potential to appeal not only to those from traditional IRA families but also those from backgrounds whose parents supported constitutional parties’.

This theme was continually repeated within the pages of the *United Irishman*. Pearse became an iconic and almost spiritual figure that linked the past with the present. He was elevated to John the Baptist-like status and was described as the last great republican evangelist ‘who faithfully tended to and added to the storehouse of doctrine nourished and laid up by Wolfe Tone, Thomas Davis, John Mitchell and Fintan Lalor’.<sup>4</sup> The writings of these historical figures featured prominently in the IRA’s literature, while their personal sacrifices were also stressed. The same message was promulgated repeatedly throughout the 1950s, that these people kept the separatist tradition alive and that a new generation was needed to complete their task, the central concept of blood sacrifice being an integral part of achieving this. Certainly at times within its propaganda and recruitment appeals, an unbroken separatist tradition was emphasized more so than a close examination of the nuanced approaches that different manifestations of separatists used.

A notable feature also of the IRA’s propaganda and its version of Irish history was the focus it placed on religion. Considering the pervading influence of Catholicism in Ireland at the time, the IRA’s emphasis on republican militancy intertwined with a religious

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<sup>4</sup> *United Irishman*, May 1955.

dimension also had the possibility to attract support or at the very least alleviate any moral dilemmas that involvement in an armed group might pose for young people.

The movement's propaganda stressed the importance of religion and claimed that, not only was armed separatism justified, but that it also had a religious sanction. In 1955, a poem called 'Pearse's Oath' appeared on the front page of the *United Irishman*. Indeed the prayer featured on more than one occasion during the 1950s. It sometimes was used to entice young people to join the IRA, it equated the sacrifice of Jesus, Our Lady and the saints with Huge O'Neill, Sarsfield, Emmet and other Irish martyrs:

In the name of God, by Christ his only son, by Mary his gentle mother, by Patrick the apostle of the Irish, by the loyalty of Colmcille, by the name of our race, by the blood of our ancestors, by the murder of Red Hugh O'Donnell, by the desire of Sarsfield at the point of death, by the groaning of the oppressed Fitzgerald, by the fate of Owen Roe, by the dripping wounds of Emmet, by the corpse of the famine, by the tears of Irish exiles, we swear the oath our forefathers swore, that we will burst the bondage of our nation or fall side by side.<sup>5</sup>

Catholicism was an important aspect in some parts of the country for individual IRA members. Seán Garland pointed out that many of his colleagues in the Curragh were deeply religious and that a branch of the Legion of Mary was established there.<sup>6</sup> Gerry Higginbottom a Dublin member, went to see two priests prior to the border campaign in

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<sup>5</sup>*United Irishman*, Feb. 1955.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Seán Garland (12 Jan. 2012).

order to reassure himself that engaging in armed action was a justified course of action.<sup>7</sup> Lurgan woman Bernadette O'Hagan also felt that many northern activists were quite religious, including her husband J.B O'Hagan. She stressed that her husband's religious conviction was a fundamental aspect of his republicanism.<sup>8</sup> In the days leading up to an attack on Dungannon RUC station in 1957, the IRA had been in discussions with a local priest who gave the men absolution. Davey Lewsley stated that the priest: 'gave us all a pair of rosary beads each, gave us confession and the last words he said before we all left was "I'll be reading about you in the morning lads, all the best, your cause is just".<sup>9</sup>

Not only was it necessary for the IRA to emphasize that an armed campaign did not contradict the beliefs of some of its members, a pervading Catholic influence in republican propaganda and among would be recruits was an influence at the time. It should be added that the movement's ideological position according to republican literature and spokespeople was inspired by Wolfe Tone and the United Irishman and the need for Catholic and Protestant unity. It also issued a special appeal to the unionist community and promised equal religious and civil liberty in an independent Ireland.<sup>10</sup>

In the 1930s the republican movement attracted support from some Shankill Road Protestants but this was unimaginable by the 1950s, partly due to the fact that a Catholic tradition was intertwined with many aspects of the organization. While the organization was ideologically opposed to sectarianism, the reality was that the literature and attitudes

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Donal Donnelly (2 Dec. 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Bernadette O' Hagan (2 July 2010)

<sup>9</sup> Interview with David Lewsley (6 June 2010).

<sup>10</sup> *United Irishman*, Mar. 1958.

of members was one immersed in a Catholic custom, one which was unlikely to attract working class Protestants disillusioned with the status quo. Therefore a Catholic tradition which ran through the IRA at the time counteracted some of its more progressive ideological positions on economic and international issues which will be examined in the next chapter and in effect circumscribed membership to those from Catholic or nationalist backgrounds or to non-Catholics who would have to accept a Catholic ethos and symbolism as part and parcel of the republican movement.

The *United Irishman* was read by many who joined the IRA at the time. In Dublin for example Tony Hayde and Mick Ryan applied to join the IRA through the advertisements in the paper. As already stated the paper's quite extensive coverage of international events as well domestic issues appealed to some while it also regularly commented on the economic situation at the time. However, its depiction of Irish history had the potential to allure young idealistic people who already had their interest stimulated by other representations of republicanism within Irish society. While not the defining reason for IRA recruitment, in this regard an unbroken tradition underpinned by a spiritual dimension and sacrifice was successful in attracting new recruits.

Mick Ryan from East Wall in Dublin became aware of a neighbour who sold the paper at the time and pointed to the impact it had on him initially: 'I got a copy of the *United Irishman* off this chap and read it from start to finish. I couldn't believe what I was reading, when I use to think about 1916 and see that painting of Pearse, like in the GPO,

I'd say God, I wish I was alive then'.<sup>11</sup> For Seán Lynch in Longford, the paper also by the way left a lasting impression, as Lynch was from a family that supported the IRA, his exposure to the paper cultivated earlier childhood influences: 'The first *United Irishman*, my father brought it in from Longford. I can remember real well, a little article about Kevin Barry'.<sup>12</sup>

### **Educational curriculum**

The IRA's teleological view of Irish history which became a feature of the *United Irishman* throughout the late 1940s and 1950s in many respects reflected a similar view of Irish history to that presented in the education curriculum after independence. The education curriculum in the Northern state was notable for the absence of Irish history and this void will be discussed later. The history curriculum in the south however sought to celebrate and elevate the participants in the eight hundred year long nationalist struggle. While a number of interviewees felt that their experience of history teaching in school did not go beyond the War of Independence, it did nevertheless reflect a shared teleological view with the republican movement that Irish history was one of centuries of struggle with a predestined outcome. O'Callaghan argues that the function of history teaching in the Free State was to pass onto a new generation a popular political version of history to legitimise the objectives and status of the State.<sup>13</sup> He argues that the objective of teaching in independent Ireland 'was the transmission of the distinct nationality upon which the state was founded. The past served the multitude as well as the elite; it allowed

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Mick Ryan (2 Jan . 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Sean Lynch (4 April 2011).

<sup>13</sup> John O'Callaghan, *Teaching Irish independence: history in Irish schools, 1922-1972* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 63.

the Irish people to reconcile themselves to contemporary economic and social woes while taking pride in the self image it offered them as a people.<sup>14</sup> A shared nationalist narrative of Irish history until 1916 was ultimately a unifying influence in the new state.

O'Callaghan also argues that 'a teleological construal of history is fundamental to the essentialist view of nationality, with the nation state as the achieved or about to be achieved aspiration'.<sup>15</sup> He adds that the Irish education system after independence impressed on students 'the unique qualities of a Gaelic nation' and how it had endured centuries of oppression from the 'halcyon days of the pre Norman era, through the long struggle of conquest, persecution, endurance and deliverance, the narrative featured martyrs like Wolfe Tone, Emmet, O'Donovan Rossa, Connolly and Pearse'.<sup>16</sup> This view is also supported by Vincent Comerford who believes that it was not only evident in nationalist propaganda, but also in scholarly historiography in independent Ireland which saw the ancient Gaelic world as the embryonic modern nation.<sup>17</sup> This approach to teaching history in many ways was a political tool used in the Free State in order to give a historical legitimacy to the status-quo.

This popular ideology was disseminated through different means in the south, one being within the school curriculum. The fact that a simplistic nationalist narrative of Irish history became part of the ideological consensus in independent Ireland prevented a genuine questioning of the social or economic nature of the state and elevated the idea

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<sup>14</sup>John O Callaghan, *Teaching Irish independence: history in Irish schools, 1922-1972* (Cambridge, 2009), p.59.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, p.59.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*, p. 2.

that national reunification as the predestined outcome to centuries of Irish history. This view was also echoed in the prominence that the IRA placed on a similar simplistic view of history in the *United Irishman*. Like the state the republican movement placed the reunification of Ireland as the most pressing concern that faced the Irish people and that this would lead to an improvement in living standards for all. The fact that the IRA portrayed themselves as the latest chapter of Irish history which would make the predestined concept become reality, gave a degree of relevancy to the resurgent IRA, and complemented the way Irish history was represented in society and in the education system at the time.

How the republican and separatist tradition is represented through this medium has been commented on by a number of academics and social commentators who have pointed towards its significance in influencing younger generations. According to Joost Augusteijn, a nationalistic version of Irish history and commemoration in the 1920s influenced schoolchildren.<sup>18</sup> Past pupils of this type of educational environment have also pointed to how history was taught from a nationalist perspective, particularly by the Christian Brothers. The writer Denis O'Donoghue from Newry who went to the Christian Brothers in the 1940s spoke about how students were 'encouraged to regard the history of Ireland as a great story that lacked only a noble resolution.'<sup>19</sup> Noel Browne who became the Minister for Health in 1948, also pointed to a nationalist version of history taught to

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<sup>18</sup> Joost Augusteijn, 'Motivation; 'Why did they fight for Ireland?', the motivation of volunteers in the revolution', (ed), Joost Augusteijn, *The Irish revolution*, 1913-23 (New York, 2002), p. 112.

<sup>19</sup> Denis O'Donoghue, *Warrenpoint*, (New York, 1990), pp156-7.



him in school as having a pervasive influence on young people educated by these means.<sup>20</sup>

It is hard to accurately gauge to what extent young people joined the IRA at any period as a result of the way history education was conducted in school. While the aim of history education in independent Ireland may have been to create consensus in society, it also lay the foundations for some in their formative years, who later saw the IRA's representation of history in the *United Irishman* as an extension of what they had learned in school. As will be shown later on, it had varying degrees of influence on different members. Nevertheless what needs also to be examined is how Irish history was interpreted and presented within the school curriculum which bolstered the IRA's historical version and gave it a familiar relevance to the youth of the 1950s.

History textbooks illustrate this nationalist approach to teaching in 1940s Ireland, in which a whole generation of children were educated, including future IRA members. The range of textbooks highlighted heroic patriot courage against centuries of repression, and this became part of a narrative that was disseminated within Irish school textbooks. The Christian Brothers secondary school text book *The Kincora Reader* also reflected a similar approach to Irish history. Some of those interviewed such as Tony Hayde, Donal Donnelly and Eamon Boyce were educated by the Christian Brothers. The response of Paddy O'Regan who attended the Christian Brothers in Dublin's North Inner City, illuminates the Brother's nationalist approach to education, where reading material on

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<sup>20</sup> John O Callaghan, *Teaching Irish independence: history in Irish schools, 1922-1972* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 55.

the school curriculum, which did not have an Irish nationalist dimension was often ignored:

They were very nationalistic. One subject you never missed was your Irish or religion. They weren't too pushed about teaching you English, I remember when I was in sixth standard, the primary cert was on the go. We got *Treasure Island* as our reader, we never opened it once, not once in the whole year.<sup>21</sup>

The writings of Tomas Davis appeared in *The Kincora Reader* which was favoured reading material by the Christian Brothers. A chapter titled 'Thoughts from Tomas Davis' placed an emphasis on the importance of Irish heritage such as place names which had their origins in Gaelic Ireland. The Irish landscape was depicted as the most majestic in the world, while Irish history was intertwined with a noble tradition of poetry, which according to Davis should remember those who died seeking independence: 'I never heard of any famous nation which did not honour the names of its departed great, study the annals of the land and cherish the associations of its history and theirs. The national mind should be filled to overflowing with such thoughts'.<sup>22</sup> A poem by John Todhunter, also in the *Kincora reader* reflected a similar fixation, an almost mystical fascination with Irish history, 'through the long night, through Irelands night of tears, new songs wake in the morn of her awakening, from the enchantment of nine hundred years'.<sup>23</sup> The texts of these books where Ireland was elevated as a proud and noble nation which had endured centuries of sacrifice and persecution was evidence of a relatively young

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Paddy O'Regan (2 June 2011).

<sup>22</sup> *The Kincora reader* (Dublin, 1940 ), p. 87.

<sup>23</sup> *The Kincora reader* (Dublin, 1940 ), p. 24.

independent country seeking to assert its position in the world and it was against this wider backdrop that these textbooks can also be seen.

The textbooks by the Christian Brothers had what could be described as having a dedicated nationalist focus. While the history taught by them did not go beyond the 1916 Rising, it did represent Irish history as part of a series of legitimate militant revolts against repressive English regimes. Many accounts of militant insurrection featured throughout these textbooks also. Not only did these accounts legitimise militant republicanism from a previous generation, they glorified it: thus the continuity in separatist militancy over the centuries was venerated in these textbooks. The elevation of certain historical figures that possessed almost messianic qualities was evident in the Brothers depiction of separatist leaders. The Brothers also produced a magazine at the time called *Our Boys* which featured similar stories and cartoons.

Many of the accounts which depicted Irish separatists by the Brothers were replete with acts of heroism and selfless bravery. A chapter in the *Kincora Reader* about the 1798 rebellion gave an account of Wolfe Tone's role in the Rising where it stated that he 'fought like a lion, exposing himself to every peril of conflict' while his impending death was described as follows, 'he knew that his hour had come but he went cheerfully to his doom'.<sup>24</sup> Pearse's role in the 1916 Rising was also described in similar glowing terms, 'A soldier's death for Ireland and freedom, he would have chosen that death of all deaths had God offered him the choice. Chivalrous, charitable, noble was the spirit of this man when

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<sup>24</sup> *The Kincora reader* (Dublin, 1940), p 161-162.

he realised the end had come'.<sup>25</sup> This again mirrored the glorious and religious act of sacrifice and redemption, a theme omnipresent in Catholicism at the time as well as in the IRA's propaganda.

Poems and songs also featured in the *Kincora Reader* which extolled the virtues of armed militancy. Previous manifestations of political violence were legitimised in many of the poems and songs. Lionel Johnson's poem 'Who fears to speak of 98', which celebrated the militancy of the United Irishmen in the 1798 rebellion also featured. This poem not only legitimised the actions of the United Irishmen, but in many ways invited a new generation to carry on the separatist tradition. 'Who fears to speak of 98, not he who fears a poisonous peace, for while the days of triumph wait, and till the days of sorrow cease, He with the lord and friend, will fight for Ireland till the end'.<sup>26</sup>

Certain poems traced the continuity in the separatist tradition going back to the 16th century. The glorification of militancy against the British was a recurring theme. A poem by Roger Casement which celebrated Hugh O'Neill's victory at the Battle of Benburb appeared in the *Kincora reader*. In its introduction, the reader is told 'O'Neill won a great victory against the Scots leaving thousands of men dead on the field'.<sup>27</sup> Another poem about Hugh O'Donnell reflected a similar theme which celebrated victory over the English 'O with O'Donnell, then fight the old fight again, sons of TirConnall all valiant and true, make the false Saxon feel, Erin's avenging steel'.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>, *The Kincora reader* (Dublin, 1940), p.53.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 163.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 197.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.,p. 186.

Those interviewed gave mixed responses to questions about the impact that the teaching of history had on shaping their future outlook. For some of its future leading members it was their introduction to militant republicanism. Others felt that history was biased in favor of the Free State and ended at the 1916 Rising. While some pointed to other influences that stimulated their interest in militant republicanism, they did feel it may have complemented the IRA's propaganda. The republican movement offered a similar view of a centuries old struggle; however it also offered a solution.

The way history was represented and taught, nurtured an already developing interest. Seán Ó Brádaigh from a republican family and who attended St Mel's in County Longford, felt that Irish history was taught with a very nationalistic slant and described his teachers 'fervor' when it came to teaching Irish history and in particular poems by 1916 leaders such as Joseph Mary Plunkett.<sup>29</sup> Marion Steenson from a staunch IRA background, indicated that the way history was presented, nurtured earlier influences of republicanism which she was exposed to at home. She attended St Agatha's School at North William Street in Dublin, of which she recalled: 'Yes we learned all our history in school.... I remember learning Pearse's The Mother and different things like the Battle of Clontarf'.<sup>30</sup>

A Leitrim interviewee pointed to his father's political outlook as being his first great influence in terms of his political and historical awareness, in many ways this was also nurtured at school. He described how his teacher established a library in his school where

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Seán Ó Brádaigh (2 Feb. 2010).

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Marian Murphy (4 June 2011).

books about the War of Independence featured and how the protagonists were ‘looked up to and revered’.<sup>31</sup>

Future IRA Army Council member Mick Ryan from East Wall in Dublin, who was not from a republican family pointed to his education with the Brothers as being the pivotal reason in why he became interested in militant republicanism. For him the way history was presented by the republican movement in the early 1940s and early 1950s was an extension of what he had learned in school. When asked what was his initial interest in Irish republicanism he stated that:

I left national school at seven, my mother was a great believer in the Brothers, so she enrolled me in the CBS in Seville Place near the North Strand, near the Five Lamps. Anyway, I went there and that was my first real introduction to Irish nationalism and republicanism. There was not much talk of it at home.<sup>32</sup>

While Ryan was of the opinion that the history he learned at school was sanitized and ended at 1916, he indicated that it did instill in him ‘a love of country’.<sup>33</sup> Combined with the way Irish history was depicted in school textbooks, individual teachers with a particular nationalist outlook developed his growing interest. Ryan stated:

I was lucky in that the very first teacher (in the Christian Brothers) I had was a man called Frank Cahill. Frank had a gamy leg. But any way Frank had taken part in

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Leitrim Person (2 Mar. 2010).

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Mick Ryan (2 Jan. 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Mick Ryan (2 Jan. 2012).

1916; and he was a TD in the First Dáil, he inspired me and some of us with a love of country and that. He wasn't a singer, but he taught us a couple of great songs like 'Deep in Canadian Woods We Met' the Fenian song and a few other things and he was really a kind of republican and Irish, he hadn't any Irish himself, but he was a lovely man.<sup>34</sup>

Ryan also spoke about the nationalistic iconography of the Christian Brothers school as well as the way Irish history was imparted:

It was very simple. He talked about 1916 and Ireland and had no love for England, that's putting it mildly you know, but at seven you don't take in things, like the barest of things. Like Brian Boru, there was a painting of Brian Boru, him praying at his tent before the Battle of Clontarf, like a thousand years ago and that was in his class room and that had a terrible effect on me, well I don't mean terrible, but like I would almost cry when I would think of it, that he died like that and there he was kneeling down, it was a very inspiring type of picture.<sup>35</sup>

Seán Garland who attended St Canice's School in Dublin's Inner City felt that history was underpinned by a Catholic nationalist bias. He was of the view that history was presented in a certain way to suit the Catholic Church and the elite. Indeed he indicated that this simplistic view of Irish history was not totally dissimilar to that preached by the IRA, where the basic thrust of their representation of Irish history was interwoven with

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with Mick Ryan (2 Jan. 2012).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

religion. He indicated that the dominant school of Irish history at the time, did percolate its way down to the general public, including future IRA members, and was reflected in the attitude of many of its members. For example Garland maintained that rendition of the rosary was very much part of the daily prison life in the Curragh internment camp.<sup>36</sup>

While Irish history in the *United Irishman* may have elevated the role of separatists and castigated constitutionalists such as Daniel O’Connell, who played an important role in the state’s narrative, both did share a teleological view of Irish history which was underpinned with religion and ignored left wing or socialist accounts of Irish history. Garland described his experience:

I was always fond of reading. I did well in school, Maths and English, I didn’t get engaged with any sort of sporting activity in school. But as you know yourself the Christian Brothers weren’t concerned very much with education, but having you as a Gaelic speaking, Gaelic football player and everything that went with that, maybe Irish dancing. I had no interest in that.<sup>37</sup>

He elaborated :

‘It was very much slanted to a national view of history, but also a very partisan Catholic view of things. There was no kind of broad sweep of history, where you could see who else was involved. James Connolly was never mentioned in our

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with Seán Garland (12 Jan. 2012).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



history classes or any kind of socialist or any person that was even involved in trade union activity, like Larkin. But none of those people were ever mentioned. It was very much geared to the nationalist population the Catholic population. They more or less took over it'.<sup>38</sup>

Others felt that history teaching was censored by the state. Eamon Boyce who attended St Canice's school felt that 'Irish history finished at 1916'.<sup>39</sup> He pointed to family influences and emigration as having a much stronger impact in his motivation for joining the IRA. Tony Hayde also felt that history teaching was sanitized, however he did feel that Irish history was portrayed from a nationalist perspective and that centuries of nationalist insurrection was stressed in the way it was taught: 'I liked history and geography. The history was very restricted; it didn't go into 1916 or it certainly didn't go near the Civil War. Everything was very much sanitized'.<sup>40</sup> He also stated that:

We were taught we had a great history and that people paid the ultimate price. And that the British shouldn't be here and it was great that the British were gone. That would have been the extent of it. Now the gymnasium in the school which is still there in Inchicore was where the (1916) court martial was carried out. We were never told it was a very historic building'.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Seán Garland (12 Jan .2012).

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Eamon Boyce (2 Feb. 2010).

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Tony Hayde (2 Feb. 2011).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

In other cases some of the interviewees reflected a deeply unhappy experience during their school years due to brutality at the hands of some of their teachers, that in some cases counteracted the nationalistic ethos which the education system attempted to impart to youngsters. Paddy O'Regan described his experience of the education system in the late 1940s and early 1950s: 'It was an all Irish school. They were bastards. It was a very violent school, not the kids that were violent, but the teachers were violent and they were predominately Christian Brothers, extremely violent people'.<sup>42</sup> In O'Regan's case it could be surmised that the nationalist ethos of the Christian Brothers and the wider education curriculum had no formative influence on his decision to become involved in armed republicanism, he stated: 'I went in to first year secondary and I didn't finish it. I hated it, we were doing Latin through Irish and we couldn't speak English. I didn't finish first year secondary. I went to the tech, I did two years in the tech and loved it'.<sup>43</sup>

While some historians have pointed to the way Irish history was taught as having an instrumental impact on IRA recruitment at different times in Irish history, the response from those interviewed is more complex. It should be pointed out that those in the northern school system who did not go to the Christian Brothers did not have the same nationalist exposure when it came to history education. That Irish history was not covered and therefore was not a factor in influencing them unlike their southern counterparts.

When asked where his awareness of history came from, Joe Haughinn said: 'Well the people you lived with or were connected with or the people you were knocking about

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with Paddy O'Regan (2 June 2011).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

with, that's where it would have come from. But in the early 50s, there wasn't a whole lot going on' his brother Gerry maintained that: 'You wouldn't have got it in school, I tell you that much, you wouldn't have got it in school. In fact, they weren't allowed teach it, more or less'.<sup>44</sup>

Joe Haughinn explained his experience of history teaching saying that it; 'was English influenced or world history of some sort, but certainly you wouldn't have heard of the Rising'.<sup>45</sup> While southern members who joined the IRA were exposed to a nationalist version of Irish history through official recommended reading material, the same was not the case for many young nationalists north of the border, Joe Haughinn added that 'even your reader was British orientated'.<sup>46</sup>

For some of those interviewed, the history presented in school was censored and had little influence in their formative years. For example Donal Donnelly who attended the Christian Brothers in Omagh dismissed out of hand, the way history was taught and pointed to daily experiences of discrimination of Catholics as being the biggest motivating factor among his peers.<sup>47</sup> Others such as Mick Ryan from a non republican family in Dublin indicated that it was essential in stimulating his interest. While at times the education curriculum would have contrasted sharply with the IRA's version of history, both shared this same teleological outlook. The IRA's propaganda from 1948 onwards placed a significant emphasis on a particular view which echoed the teleological

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with Joe and Gerry Haughinn (6 July 2010).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Donal Donnelly (2 Dec. 2011).

view articulated in officialdom, which in turn gave the organization a degree of relevancy to many young people. While the teaching of history may not have been as pivotal as historians such as Augusteijn or F.X Martin believes it was in other generations of militant republicanism, it cannot be overlooked when examining influencing factors.

### ***The Wolfe Tone Annual***

The *Wolfe Tone Annual* by Brian O'Higgins who was a former IRA member, was a yearly magazine covering various aspects of Irish history. The *Annual* consisted of short stories, poems and songs about Irish history. Its representation of Irish history which was aimed at a young audience certainly glorified the separatist tradition while pointing to armed republicanism in the 1950s as its natural inheritor. While the *Annual* was advertised and appealed to a broad audience throughout Ireland, Dublin IRA man Mick Ryan felt that not only did it have an influence on some young people who joined the republican movement, but that the type of history presented made the magazine the 'IRA man's Bible'.<sup>48</sup> Donal O'Shea from Kerry also read it as a teenager: 'I read that regularly....Brian O' Higgins brought that out.... That was great'.<sup>49</sup> Its representation of Irish history echoed that of the Republican movement who advertised it in *The United Irishman* through the 1950s.

The editor of the *Annual* Brian O'Higgins was a 1916 veteran. Born in County Meath in 1882 he was a member of the GAA and the Gaelic League. During the Civil War he was imprisoned. He also served as president of Sinn Féin in the 1930s and spent the years

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Mick Ryan (2 Jan. 2010).

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Donal O'Shea (2 Feb. 2010).

leading up to and during the revolution in the 1920s, composing songs and poems in support of republicanism. His work was also noted for its devotion to Catholicism. He published countless pamphlets and booklets of prayers and religious stories which often depicted the Irish nation as a gift from God. For example *A rosary of song* was a book of poems by O'Higgins which was dedicated to different Catholic saints. One poem called 'The faith of Ireland' gave a spiritual dimension to Ireland and likened its history to the suffering of Christ 'that unto the end the faithful nation, Be brave and true, loving the cross when foes are many and friends are few'.<sup>50</sup> Another booklet called *The mercy of God, stories in verse* repeated the same religious themes. One poem 'For Ireland' involved a young girl praying to the sacred heart for Irish Freedom, 'And what are you going to pray for, O that Ireland may soon be free that there may be peace and love and joy in the land from sea to sea.'<sup>51</sup>

In 1932 O'Higgins brought out his first edition of the *Wolfe Tone Annual* which continued to be published until 1962. While suppressed during the Emergency by the government, the *Annual* became popular reading material again among some young people by the late 1940s. Advertisements and reviews of the *Annual* featured in both the national and local media. *The Irish Press* in 1948 carried an advertisement praising it for its 'telling of the ever inspiring story of Owen Roe O'Neill and the rising of 1641'.<sup>52</sup> A review in the *Irish Independent* in 1952, described the annual as 'both absorbing and revealing' and covering many aspects of Irish history that had been ignored.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Brian O' Higgins, *Rosary of song* (Dublin, 1932), pp 96- 97.

<sup>51</sup> Brian O' Higgins, *Glory be to God* (Dublin, 1959), p. 30.

<sup>52</sup> *The Irish Press*, 30 Jan. 1951.

<sup>53</sup> *The Irish Independent*, 16 Feb. 1952.

Local newspapers also carried advertisements for the *Wolfe Tone Annual*. The *Meath Chronicle* described O'Higgins's representation of history as being told with 'the stamp of candor and truth'.<sup>54</sup> In 1954, the *Annual* was dedicated to the life of O'Donovan Rossa. The *Meath Chronicle* praised the edition saying that 'the noble story of Rossa and his times is told graphically, simply, sympathetically and above all truthfully'.<sup>55</sup> *The Kerryman* in 1954, featured an advertisement about the *Annual* which stated that 'it is a pity the *Wolfe Tone Annual* is not read aloud in every school and college and public hall in Ireland'.<sup>56</sup>

While Brian O'Higgins's view of Irish history was in favour of armed republicanism in the 1950s, it also echoed a similar teleological view of Irish history as preached by the republican movement and in the Irish education system at the time. Also the fact that it was promoted widely in the local and national media reinforces Anne Dolan's view about an ambiguity in attitudes to armed separatism.<sup>57</sup> O'Higgins's work was also distinguished for the emphasis it placed on how religious faith was inextricably linked to militant republicanism. The Irish separatist was continually portrayed as the chivalrous and pious hero.

This was a recurring theme in O'Higgins representation which was tailored to an adolescent audience. Martyrdom and sacrifice played an important role in O'Higgins

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<sup>54</sup> *The Meath Chronicle*, 3 Feb. 1951.

<sup>55</sup> *The Meath Chronicle*, 13 Feb. 1954.

<sup>56</sup> *The Kerryman*, 13 Feb. 1954.

<sup>57</sup> Anne Dolan, 'Our army of Fenian dead', in Fergal McGarry (ed.), *Republicanism in modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2003), p. 135.

narrative. The *Annual's* interpretation of Irish history has been described as 'faith and fatherland' type history which drew on Pearse's view of Irish history and conferred a spiritual approval on republicanism.<sup>58</sup> The popularity of the magazine among young people undoubtedly fed into republican propaganda from 1948 onwards which shared many of the same sentiments espoused in *The Wolfe Tone Annual*.

The fact also that the *Annual* echoed a popular ideology in 1950's Ireland, which was that Irish history was unfinished business, has led some academics to contend that this directed many young people towards militant republicanism. FX Martin states; 'The academic historian may knowingly shake his head, confident that Pearse and his followers have misrepresented Irish history, but in fact it has not been Stephens and Stephen Mac Kenna, but Brian O'Higgins who have directly influenced the political views of Irish youth'.<sup>59</sup> As will be demonstrated later, O'Higgins work, did have varying degrees of influence on young people's decision to become involved in the republican movement in the 1950s.

Irish history according to the *Wolfe Tone Annual* was a perpetual struggle against what was the 'invader' which first set foot in Ireland with the arrival of the Normans. Yearly editions concentrated on particular events in Irish history, where different manifestation of armed separatists challenged what O'Higgins saw as British oppression in Ireland. For

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<sup>58</sup> FX Martin, 'The evolution of a myth- the easter rising, Dublin 1916' in Eugene Kamenka (ed.) *Nationalism: the nature and evolution of an idea* (London, 1976), p. 66.

<sup>59</sup> FX Martin, 'The evolution of a myth- the Easter rising, Dublin 1916' in Eugene Kamenka (ed.) *Nationalism: the nature and evolution of an idea* (London, 1976), p. 68.

example the 1948 edition focused on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1798 rebellion.<sup>60</sup> In 1950 it was dedicated to the 1916 rising.<sup>61</sup> The 1951 edition covered the risings of 1641, while the 1953 edition looked at the rising of Robert Emmet.<sup>62</sup> However it was the 1955 edition of the *Annual*, just a year before the outbreak of the IRA's campaign, which best synopsized his view. The 1955 annual was titled 'The story without an end.' The *Annual* traced the history of Ireland back to its origins in Gaelic Ireland which O'Higgins maintained was attacked by the Normans.<sup>63</sup> The subsequent centuries of Irish history according to him resulted in a nation where people and culture was under attack by the British which by the 1950s had 'imposed an enemy made border'.<sup>64</sup>

Not only did the 1955 edition argue that despite many defeats Irish separatism was indestructible, it also predicted that at a future date another separatist insurrection would lead to inevitable victory. The constant references to the unfinished business of uniting Ireland through armed struggle placed an onus on some of its young readers to accept their historical obligation to bring Irish history to its logical conclusion by involving themselves in armed republicanism. The tone of the *Annual* also intimated at the need for a new generation of armed separatists. O'Higgins stated: 'In a battle that has been going on for over 800 years and is not over even now. Again and again and ten times again the invader has paused and listened for the final 'I Submit' but has never been spoken by the

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<sup>60</sup> Brian O Higgins, *Wolfe Tone annual* 1948 (Dublin, 1948).

<sup>61</sup> Brian O Higgins, *Wolfe Tone annual* 1950, (Dublin, 1950)

<sup>62</sup> Brian O Higgins, *Wolfe Tone annual* 1951, (Dublin, 1951)

<sup>63</sup> Brian O Higgins, *Wolfe Tone annual* 1955, (Dublin, 1955)

<sup>64</sup> Brian O Higgins, *Wolfe Tone annual* 1955, (Dublin, 1955), p.17.



voices of Ireland and in that fact and truth of history, we have found courage and inspiration to stand against the foe'.<sup>65</sup>

The 1957 edition followed the same theme, while it also demonstrated support for the post-Civil War IRA. The new IRA in the *Annual* was depicted as the true inheritors of the separatist tradition. O'Higgins also used the 1957 edition to give his view of the treaty negotiations and the Civil War. The Anglo Irish treaty of 1921 was described as 'The Treaty of Surrender.'<sup>66</sup> The activities of the anti-treaty IRA were commended.

O'Higgins made no differentiation between De Valera's treatment of the IRA in the 1940s and the treatment meted out to the organization during the Civil War. For him it was the new generation of separatists being attacked by a new enemy, 'the renegades of 1922 took the lives of Irish republican soldiers, by shooting them to death with English guns. The renegades of 1940 hired the official English hangman and brought him over here to strangle to death a brave faithful soldier of the Republic of Ireland'.<sup>67</sup> He added, 'They shot men in prison yards, shot men in the streets without warning, tortured men to death in their jails and eclipsed all their mean and callous deeds by importing the English hangman to put a brother to death'.<sup>68</sup>

Two years after the outbreak of the border campaign, the 1958 edition also continued with this same theme which condemned the actions of the Irish government's attempts to

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<sup>65</sup> Brian O Higgins, *Wolfe Tone annual 1955*, (Dublin, 1955), p.18.

<sup>66</sup> Brian O Higgins, *Wolfe Tone annual 1957*, (Dublin, 1955), p.82.

<sup>67</sup> Brian O' Higgins *Wolfe Tone annual 1957* (Dublin, 1957), p.114.

<sup>68</sup> Brian O' Higgins *Wolfe Tone annual 1957* (Dublin, 1957), p114.

curtail the IRA, while also demonstrating explicit support for the contemporary IRA. Internment which was introduced in 1957 by the De Valera government was condemned in the *Annual* in a column titled ‘Informers’.<sup>69</sup> Fianna Fáil was accused of being British coercionists and collaborators in 1957 for introducing internment. The Irish Government’s actions were compared with British attempts during the Fenian period to recruit and defeat Irish republicanism with the use of informers. Speaking of the Irish governments attempts to crush the IRA and the durability of the separatist tradition O’Higgins declared; ‘But the Fenian spirit lives in Ireland still in spite of the force and guile of English invaders and the hypocrisy and vindictiveness and petty spleen of the Irish professional politician who collaborates with them in the vain and futile attempt to kill the separatist ideal and purpose’.<sup>70</sup>

An important aspect of the *Annual* for many future IRA volunteers was that it conferred a spiritual dimension to armed militancy. Given the degree of religiosity in Ireland at the time, O’Higgins view, that republican militants had a spiritual sanction from God, had the potential to alleviate any moral dilemmas for young people interested in participating in armed republican. He frequently referred to republicanism as being inextricably linked to religion. In 1950 he condemned Irish communists when he stated, ‘As if we have not enough to contend with the menace of English paganism, we have now been brought face to face with the menace of Eastern materialism that drags down every high ideal into the

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<sup>69</sup> Brian O’Higgins, *Wolfe Tone annual 1958*, (Dublin, 1958), p.80.

<sup>70</sup> Brian O’Higgins, *Wolfe Tone annual 1958*, (Dublin, 1958), 82.

gutter and insults the very name of God'.<sup>71</sup> He avowed that 'men who deny God, who are traitors to God, will be false to every person and everything less than God'.<sup>72</sup>

In republican homes such as the Lynch's in north Longford, the *Annual's* depiction of Irish history confirmed a view of the incomplete nature of the struggle and reassured them morally about taking up arms. In some cases the annual was pointed to as proof for the justification of armed struggle. When asked had he any moral problem about joining the republican movement that was engaged in killing, Seán Lynch replied: 'Well I wouldn't because I read and that. I tell you something that had a very big influence on me, Brian O'Higgins Annuals. He was a great friend of my grandmothers..... I have letters here he wrote to my grandmother'.<sup>73</sup>

Many of those who joined the IRA in the 1950s have indicated that the *Wolfe Tone Annual* and its concentration on a historical tradition was another factor in their decision to join. Its view that true Irish independence was an incomplete work in progress, as well as conferring a sense of religiosity upon armed separatism, had the potential to awaken in young people a particular view of the historical narrative. For some people who joined the IRA the *Annual* played an important role in their decision, for others it confirmed an existing view of Irish history while for some it assuaged any moral dilemma about engaging in armed struggle.

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<sup>71</sup> Brian O Higgins, *Wolfe Tone annual 1951* (Dublin, 1950), p.117.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Sean Lynch (4 April 2011).

A number of those interviewed spoke about how they eagerly awaited the yearly *Annual* as young adolescents. Sean Lynch recalled how it was sold in Longford at the time and was popular among many of his peers.<sup>74</sup> He stated that he looked forward to the stories and in particular the O'Higgins rhymes. Mick Ryan remembers a shop on the Quays in Dublin owned by two women where young people like himself went to buy the *Annual*.<sup>75</sup>

The *Annual* was also popular reading material for young nationalists in the north. Some felt that the education curriculum in the north ignored Irish history; therefore the *Annual* filled this void. In Lurgan the re-emerging republican movement and particularly young Fianna members such as Joe and Gerry Haughinn enthusiastically read it.<sup>76</sup> Both described how history teaching in the northern state did not cater for Irish history, therefore the *Annual* could fill a void.<sup>77</sup>

In places such as Wexford where the IRA had established a unit by the early 1950s, new recruits political education involved the *Wolfe Tone Annual*. Not only were new members trained in the use of firearms, they were encouraged and enthusiastically read the *Wolfe Tone Annual*. Brian O'Higgins view of Irish republicanism was a crucial influence. Wexford IRA member, Liam McGarry described the importance of the *Annual* on young recruits thinking:

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with Mick Ryan (2 Jan. 2012).

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Seán Lynch (4 April 2011).

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Gerry and Joe Haughinn (2 June 2010).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

We were anxious to learn all we could about the republican cause and understand the other point of view. The *Wolfe Tone Annual* then looked on as the bible of Republicanism was read and exchanged and the new county library service was invaluable. ‘*The United Irishman*,’ ‘*An Rosc*’, the *Gaelic Weekly*’ and many other similar publications were eagerly purchased in Cranitch’s, J.L Doyles and Woolheads on the main street.<sup>78</sup>

Mick Ryan described the appeal the *Annual* had for him as a young man before he joined the IRA, saying that he use to ‘eat it and the United Irishman’.<sup>79</sup> Retrospectively he felt that the *Annual* was not a particularly accurate account of history, but that its depiction of Ireland past certainly contributed to an interest and an increase in IRA recruitment at the time. He indicated that the nationalist tone of the songs and stories in the *Annual* was just one of many pervasive nationalist influences at the time. He also pointed out that Radio Éireann programmers promoted a similar view of Irish history: ‘There was a little shop across the Quays from where I worked on Burgh Quay and it was run by two old ladies, I think use to get the *Wolfe Tone Annual* there you know. That was Brian O’Higgins that was really romantic you know’.<sup>80</sup>

When Ryan was asked had this type of historical perspective have an impact on the IRA he replied:

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<sup>78</sup> Ruan O Donnell, *Vinegar Hill to Edentubber: the Wexford IRA and the border campaign* (Wexford, 2007), p. 16.

<sup>79</sup> Interview with Mick Ryan (2 Jan. 2012).

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

Ah yeah it was very romantic view of Ireland, that suited me in the absence of hard history, you know the same with the songs, I think Walton's use to have a radio programme, we didn't have a radio till 1950 or 51.... Waltons use to have a programme on a Saturday and Waltons was a real pro-nationalist record shop. They would play all the rebels songs and then I began to listen to Ciarán MacMathúna and I think that was in the early 50's... It fired me up'.<sup>81</sup>

When analysing the reading interests of young people in the 1950s who later went on to join the IRA the *Wolfe Tone Annual* cannot be overlooked. Its particular emphasis on the spiritual nature of armed separatism was important in inculcating in some a moral justification for armed action. This does not necessarily mean it was the overriding reason that they joined the IRA, but it did have the potential to assuage any moral dilemmas about engaging in armed action among young practicing Catholics. In the north it sometimes served as an alternative history to the one presented by the Stormont Government. Crucially the popular *Annual* gave a degree of credibility to the IRA's message among young people.

### **Popular Literature**

Like the *Wolfe Tone Annual*, a range of popular books which were published in the late 1940s also had an important influence in popularising the IRA among a new generation. It also reinforced the IRA's propaganda which favored the use of armed struggle as a valid political option. Some interviewees pointed to the popular literature of the time as

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

having a critical influence in their decision to join the IRA. The late 1940s and early 1950s saw a number of popular new books emerge about the 1916 to 1921 period, often told by survivors of the revolutionary years. These books about the war of independence often written by some of its participants frequently presented the militancy of the period as heroic, exciting and in some cases romantic. Gabriel Doherty describes them as a product of ‘a dominant school of writing during the middle decades of the twentieth century’ which was shaped by a journalistic milieu that attempted to popularise these events and were written in an often ‘succinct ‘racy’ narrative’.<sup>82</sup> Partisan accounts of that period by former IRA members became popular reading material among the general public.

It is also worth mentioning that internationally the late 1940s also saw a similar genre to emerge about the Second World War. While in Britain for example, book, radio dramas, posters and war films echoed themes which extolled patriotism while cinematic soldiers were depicted as young, fearless and willing to die for their country.<sup>83</sup> Norman Mailer’s novel *The Naked and the Dead* was published in 1949 and focused on the experiences of the 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry during the Philippines campaign in World War II, alongside a host of other best selling books about this period which became popular throughout the UK, Europe and the United States. In many ways Irish novels and memoirs about the War of Independence and the Civil War were also an extension of this global military genre of the 1940s. While an Irish teenager in Longford or Tyrone or Dublin may not have related

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<sup>82</sup> Mercier Press, *With the IRA in the fight for Freedom*, (Cork, 2010), pp 9-10.

<sup>83</sup> Ian Mc Laine, *Ministry of morale*, (London 1979), p. 12.

directly to the exploits of the RAF, they could relate to the need to defend ones ideals militarily, in an energetic and noble pursuit for Irish independence.

The popularity of War of Independence books in Ireland was often a result of them being published and promoted in the local and national media such as *The Kerryman* and *The Irish Press*. Significantly, the appreciation for these books by both the young and the old opens a window in to the mentality of 1950s Ireland and demonstrates a degree of ambiguity in terms of republican violence. Graphic accounts of militant republican activity retold by some of its participants had the potential to raise the spectre of armed struggle as a legitimate political tactic to a new generation.

The *Fighting Series* first published by the *Kerryman* in 1947, which began with *Kerry's Fighting Story*, reflected this nationalist narrative of the events of the 1920s. The edition was a compilation of interviews with IRA men from the 1920s in County Kerry. Between 1947 and 1949 other counties were represented in the series, which had witnessed a high degree of military activity in the 1920s. *Rebel Cork's Fighting Story*, *Dublin's Fighting Story* as well as *Limerick's Fighting Story* were titles of the other editions. The series was aimed at a young audience where accounts of the period by IRA veterans according to the editor served 'to preserve in the hearts of the younger generation that love of country and devotion to its interests which distinguished the men'.<sup>84</sup>

The objective of publishing these regional accounts was to promote a type of history among the young generation through exciting and dramatic accounts of the time rather

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<sup>84</sup>Kerryman, *Dublin fighting story* (Kerry, 1948), p. 4.



than being purely a profit making venture. In the forward to *Dublin's Fighting Story*, it was stated that publishers were content to reduce their profit so that as many people as possible could access these books.<sup>85</sup>

Undoubtedly the partisan accounts had a bias in favour of the IRA. In the introduction to the current reprinted edition, O'Donnell argues that 'The tone of the book is emphatically republican, unapologetic and at times verges on hagiographic veneration of its subjects'.<sup>86</sup> Despite this, the series was also widely acclaimed in sections of the print media such as *The Irish Press*, which praised the way the history of the period was presented. In 1947 *The Irish Press* commended the *Kerryman* for the series which it described as a 'factual narrative' adding that 'in this history one reads of their sacrifices. Some are still with us; some gave their lives for the causes some have since passed away. But their deeds will live to become fireside tales for their children and their children's, children'.<sup>87</sup> Considering the IRA's propaganda within the *United Irishman* which elevated the role of both previous and contemporary generations of militant republicans, the IRA in the 1950s had a considerable potential audience to put forth the case, that they could follow in the footsteps of their heroes depicted in these books, by joining the IRA.

*The Kerryman* also published *With The IRA, in the Fight for Freedom* in 1950. Indeed, for some Kerry IRA members such as Donal O'Shea, these books along with the *Wolfe Tone Annual* were popular reading material for him in his formative years, he stated that: 'there was ones that were published like *Kerry's Fighting Story* and *Limericks Fighting*

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<sup>85</sup> Kerryman, *Dublin's fighting story* (Kerry, 1948), p. 4.

<sup>86</sup> Mercier Press, *Limericks fighting story* (Dublin, 2009), p. 18.

<sup>87</sup> *Irish Press*, 18 Dec. 1947.

*Story* and *Dublin's Fighting Story*' which he read as a young person.<sup>88</sup> The books featured a number of first hand accounts of different incidents during the conflict up until the truce. Celebrated former revolutionaries from opposing sides in the Civil War such as General Sean MacEoin and Tom Barry featured. In the original preface it was stated that the book was written as a result of the growth in books about the Second World War. 'It seemed to us that in the face of this publicity for the actions of patriot forces attempting to re-establish the independence of their country, it was timely to give a record of the fight put up by men and women of our own race against greater odds than any of those groups had to face'.<sup>89</sup>

In March 1955 *The United Irishman* reproduced an editorial written in *The Kerryman* that praised the people featured in the 'Fighting Series', as part of IRA recruitment advertisement. The article was concluded with the caption 'Join the Republican Movement'.<sup>90</sup> It stated that:

These men achieved much because they were prepared to give much. They saw the relationship between themselves and their country in terms of giving not taking. They were prepared to give their minds, their energies and if necessary, their lives to the service of their country and the knowledge that they were serving their country was the only reward they either sought or desired. If we are to take up the task where they were left off we must realize the lesson of service.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Interview with Donal O'Shea (2 Feb. 2012).

<sup>89</sup> Mercier Press, *With the IRA in the fight for Freedom* (Cork, 2010), p. 12.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> *United Irishman*, March. 1955.

Tom Barry's accounts of republican militancy in *Guerilla Days in Ireland*, published in 1949, also became a best selling book. It was also enthusiastically read by many young people who later joined the IRA, the Fianna and Cumann na mBan. Barry was the Officer Commander of the IRA in West Cork. He had led the guerilla flying column during the War of Independence which was responsible for some of the most successful military ambushes during the period. In October 1920 his column successfully ambushed and killed seventeen auxiliaries at Kilmichael. Prior to the publication of his book the *Irish Press* published a serial of his recollections about the War of Independence. According to the *Irish Press*, when it was announced that series was to be published in book form it created a huge demand to deal with orders stating, 'The serial version published by the *Irish Press* last year has made people impatient to obtain the book. Orders will be taken in strict rotation and those who want to make sure of copies should apply early'.<sup>92</sup> Like the *Fighting Series*, Barry's book gave a certain view of the conflict that elevated the IRA as heroes.

*Guerilla Days in Ireland* was also widely acclaimed in reviews at the time of its first publication in 1949. Cathal O'Shannon on Radio Éireann recommended it to listeners. He described it as an accurate account of the period full of exciting memories.<sup>93</sup> Another review in the *Irish Press* described Barry's account as a 'splendid book'.<sup>94</sup>

Another writer who published books during the 1950s which would have a lasting impression on the young generation was Frank Gallagher. Born in 1893 in Cork,

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<sup>92</sup> *Irish Press*, 20 June 1949.

<sup>93</sup> *Irish Press*, 21 Dec. 1949.

<sup>94</sup> *Irish Press*, 3 Nov. 1949.

Gallagher was an IRA member in both the War of Independence and the Civil War. A talented publicist during the War of Independence, he became the Sinn Fein Director of Propaganda in 1918. He was imprisoned during the Civil War, on his release he worked for De Valera as Fianna Fáil Director of Publicity. He also was appointed editor of *The Irish Press* in 1931. Gallagher wrote several books over the course of his life. *The Challenge of the Sentry* (1928) , *Days of fear* (1925) and *Dark Mountain and Other stories* (1931) all were based on accounts of the War of Independence and the Civil War. However it was his books written in the 1950s such as *The Four Glorious Years* (1953) and the *Indivisible Island* (1957) about partition which were remembered by former IRA members such as Jim Lane as having a determining influence on them as young people.<sup>95</sup>

A serialisation of the *The Four Glorious Years*, first appeared in *The Irish Press*. Gallagher wrote under the pseudonym David Hogan. The book was an account of the period which traced the revolutionary years from 1916 until the outbreak of the Civil War. It celebrated republican militancy from the Easter Rising until the end of the War of Independence, while the politics of the time were also discussed. Those who died on the republican side were praised in Gallagher's narrative of events. Gallagher's account was also clearly anti-treaty when it came to a discussion of the treaty negotiations.

Another founding member of Fianna Fáil who wrote about his experiences of the 1916 to 1921 period and published a book called *Allegiance* in 1950 was Robert Brennan. Brennan played a leading role in the 1916 Rising. Imprisoned during the period he was also the secretary of the first Dáil. He was a member of Fianna Fáil in the early years and

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<sup>95</sup> Jim Lane , E-mail (17 Oct. 2011).

in 1931 he became the first general manager of the *Irish Press*. An international diplomat in the 1940s, he returned to Ireland in the following decade and became Director of Broadcasting in RTE. In 1956 and 1957, he wrote a column called 'Mainly Meandering' and regularly referred to his experiences during his revolutionary years. His book *Allegiance* was published in 1950 and was serialized by the *Irish Press* in 1958. *Allegiance* featured many of the well known names of the revolution and traced Brennan's journey from the 1916 Rising up until the civil war. In the book's preface, Brennan justified the methods of the IRA of that period by stating that they followed in the tradition of Tone and the Fenians. However his claim that the IRA 'partially achieved the dream of centuries, a free Island' suggested that the revolution had yet to be completed.<sup>96</sup>

Dan Breen's popular account of the War of Independence in *My Fight For Irish Freedom* was first published in 1924. Breen led the IRA in South Tipperary in the 1920s and was responsible for the ambush and killing of two RIC men which triggered the War of Independence. Breen's book which contained shot outs, jail escapes and the death of comrades was a fast paced and energetic account of armed republicanism. Indeed, Breen's book read like a western, where his description of the events elevated him to the status of national hero. He described an IRA ambush as follows: 'only a moment before the blood was rushing madly through my veins, now when I saw them actually at hand all my nervousness disappeared and I felt cold and strong again. I believe I could fight a dozen of these enemy forces myself.'<sup>97</sup> Indeed these exciting accounts had a young

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<sup>96</sup> Robert Brennan, *Allegiance* (Dublin, 1950), p.viii.

<sup>97</sup> Dan Breen, *My fight for Irish freedom* (Dublin, 1924), p. 39.

audience who were exposed to these often romanticized versions of events from the 1920s. By the 1950s the book was republished at a bargain rate. Described as a classic memoir of the revolution, an advertisement in the *Independent* stated that ‘More than thirty years since it first appeared, a new generation is no more remote from the event than those who were thrilled by the first edition and the episodes it recounted’.<sup>98</sup>

Gabriel Doherty, in the introduction to the 2010 reprint of *With the IRA in the Fight for Freedom*, claims that the impact that these books had in ‘shaping popular understanding of the independence struggle has yet to be adequately assessed’.<sup>99</sup> While there has not been a quantitative study of these books and their impact, the response of a number of people who joined the republican movement in the 1950s, suggests that they had varying degrees of influence in attracting young people to the IRA. For some the books merely reaffirmed the concept of a justified armed struggle, for others they were pivotal in their decision to join the IRA. Undoubtedly the heroic type of history promoted in these books, complemented the IRA’s new efforts to recruit and spurred on young men willing to serve their country in the unfinished work of achieving independence, while offering them the opportunity of doing so in a noble and dramatic fashion, which they would hope echo the exploits of Breen and the like.

Indeed the absence of other distractions such as television in the early 1950s often meant that many young people read keenly. The popularity of these books and the celebrated nature of the protagonists in them often saw IRA gunmen become iconic figures among

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<sup>98</sup> *Irish Independent*, Jan 21. 1956.

<sup>99</sup> Mercier press, *With the IRA in the fight for freedom* (Cork, 2010), p.10.

teenagers in the same way as film or pop stars were for other generations. The 1950s itself saw the rise of the iconic film and teen stars such as James Dean and it was against this backdrop that Irish teenagers created their own heroes and icons, albeit military ones. One Leitrim member felt that that his friends growing up read quite a lot and that these republican books were available in his school: ‘The teacher was advanced in that way. He had a library in the school. We read Tom Barry, Dan Breen and Seamus Moylan and trashy sort of stuff like Nancy Drew and the Hardy boys.’<sup>100</sup> When asked were books from the War of Independence era widely read and how were the participants perceived he stated; ‘Yes, more so than now. They were revered and looked up to’.<sup>101</sup>

Mairín De Burca who joined Sinn Fein in Co Kildare in the mid-1950s at the age of sixteen pointed to these accounts of the War of Independence as having a pivotal influence. While she read a vast range of books she indicated that the popular accounts of militant republicanism of the previous generation as being among her favorites. While her family was not particularly republican she pointed to Dan Breen and Tom Barry’s books as being the initial reason why she developed an interest in militant republicanism. She felt that the books were quite popular at the time and she stated that her interest in reading about militant republicanism as well as the fact that a Sinn Féin Cumman existed in her town was the main reason why she joined:

I was a good reader, I read history books and just got caught up in it, got hooked. I read novels as well..... Things like Dan Breen’s book My Fight for Irish Freedom,

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with Leitrim person (2 March 2010).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

Sean Treacy, Tom Barry, Florry O'Donoghue wrote a book. There was a lot of books I don't think we got Ernie O'Malley till later on.<sup>102</sup>

Jim Lane from Cork pointed to the barracks raids in 1954 as being the immediate reason why he joined the IRA as well as the influence of the Anti-Partition League. However it was these raids as well as having widely read much of the popular literature of militant republicanism available that prompted him to join the IRA. He stated that:

The most immediate influence on my joining was the discovery that fellow Cork men were being given the opportunity of engaging with British forces in an effort to drive them out of occupied Ireland. This awareness developed when three Cork volunteers were arrested in the North following a failed raid on British military barracks. Their arrest and imprisonment was not a deterrent in any way. My thinking on armed struggle was informed by much reading on the events of the Tan War and Civil War.<sup>103</sup>

Lane and his friends' reading literature at the time, illuminates the interest that young working class people had in books and particularly in republican literature:

Most books in those days were borrowed from the local library. A certain amount of books were available in paperback editions and were fairly cheap and we bought those. Secondhand book shops were plentiful and one often got a hard back at a good

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<sup>102</sup> Interview with Mairín De Burca (2 June 2011).

<sup>103</sup> Jim Lane, *Miscellaneous notes on the republican and socialism in Cork city, 1954-1969* (Cork 1987), p. 1.



price. People also shared books and very often they were fairly worn and torn when you get got your book back.<sup>104</sup>

Lane named *The Four Glorious Years, Guerilla Days in Ireland, Allegiance, With the IRA in the Fight for Freedom* and *Rebel Cork's Fighting Story* as being the most read books in Cork at the time among his IRA associates.<sup>105</sup>

The appeal of these books was not confined to the regions they were about, they became popular across the country. Many young northern nationalists' enthusiastically read accounts of how the IRA fought and ultimately defeated the British system in places like Kerry and Cork in the 1920s. Donal Donnelly remembers reading *Kerry's Fighting Story* as a young man and stated that it was sold in a book shop in Omagh, but could never be placed in the front window of the shop for fear of the shop being attacked by the RUC or the B Specials.<sup>106</sup>

The emergence of new books about the 1916 to 1922 period in the late 1940s and 1950s illuminates what Ruan O'Donnell calls the 'heroic phases of Irish history writing'.<sup>107</sup> Books written by former IRA members were celebrated in both the local and national media. Armed action by the IRA was not only justified in these accounts but was often celebrated and often romanticized. The fact that Northern Ireland did not achieve independence was often alluded to as unfinished business. Among many of those

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<sup>104</sup> E-mail Jim Lane (17 Oct. 2011).

<sup>105</sup> E-mail Jim Lane (17 Oct. 2011).

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Donal Donnelly (2 Dec. 2011).

<sup>107</sup> Mercier Press, *Limerick's fighting story* (Dublin, 2009), p.18.

interviewed reading was very much part of teenage life at the time. In the north it offered young nationalists a type of history which could in their eyes be successfully applied in the 1950s as a means of ending partition. For others it confirmed their belief that the IRA in the 1950s was the organization that would complete the 1920s revolution.

### **The *Irish Press* Newspapers**

*The Irish Press* newspaper established by De Valera in 1931 also promoted an unapologetic republican outlook. According to Clifford, its founding in 1931 ‘gave coherence to the movement of resistance against the settlement imposed by Britain in 1921, and made that resistance articulate in the daily life of that society’.<sup>108</sup> By the late 1940s the paper unlike *The Irish Times* or *The Independent* was unapologetically nationalist. Many of the people interviewed stated that the *Press* newspaper was the one which was most commonly read in their households. Many of the key personnel in the newspaper, such as its first editor Frank Gallagher, were anti-treaty IRA veterans. Its editorials, feature articles and political commentary not only promoted a teleological view of Irish history as unfinished business, but celebrated the role of militant separatism in Irish history. By the 1940s *The Irish Press* newspapers had become the most widely-read broadsheet in the state. Its representation of Irish armed separatism was at times indistinguishable from what was depicted in the *United Irishman*.

Many of the popular War of Independence books already mentioned at the time were published and serialised by the paper. The accounts of the War of Independence by

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<sup>108</sup> Brendan Clifford, *The Irish Press: Fianna Fail and the decline of the Irish Free State* (Cork, 2007), p. 7.

Robert Brennan, Tom Barry, Frank Gallagher and others were all given huge coverage in the paper by late 1940s and 1950s. Commemorations and anniversaries of deceased republican militants from Wolfe Tone to Liam Mellows appeared regularly within its pages. The expansion and success of the paper saw it launch *The Sunday Press* edition in 1949. Mark O'Brien states that from its inception the new Sunday paper was noted for its nationalist tone.<sup>109</sup>

The paper sold nearly 400,000 copies weekly by the 1960s, making it the most popular Sunday newspaper.<sup>110</sup> Its first edition set out one of the key objectives of the paper which was to champion 'the nationalist tradition... embodied forever in the proclamation of Easter week'.<sup>111</sup> Another edition described partition as 'the denial of our national integrity, that is the denial of our right to full freedom, because it shelters an army of occupation'.<sup>112</sup>

Many of the revolutionary accounts were unapologetically militant, for example one stated 'IRA Commander Speaks' and 'IRA Raid by Ernie O'Malley'.<sup>113</sup> Stories from the 1916 Rising such as 'Six Defiant Days' by Liam Mac Gahann as well the writings of Padraig Pearse was a constant feature of the *The Sunday Press*.<sup>114</sup> One notable feature of the newspaper was a cartoon section called 'Eire ar Aghaidh' which was a fictional serial of two teenagers during the 1916 Rising up until the end of the War of Independence.

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<sup>109</sup> Mark O'Brien, *De Valera, Fianna Fail and the Irish Press* (Dublin, 2001), p. 87.

<sup>110</sup> Newspaper descriptors project, [www.nli.ie](http://www.nli.ie) (11 Sept. 2013).

<sup>111</sup> *The Sunday Press*, Sept. 4 1949.

<sup>112</sup> *The Sunday Press*, 27 Nov. 1949.

<sup>113</sup> Mark O'Brien, *De Valera, Fianna Fail and the Irish Press* (Dublin, 2001), p. 87.

<sup>114</sup> *The Sunday Press*, April 9 1950.

The cartoon was aimed at the paper's younger readers. From September 1949, every Sunday edition saw the two young boys joining the volunteers and gradually becoming fully fledged IRA men, engaged in exciting accounts of militant activity from the 1916 to 1921 period.<sup>115</sup> The adventures of the youths involved them fighting in the GPO in 1916, to shoot outs with the Black and Tans. Indeed as the series progressed they were involved in ambushes and killings.

According to Tim Pat Coogan the nationalist tone of the *Irish Press* which had strong links with Fianna Fáil in the 1950s, had led to some within the IRA to believe that De Valera would turn a 'blind eye' to IRA attacks in the north.<sup>116</sup> Of *The Sunday Press*, it has been suggested that it was 'violently political and its profoundly "green" approach may have helped inspire the 1950s IRA activities'.<sup>117</sup> For many of those who joined the IRA, *The Irish Press* newspapers was the paper read by their parents. Eamon Boyce from a republican family in Dublin felt that more republican minded people read the paper and that at the time one could often identify people's political affiliations by what paper they read.<sup>118</sup> One Leitrim interviewee regarded most families that bought the *Irish Press* in his locality as being sympathetic to republicanism and nationalism.<sup>119</sup>

The overtly nationalist *Irish Press* and *Sunday Press* undoubtedly presented Irish separatism in a sympathetic light and this tone appealed to a like minded readership, young and old. Young people who had an awareness of family involvement in armed

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<sup>115</sup> *The Sunday Press*, Sept. 11 1949.

<sup>116</sup> Mark O'Brien, *De Valera, Fianna Fail and the Irish Press* (Dublin, 2001), p. 87.

<sup>117</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Eamon Boyce (9 Feb 2010).

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Seán Lynch (4 April 2011).

activity had their developing interest in republicanism augmented by the contents of the paper. Seán Lynch from a staunchly republican home in North Longford, when asked if the republican ethos of the paper had an influence on him stated: ‘Oh it had it had’, adding that: ‘I use to remember letters about republicanism in it. They use to have *In Memoriam* in it of Rory and Liam and Dick and Joe and Kevin Barry and the date’.<sup>120</sup> He also stated: ‘I remember you would be looking at dates like the 8th of September for Rory O’Connor and Kevin Barry, I always remember the different bits about both of them such as live on, fight on for the ideals. I’m about to die, that was always about Kevin Barry’.<sup>121</sup>

In the north, *The Sunday Press* sold well in nationalist areas. Donal Donnelly recalls it being the favored newspaper by himself and his family. In some cases those from non-republican families pointed to the content within the paper as being instrumental in stimulating their initial interest in militant republicanism. Paddy O’Regan from Dublin, whose father was a prison officer in Mountjoy, grew up in a housing complex for prison officers beside the prison. His father was also at one time a member of the British army and the Gardaí. O’Regan who was later shot alongside Seán South and Fergal O’Hanlon in 1957, stated that there was absolutely no republican tradition in his family and pointed to *The Sunday Press* as having a pivotal influence on him. The romantic slant of how militant republicanism was depicted in the paper attracted him to the idea of militant activity. O’Regan also admitted to having an interest in weapons and military history as a teenager. The IRA’s re-emergence in the 1950s, gave the Dublin teenager the

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<sup>120</sup> Interview with Seán Lynch (4 April 2011).

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

opportunity of playing an exciting role in repeating the deeds of his heroes depicted in *The Irish Press*. He stated:

I always was interested in fire arms I was very much interested in the First World War, the Second World War to a lesser extent. But I always from the age of about eleven had a pellet gun or a rifle or a pistol. You could go into the shop back then and buy all the pellets you wanted; now because I had no background if I had been inducted into the FCA that might have satisfied whatever was in me. But I never did go into the FCA. If I did join the FCA I might have been like Seán South and moved on. But I remember about 1950 the Irish Press was started up and it was supposed to be a republican paper. Every week there would be an article in it on the War of Independence .....Kilmicheal or Tom Barry or Dan Breen. I used to read these things and go, oh Jesus that was great I wish I was around for that. If I had been around I would be joining that. At the same time the arms raids were on, I can't say that they were making a big impact on me but there must have been some awareness.<sup>122</sup>

*The Irish Press* and particularly the emergence of *The Sunday Press* are significant in understanding the renewed popularity of the IRA in the 1950s. *The Irish Press* was the most popularly read paper in the homes of those that were interviewed. As has been already stated some who worked within the paper such as Tim Pat Coogan felt that its overt republicanism played a role in encouraging the activities of the IRA at the time. A number of interviewees have demonstrated varying degrees of influence it had on them.

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<sup>122</sup> Interview Paddy O'Regan (2 June 2011).

Perhaps most significantly, the huge influence that these papers had in Irish society at the time coupled with the nationalist ethos they promoted, echoed a similar nationalist outlook of the IRA and inadvertently elevated and compounded the relevancy of that organization at the time.

## **Conclusion**

The vast amount of coverage and emphasis that the *United Irishman* placed on Irish history, is significant, if one is to understand how the IRA became politically relevant to a whole new generation from 1948 onwards. The republican movement within their propaganda not only justified themselves by claiming to be the republican inheritors of previous generations, they also, as all political groups do, revised aspects of history to fit into their wider ideological objectives. Its basic interpretation was that Irish history was a catalogue of struggles with a religious sanction and a predestined outcome. This was constantly repeated in its propaganda and had the potential to tap into wider interpretations of history at the time which depicted previous manifestations of armed republicanism as exciting, noble and at times almost spiritual. Therefore the IRA at the time did appeal to a militant republican tradition in this regard.

The popular *Wolfe Tone Annual* which endorsed the IRA in the 1950s and its emphasis on the religious aspect of militant republicanism also had an impact in developing an interest or assuaging any moral dilemmas about being involved in the IRA. The

emergence of popular books about the revolutionary period and the *Irish Press* papers and their style of ‘heroic writing’ about 1916 and the Black and Tan War romanticized armed action against the British to a new generation. Indeed these accounts often directed young people towards the IRA, and aided a developing ideological awareness simultaneously, as will be demonstrated further in the next chapter.

What the IRA’s newspaper *The United Irishman* did from 1948 onwards was to dedicate most of its monthly editions to a particular interpretation of history. In doing this it cultivated an existing awareness among many young people, whose interest was often stimulated by other representations of history in Irish society which celebrated a tradition of armed struggle, and martyrdom. As has been discussed, these forms of republican literature in tone and character were very much of their time as the global emergence of Second World War heroes and teen idols in films and books appealed to the new emerging youth of the 1950s. While some interviewees point to literature and family tradition as important in stimulating an initial interest the same people also had strong views on international and social issues. The sophisticated international awareness of the republican movement and among its new members in the following chapter will demonstrate this.



## Chapter 4

### **‘Cyprus now, Ireland when ?’. The International dimension to the IRA and its appeal to a new generation.**

The re-emergence of the republican movement benefitted from the prominent and celebrated role that former manifestations of republican militancy enjoyed in Ireland in the 1950s. Therefore, tradition did play a role in the rebirth of the organization. However, to what extent this is so, remains open to interpretation. The anti-partition discourse allowed Sinn Féin and the IRA to enter the wider political debate, while the continued marginalisation of the nationalist community in the north consistently supplied armed republicanism with recruits. The IRA and Sinn Féin, which revived in the early 1950s, did so at a time when many countries around the globe experienced political and military conflict between liberation movements and colonial regimes. There were also brewing conflicts in Soviet controlled states opposed by nationalist independence movements. To understand why the republican movement established itself from 1948 onwards, it is important to examine these international anti-colonial movements and their impact in Ireland. Also, it is important to point out that in the aftermath of World War Two, the Republic of Ireland began to assert itself on the international stage. In 1955 the country was accepted into the UN, acting as an independent international voice and not aligning itself with either of the two superpowers during the Cold War. Again, this shows how the IRA and its members did not operate in a vacuum when the global stage is considered. This chapter will examine the republican movements news-sheets response to

international events, as well as the response of interviewees which reveals a quite sophisticated ideological and international awareness of global events among veterans of the period, thus challenging the hypothesis that Irish republicanism in the 1950s was a introspective and insular phenomenon.

Like other manifestations of republicanism since 1916, the IRA and Sinn Féin expressed solidarity with what they saw as their international counterparts around the world. The late 1940s and early 1950s witnessed the beginning of the Cold War as well as the rise of decolonization movements in Africa and in Asia. John Maguire points to the international decolonization movements as being a key factor in the IRA re-emerging in the early 1950s. He gives a detailed picture of the typical IRA recruit at the time; ‘Generally speaking, typical IRA recruits were young men in their late teens who were motivated by a desire to emulate the ongoing anti-colonial guerrilla struggles of the day, such as the National Liberation Front (FLN) uprising in Algeria, the Enosis movement in Cyprus and the Mau Mau insurgency in Kenya’.<sup>1</sup> Donal Donnelly in county Tyrone confirms Maguire’s view stating: ‘We felt we were part of this international ferment’.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed the IRA’s propaganda at the time, in the reinvigorated *United Irishman*, dedicated a significant amount of its coverage to these international events. They offered both solidarity to these groups and presented themselves as an Irish extension of them. The republican movement also highlighted the cause of small countries in Eastern Europe under the occupation of the Soviet Union as deserving of solidarity and support.

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<sup>1</sup> John Maguire, *IRA interments and the Irish government: subversives and the state 1939-1962* (Dublin, 2008), p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> Interview Donal Donnelly (2 Dec. 2011).

Republicans managed to marry an anti-Soviet with an anti-colonial position. It was incumbent on them to adapt to the political realities of the late 1940s and 1950s, which necessitated removing any association with communism, as well as being able to articulate an ideological position which transcended international boundaries. The IRA successfully managed to present itself as an international supporter of those fighting Soviet communism and western imperialism in their pursuit of national independence, sovereignty and the ownership of individual countries resources.

### **Eastern Europe**

The republican movement's condemnations of colonial regimes, which it geared much of its propaganda from the early 1950s was also applied to totalitarian communist regimes in Eastern Europe. The political climate in which the IRA tried to establish itself during the period was marked with a renewed hostility towards communism and socialism in the western world. Internationally, the onset of the cold war saw the polarisation between communist regimes and non-communist countries around the world. The activities of communist governments in Soviet controlled countries would have a bearing on the ideological outlook of revolutionary movements beyond the confines of the Iron Curtain.

As part of its developing international analysis from the late 1940s onwards, the re-emerging IRA issued condemnations of communism similar to those often uttered by mainstream Irish parties. By and large, both the leadership and the rank and file membership of the organization rejected communism. The activities of communist regimes in Eastern Europe were viewed by the republican movement as unjust

occupations of smaller countries. The international position that the IRA emphasised was that small countries which were denied freedom by either capitalist or communist countries had the right to resist.<sup>3</sup>

Its denunciations of Soviet communism also offered the re-emerging IRA a degree of relevance considering the level of opprobrium felt towards communism in 1950s Ireland. With the onset of the Cold War and the division of a new world order between communism and capitalism, from the late 1940s onwards a 'red scare' similar to that of the 1930s was rekindled. This red scare was replicated throughout the western world, particularly in the United States. Indeed, serious incidents of anti-communist activity occurred in Ireland also where people who were communist or associated with communism were attacked. In 1949, a public meeting of the communist group, The Irish Workers League, that had held a meeting in O'Connell Street was attacked by a mob. Serious violence erupted leading to the abandonment of the meeting.<sup>4</sup>

While the general rejection of communism in Irish society was encouraged by the political and clerical establishment, the repression of people in Soviet occupied Eastern Europe highlighted the realities for ordinary people living under communism and heightened an existing fear of it in Ireland. The IRA, which in the 1930s had a significant socialist element among its membership, was by 1948, notably anti-communist. This new position fed into a collective consensus within contemporary Irish society which

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<sup>3</sup> *An Glór Uladh*, Aug.1955.

<sup>4</sup> Garda report, Bodenstown commemoration (NAI, Jus 8/9760).

considered communist regimes as oppressive, anti democratic, anti-Catholic and as foreign occupying forces in Eastern Europe.<sup>5</sup>

The departure of leading socialists from the organisation in the early 1930s, such as Peadar O'Donnell and Frank Ryan, saw traditional republicans elevated into leadership positions within the IRA.<sup>6</sup> Ideological differences over socialism persisted among republican prisoners interned in the Curragh in the 1940's, which resulted in leading communist Mick O' Riordan leaving the organization.<sup>7</sup> O'Riordan took with him many of the more socialist or communist inclined activists, which in turn paved the way for a new leadership to emerge in this vacuum. This new leadership could organize the new IRA free from the difficulties of being aligned with communism and the ideological shackles that would have entailed. In order for the IRA to attract any level of support it needed to take into account the widespread abhorrence of communism among the population.

The new leadership of the IRA under the tutelage of Tony Magan was primarily made up of ex-internees from the Curragh who were opposed to the communist faction during interment in the 1940s.<sup>8</sup> The leadership, through its organ of propaganda, the *United Irishman*, ensured a new and concise anti-communist position from 1948 and throughout the border campaign. The paper devoted a huge amount of its coverage to popular anti-colonial conflicts in Cyprus and Africa. This position continued until 1962.

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<sup>5</sup> Dermot Keogh, 'Ireland, the Vatican and the Cold War, the case of Italy, 1948' in *Irish studies in international affairs*, vol. 3, no.3 (1991) ,pp.67-114.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Hanley, *The IRA, 1926-1936* (Dublin 2002), pp195-198.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Quinn, *Micheal O'Riordan: The making of an Irish communist leader* (Dublin, 2011), p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> Robert White, *Ruairi Ó' Brádaigh: the life and politics of an Irish revolutionary* (Indiana, 2006), p.38.

Seán Garland stated that those within leadership positions were deeply conservative and totally opposed to communism.<sup>9</sup> Another key figure who was in charge of publicity, and arguably more importantly the *United Irishman*, and articulated aspects of the movements ideology was Tomas Doyle. Doyle was a senior ranking IRA figure and was also vice president of Sinn Féin.<sup>10</sup> Doyle had a strong Catholic outlook which again insured his opposition to communism. By the mid to late 1950s, a younger generation would emerge into leadership positions. Both Seán and Ruairí Ó Brádaigh would take charge of propaganda at different times. Both were opponents of Soviet Communism, although as will be shown later, they did support the Cuban Revolution.<sup>11</sup> The political situation in China was often commented on in the general Irish media at the time, however there is an notable omission of Mao's land reform policies and the general political situation in China within republican literature. This more than likely was due to the communist nature of the Chinese administration under General Mao, which republicans were keen not to be seen to be in any way sympathetic towards.

A new social programme, which will be discussed in the following chapter, based on Catholic social teaching became the new template for economic thinking within the republican movement during the period. Indeed, the new rejection of communism was not only tactical, but also complemented a republican movement that was trying to articulate an economic and social outlook based on papal encyclicals.

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Seán Garland (12 Jan. 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Matt Treacy, *The IRA 1956-1969: Rethinking The Republic* (Manchester, 2011), p. 33.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Seán Ó Brádaigh (22 Jan. 2010).

While anti-colonial struggles in Africa and Cyprus featured more regularly in republican propaganda, solidarity was frequently offered to victims of persecution in Eastern Europe. The movement saw independence struggles in Eastern Europe against the Soviet Union as deserving of their support. They made no political differentiation between nationalists in Northern Ireland challenging the unionist state and people living in the Eastern bloc who resisted Soviet imposed governments.

Not only was a clear rejection of communism evident in republican literature, but it could also be gleaned from looking at republican publications, that the leadership of the movement also set out to reassure its own membership and support base of its rejection of socialism and communism. Members who were recruited into the IRA in rural areas later indicated that any links with communism would have been detrimental to the IRA and would have discouraged recruitment. One interviewee, when asked if he was aware of an anti-communist sentiment growing up or if he had a knowledge of any left-wing or communist activists, stated: 'People were anti-communist, Russia was the bad boy....They would be in a minority. I only remember one man, Micheal Colreavy; he used to be on a platform with Gralton.'<sup>12</sup> Gralton himself was a former IRA member from Leitrim. Gralton was also a communist and had been deported in 1933 by the Fianna Fáil government. It is also worth pointing out that the majority of the local IRA in Leitrim during the Gralton affair were also opposed to him and strongly rejected his pro-communist position.

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Leitrim Person (2 Mar. 2010).

Northern members interviewed were usually practising Catholics, and often devout, therefore their rejection of communism was expected. Anti-communist sentiment was strong in traditional republican areas where the IRA had a degree of support and a rejection of communism became a key tenet of its communication strategy. A sneaking regard for the IRA among some Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael supporters in rural areas, would have evaporated had the new IRA aligned themselves in any way with communism.

While other young people that joined the IRA may not have had a huge understanding of communist doctrine or have been particularly religious, the activities of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe were, for some such as Tony Hayde and many of his peers, the main reason they objected to it.<sup>13</sup>

Communist doctrine, which rejected religion, was condemned by republicans in an article titled 'Neither King Nor Kremlin.' The article vowed that 'as Irish Republicans, we neither condone communism nor can we condone the attitude of those who would have us support our common enemy-England. If communism ever menaces our shores we shall steadfastly oppose it'.<sup>14</sup> In 1955, an article in the *United Irishman* highlighted the political persecution of the people of Poland and advocated support for the Polish underground, stating that 'the history of Poland is in some respects, somewhat like our own, many times her borders have been crossed by hostile neighbours and her freedom lost for long periods, but fidelity to her culture and traditions and a burning faith in final liberation, has always brought her safely through the dark years. The sufferings of Poland

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Tony Hayde (2 Feb. 2011).

<sup>14</sup> *United Irishman*, Nov. 1951.



today are much akin to those endured by the Irish people during the penal days, her people are being persecuted both for their nationality and their faith'.<sup>15</sup>

The Hungarian revolt in 1956 was also enthusiastically backed and comparisons were made with the actions of the Hungarians and the nationalist population in the north of Ireland. A special edition of *The United Irishman* was issued to coincide with the launch of Operation Harvest. The four page bulletin outlined a number of attacks in which the IRA were involved and outlined their objectives. In the bulletin, the international connection with the Hungarian insurgents was emphasised, when it questioned; 'why are Irishmen fighting in the six counties referred to as raiders by the Radio Éireann and the twenty six county newspapers, while the Hungarians are called Freedom Fighters. The imperialist coined the terms raiders and terrorist. Men who fight for freedom are freedom fighters, whether they battle in Hungary or in Ireland'.<sup>16</sup>

Tony Hayde, had an uncle named Bill Gannon who was a former member of the IRA and a member of the communist group the Irish Workers League. Hayde pointed to his uncle's influence as being an important factor which stimulated his initial interest in politics. However, he also described a general feeling among his IRA peers of an abhorrence of what totalitarian communist regimes were doing in Eastern Europe and that ordinary members saw themselves as being in a similar position as those involved in revolts against the Soviets in Eastern Europe. When asked about his interest in socialism or communism or among his peers at the time he said: 'I never bought all that. I use to

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<sup>15</sup> *United Irishman*, Jan. 1955.

<sup>16</sup> *The United Irishman*, Bulletin, 15 Dec. 1956.

hear my uncle Billy saying things weren't that bad over there. A lot of guys I was with, thought it was terrible what was happening over there'.<sup>17</sup> Hayde's comments also illuminate how the new generation of the IRA reflected a wider feeling of contemporary Irish society which saw the denial of national independence whether it be in Africa, Cyprus or Poland as being unjustified. His response gives an indication of how the IRA's anti-Soviet position had the potential to further increase its appeal to some Irish teenagers as a guerrilla army, similar to those fighting for independence in Hungary or EOKA in Cyprus.

Donal Donnelly, also reflected Hayde's view and felt that there was strong support for the Hungarian revolt at both rank and file and leadership level in the IRA and in the wider nationalist community in Tyrone. Donnelly instances the cause of the Hungarians during the uprising, when asked which international movement he was sympathetic towards in the 1950s. He also stated he had an interest in international conflicts in places such as Hungary, Cyprus and Africa prior to joining the IRA. This illustrates the recruitment potential that existed for the IRA in making parallels between themselves and different independence movements across the world: 'we also had an understanding and appreciation, now not to the same degree as we had with EOKA, but with the Hungarian revolution in 1956. We obviously were in support of the Hungarians against the Soviet Union'.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Tony Hayde (2 Feb. 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Interview Donal Donnelly (2 Dec. 2011).

When the IRA began its Operation Harvest in 1956, the statements of some of its members who were convicted in the courts illustrate how IRA activists identified with their Eastern European counterparts. David Lewsley from Lurgan was sentenced to eight years for possession of ammunition and weapons in 1957 after the outbreak of Operation Harvest.<sup>19</sup> His statement to the court after being sentenced again gives an indication of the mindset of some active within the IRA. After being sentenced he declared: 'If my actions are to be judged criminal, then world opinion is entirely wrong, when it proclaims the gallantry of the Hungarian people in their fight. Their struggles are like ours'.<sup>20</sup> Not only did Lewsley demonstrate solidarity with the Hungarians, he argued the IRA had a legitimate right to use force to remove the British from Ireland, just as the Hungarians had to remove the Soviets.

In January 1957, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh the future Chief-of-Staff of the organization appeared in court and made a speech from the dock in which he compared the IRA to the Hungarian insurgents as well as EOKA in Cyprus, stating that:

I have little to say other than, as a members of the Irish Resistance Movement against British occupation in Ireland, we resent it very much indeed being arrested by fellow Irishmen while fighting against British occupation. Had we banded ourselves to go to fight for Hungary or Cyprus or formed an Irish Brigade to go to Spain' before being cut off by the Judge who stated: 'This is a speech on matters

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<sup>19</sup> *Irish Times*, 9 April. 1957.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

which you might regard as national or international or, indeed embracing the whole world. But this is outside my jurisdiction.<sup>21</sup>

The example of those fighting for independence in Eastern Europe was used to legitimise the actions of the IRA at the time when the organization and its members genuinely made ideological connections with movements outside of Ireland. By making comparisons with the Hungarians it rationalised the IRA's use of armed struggle among young people and enhanced the appeal of the organization.

To reinforce its new international position of aligning an anti-colonial position with an anti-communist one, the republican movement was also at pains to disassociate itself from any communist organizations with which it had links in previous decades. In an article in *Glór Uladh* in 1955, republicans condemned the Connolly Association in London who previously had enjoyed a close association with the IRA.<sup>22</sup> The Connolly group was a socialist republican organization based in England in the 1950s, and were accused of exploiting national, racial and labour grievances in England.<sup>23</sup> They were described as a 'Malenkov- Hypnotised' group and 'if they choose to carry this nation's flag in procession through the streets of London we cannot stop them but we can condemn them'.<sup>24</sup> The article also contained a stinging condemnation of the group who were accused of abusing the memory of James Connolly, whom they stated would have

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<sup>21</sup>Robert White, *Ruairí Ó Bradaigh: The Life and Politics of an Irish Revolutionary* (Indiana, 2006), p. 70.

<sup>22</sup>*An Glór Uladh*, Aug. 1955.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

given his life 'just as readily for Ireland had the aggressor of the day been Russia'.<sup>25</sup> Again the republican movement was spelling out its new position which placed both totalitarian and colonial regimes on the same footing.

It should be noted that the republicans did not seek to ignore the influence of James Connolly despite his socialist background. An extensive article in the *United Irishman* in 1953 commended Connolly's work promoting socialism prior to 1916. One could argue that the republican movement's position was riddled with ideological contradictions. However, like many proponents of socialism, they had their own particular view of what the creed actually meant. They insisted that a form of socialism was a feature of their ideology and 'that nationalism was the necessary prerequisite for internationalism and that political and social freedom were not two separate and unrelated ideas, but were two sides of the one great principle'.<sup>26</sup> Connolly was commended for challenging unbridled capitalism, however the article did indulge in its own type of historical revisionism when it stated that 'much of the socialist doctrine to which he had held dear, and on which he had dogmatized, he renounced prior to his death'. It concluded stating that Connolly would have 'died for the ideal of the Republic not for a Soviet State'.<sup>27</sup>

While the *United Irishman* was careful not to be seen to be overly critical of previous generations of the IRA, the popular republican publication, *The Wolfe Tone Annual* attacked the organization's past association with socialism. In 1950, its editor Brian O'Higgins a former IRA member and president of Sinn Féin condemned the IRA of the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> *United Irishman*, Sept. 1953.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

early 1930s that attempted ‘to link our movement for independence with Soviet activities and teachings’.<sup>28</sup> He also went on to argue that communists had abused the memory of James Connolly.<sup>29</sup> Considering that many of the 1950s generation of the IRA read the *Annual*, this again shows the determination of the re-emerging IRA to refute any communist association not only out of political necessity but also out of a genuine reaction towards what totalitarian communist regimes were engaged in by occupying smaller countries and the religious percussion that this entailed.

Indeed intelligence reports at the time also reflected the republican movement’s keenness to distance itself from Communism. In 1951 George Jeffares described as ‘the most active communist in Ireland’ called for a broad front with the republican movement and suspected attempts by the communist to offer financial support to the IRA was not accepted.<sup>30</sup> The Garda report stated that the IRA was extremely cautious not to be tainted as communists and any association with them would result in disaster for the organization. Additionally in its re-organization, the IRA had consciously decided to build a base in the United States which also ensured that the organization remained anti-communist. Indeed, the re-emergence of Clann na Gael in the USA was crucial in organizing fundraisers for the republican movement in 1951.

Bodenstown commemoration reports from Garda intelligence indicate that in the early 1950s a tense relationship existed between the republican movement and communists. In 1954, the Irish Worker League marched at Bodenstown where its paper the *Irish Workers*

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<sup>28</sup> *Wolfe Tone Annual*, 1950, p117.

<sup>29</sup> *Wolfe Tone Annual*, 1950, p117.

<sup>30</sup> Memorandum on the IRA and similar activities, 19 Dec. 1951 (NAI, DFA/10/A/12)

*Voice* was sold. Sixteen names were mentioned on the special branch file. Former IRA members such as Patrick Early attended Bodenstown as a member of the Irish Workers League. Eamon Smullen, also a former IRA member, who later rejoined in the 1960s, attended as a member of the Irish Worker League.<sup>31</sup> Posters erected by the Workers League were taken down by the IRA. While the communists attempted to sell their newspaper at the commemoration, the chairman emphasised that the only paper that was to be sold was the *United Irishman* and *Resurgent Ulster*.<sup>32</sup>

It should be noted that while republican publications condemned communism for its totalitarian approach they also condemned unbridled capitalism. It was argued that the English system and the Russian socialist state were equally oppressive and that Sinn Féin and the IRA rejected both.<sup>33</sup> Again, both were seen as unjust regimes which dominated weaker countries.

However, it should also be said that at times there seemed to be an ambiguity in terms of communism among some of the membership. While Seán Garland pointed out that the Chief-of-Staff Anthony Magan was quite religious and anti-communist, he felt that as a young person himself, this did not have any relevance for him as an IRA member and for many others with whom he was associated. Indeed he also stated that prior to joining the IRA in 1953 he had been interested in reading some of the material issued by the communist group the Irish Workers League: ‘When I started working and moving about.

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<sup>31</sup> Garda report, 21 June 1954 (NAI, Jus 8/900)

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Glor Uladh*, Aug. 1955.

I use to call into the communist party book shop in Pearse Street. I would pick up the Irish Workers Voice and read that and other things'<sup>34</sup>

Seamus Murphy, who remained in the IRA, was also a member of the Irish Workers League at the time and had no problem reconciling the IRA's anti-colonial approach with his membership of the Irish Workers League, despite the official line of the movement.<sup>35</sup>

Also, it is worth mentioning that at times there was a fluid relationship between the IRA and the communists. While there may have been some tension with communists at Bodenstown commemorations, former IRA members who were communists were often well respected by IRA members.<sup>36</sup>

In some circumstances, the republican movement did give explicit support to left-wing international activists such as when communist guerrillas were seen to be challenging the Batista dictatorship in Cuba. Republicans supported Castro and the Cuban guerrillas against the Batista regime. While initially the communist nature of the revolution was not as pronounced as in later years, it was, nevertheless, a radically significant event on the world stage precipitated by left-wing guerrillas.

The defeat of the Batista dictatorship by Castro was welcomed in the *United Irishman* and among ordinary members. An article titled 'What happened in Cuba has a lesson for the people of Ireland, Castro fought terror' appeared in 1959.<sup>37</sup> Castro was praised for

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with Seán Garland (12 Jan. 2012).

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Seamus Murphy (2 Feb. 2011).

<sup>36</sup> Interview Donal Donnelly (2 Dec. 2011).

<sup>37</sup> *United Irishman*, July. 1959.



defeating the powerful Batista regime. The article pointed out that while initially the Cuban guerrillas started out with small numbers, the people gradually began to support the revolution and this was pointed to as an example of what could happen in Ireland. The article suggested that small numbers of committed activists could be the catalyst for mass revolution. Obviously republicans were trying to compare the Cuban guerrillas with the IRA. Guerrilla tactics of infrastructural sabotage were also welcomed. Despite the fact that Cuba became a communist country, interestingly the article praised Castro's land reform policies which were described as 'striving to improve the lot of his poorer countrymen'.<sup>38</sup>

The fact that Castro had removed the Batista regime which was renowned for corrupt rule resonated with young northern nationalists. In fact support for the Cuban revolution was apparent among rank and file members as well as the leadership. Donal Donnelly included Castro and his followers as being another international revolutionary organization which he admired. Donnelly's response gives an insight into how some young republicans in Tyrone were sympathetic to the Cuban revolution:

The whole Castro experience. Castro had only come to power, he had been fighting in the Sierra Mastero mountains for several years before coming to power. We were supporters of Castro, even though we were supporters of John F Kennedy. This was where the complication came in to it. But Castro would have been a great hero of

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<sup>38</sup> *United Irishman*, July 1959.

ours, because he achieved what we were trying to achieve, we saw great similarities.<sup>39</sup>

Donnelly's reply also indicates that while IRA members were certainly not committed socialists, Castro's action in removing the Batista regime was an inspiration to young republicans who also saw their role as challenging injustice and achieving freedom. Other northern IRA members such as Joe and Gerry Haughinn from Lurgan also exhibited pro-Castro feelings as young people.<sup>40</sup>

Seán Garland indicated a widespread support for Castro by IRA members during the internment years in the Curragh Camp, including the more religious members. He echoes Donnelly's view that republicans identified with the actions of the Cuban revolutionaries. Garland, who was imprisoned in the Curragh at the time of Castro's take over in 1959, stated that his achievement in removing Batista was universally welcomed, even by those who would have been implacably opposed to communism. When asked why this was, he stated:

I think it was because it was a small country and the people had won freedom and they were (IRA prisoners) willing to respect and admire what had happened there. Even if they had no great knowledge of the working people or American influences, they knew about Batista and there was as I say, a great welcome for it.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Interview Donal Donnelly (2 Dec. 2011).

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Joe and Gerry Haughinn (6 June 2010).

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Seán Garland (12 Jan. 2012).

Garland also reflected the ideological contradictions with regard to socialism among IRA members in supporting Castro. However, the response of Donnelly and Garland underline a broad sympathy with the Cuban revolution, among rank and file IRA members. Those in charge of the movement's propaganda, such as Seán Ó Brádaigh, also supported the Cuban revolution.<sup>42</sup> Indeed the support for Cuba is a window into the mentality of the organization and its membership, which saw their role as something similar to that of the Cuban revolutionaries. The Cuban guerrilla and the Hungarian insurgents were viewed by members of the IRA as fighting similar struggles.

As will be discussed later, the republican movement placed a huge importance on presenting themselves as an extension of the popular decolonization movements which emerged in Africa and other places after Second World War. While they supported Castro, they also viewed Soviet Communism as a foreign oppressive regime in Eastern Europe. As has been illustrated, this had a currency in 1950s Ireland, considering the widespread opposition to communism which existed. However, what the republican movement did successfully, was to bridge a gap between the two main conflicting ideologies in the 1950s, communism and capitalism. By concentrating on independence struggles in Eastern Europe or in Africa, the reorganized IRA tapped into a popular regard that existed for anti-colonial struggles as well as a developing ideological awareness of international events among teenagers who were later attracted by the message of the IRA which demanded national self-government for smaller countries around the world.

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with Seán Ó Brádaigh (2 Feb. 2010).

## **Cyprus 1955-1959**

The anti-colonial conflict which was closest to Ireland's political situation in the 1950s took place in Cyprus. The war between the Greek Cypriots and the British between 1955 and 1959 became one of the most high profile anti-colonial conflicts at the time. The situation in Cyprus became a regular feature of the republican movement's propaganda from the mid 1950s onwards. This was closely followed by both the rank and file and the leadership. Cyprus witnessed an anti-colonial revolt by a group known as EOKA between 1955 and 1958. EOKA's key objective was to remove the British from Cyprus. The origins of the revolt against the British was a demand by the Greek Cypriots for the reunification of Greece with Cyprus. This movement became known as Enosis. The armed campaign by EOKA would finally force the British government into negotiations in 1959.<sup>43</sup> The similarities between the objectives of EOKA and the reorganizing IRA was heightened in the republican movement's propaganda. Both sought national reunification and an end to what they saw as eight hundred years of foreign occupation.

In the 1950s EOKA in many ways was the perfect example of how anti-colonial movements could end British rule by armed struggle. Morgan Tabitha has described EOKA as 'A small group of brave and committed activists who succeeded in forcing the mighty British Empire into retreat and liberating their country from foreign rule for the first time in eight hundred years'.<sup>44</sup> The re-emerging republican movement not only shared similar objectives to EOKA, but by presenting themselves as Ireland's anti-

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<sup>43</sup> Vias Livadas, *Cypriot and Irish political prisoners, held in British prisons, 1956-1959* (Nicosia, 2008), p. 159.

<sup>44</sup> Tabitha Morgan, *Sweet and bitter island: a history of the British in Cyprus* (London, 2010), p. 211.

colonial movement, they also had the possibility of appealing to an Irish youth who had an interest in the Cypriot struggle.

The effects of this revolt stretched far beyond the confines of Greece and Cyprus. In 1956 a number of EOKA prisoners were sentenced to death by the colonial courts in Cyprus. The reaction particularly in the Irish media highlighted a degree of sympathy with the EOKA prisoners. It also illuminated the topical nature of the situation in that country within the Irish media and in turn Irish society. The *Irish Independent* condemned the executions, stating that the ‘the situation in Cyprus is deteriorating and it is apparent that the British, who traditionally refer to their opponents as terrorists, are themselves responsible for a terrorist regime similar to the one in Ireland forty years ago’.<sup>45</sup> *The Irish Times* questioned if it was justified to kill the prisoners; ‘Many doubt whether it is wise to execute people in the colonies, especially when the motives behind them were political’.<sup>46</sup> While the *Irish Press* was more forthright in its condemnation of the killings stating ‘no sick propaganda of the British press, which systematically refers to the patriots anywhere as “assassins” or “terrorist” has blinded the common man of Britain to the fact that in Cyprus it is patriotism and not terrorism that is at the root of this current uproar and that it is British stupidity and not diplomacy that make it worse’.<sup>47</sup> These particular perspectives of the Cypriot situation expressed in the Irish media illustrate not only the international nature of the situation in Cyprus, but also a degree of sympathy if not solidarity with EOKA in Ireland.

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<sup>45</sup> *Irish Independent*, 10 May 1956.

<sup>46</sup> *Irish Times* 10 May 1956.

<sup>47</sup> *Irish Press*, 11 May 1956.

The outbreak of hostilities in Cyprus featured heavily in republican propaganda throughout the mid to late 1950s. The condemnations of the British and the latent sympathy and even regard for EOKA within sections of Irish society was also mirrored in the literature of the republican movement, which tried to cultivate support for what it saw as their own anti-colonial militant organization the IRA while making comparisons with EOKA.

Joe Haughinn who joined the IRA from Lurgan, pointed to his involvement with the IRA as being the reason was sympathetic with the Cypriots and took an interest in them.<sup>48</sup> In the Curragh and in Crumlin Road, prisoners often discussed international conflicts such as in Cyprus. Eamon Boyce's prison diary which he kept while imprisoned in Crumlin Road jail between 1955 and 1962 made a number of references to the situation in Cyprus and illuminate the sympathy that IRA prisoners had with the Cypriots. A treaty which granted independence to Cyprus in 1959, was greeted by Boyce in his diary as follows 'Peace in Cyprus at last thank God'.<sup>49</sup>

Jim Lane from Cork, stated that rank and file members were recommended to read books and literature that examined certain conflicts around the globe, such as in the late 1940s, between the Jewish people in Palestine and the British. He was also recommended to read a book about EOKA leader General Grivas. While he felt that the reading material recommended by the IRA leadership was primarily to familiarise young recruits with the tactics of guerilla warfare rather than the politics of the situation, his response indicates a

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Joe and Gerry Haughinn (6 July. 2010). Interview with Davey Lewsley (6 June. 2010).

<sup>49</sup> Anna Bryson, *The insider* (Dublin 2007), p. 212.

general awareness and interest which young IRA members had at the time about other international conflicts. Lane elaborated on the reading material which was recommended and read within the IRA: 'I got the Menachem Begin book on loan from the local library. I don't remember reading the Grivas book. Volunteers in the IRA took an interest in areas of conflict around the world'.<sup>50</sup> Lane's response, as well as the evidence from other interviewees, shows that a familiarity with the anti-colonial activity in Cyprus was seen by his IRA superiors as being an important part of IRA education at the time.<sup>51</sup>

It would be inaccurate to describe the IRA's coverage of the conflict in Cyprus as opportunistic in order to attract support. Not only did the republican movement comment on events in Cyprus, it also established links with EOKA. A number of IRA prisoners including its future Chief-of-Staff Cathal Goulding, were jailed with EOKA members in Britain in the mid-1950s and formed close bonds with the Cypriots. IRA and EOKA prisoners often held discussions about political ideology and also shared expertise on guerilla war tactics.<sup>52</sup> Seán Mac Stiofáin, who spent time in prison in Britain, stated that: 'I knew the struggle for Ireland's freedom was only part of a worldwide struggle against imperialism. Therefore I and other republicans rejoiced at the success of any movement fighting a true revolutionary war and we mourned their defeats'.<sup>53</sup> Not only did the prisoners have similar views on decolonization, but also according to an EOKA prisoner Vias Livadas, they also shared similar views on issues of social justice and equality.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Email Jim Lane (17 Oct. 2011).

<sup>52</sup> Vias Livadas, *Cypriot and Irish political prisoners, held in British prisons, 1956-1959* (Nicosia, 2008), p. 67.

<sup>53</sup> Seán Mac Stiofáin, *Memoirs of a revolutionary* (Edinburgh, 1975), p. 52.

<sup>54</sup> Vias Livadas, *Cypriot and Irish political prisoners, held in British prisons, 1956-1959* (Nicosia, 2008), p. 59.

Logistical reasons also ensured that the two organizations at times worked closely. For example in the mid-1950s, members of EOKA travelled to Dublin to discuss joint escape attempts with the IRA. Indeed, EOKA prisoners assisted in the escape of IRA prisoner Seamus Murphy in 1959 from Wakefield prison in England”.<sup>55</sup>

Seán Mc Stiofáin also indicated how IRA prisoners viewed themselves in an international context while incarcerated alongside EOKA prisoners. His comments echo Lane’s account of how the organization saw themselves as part of an international decolonization movement when he stated: ‘we felt ourselves not only of the tradition of Irish republican fighters, but of the worldwide spirit of revolutionaries in prison’.<sup>56</sup> He added that; ‘it was not through imprisonment alone that we felt this sense of solidarity. We watched anti-colonial movements growing in places after another across the world and knew that the same determination would rise again in Ireland’.<sup>57</sup>

The solidarity between the EOKA and IRA prisoners reflected the similar anti-colonial mindset which underpinned both organizations. As has been referred to, this anti-colonial mentality extended beyond the British jail that housed EOKA and IRA members and was a prevalent influence among some young people growing up in Ireland at the time. The awareness of what was happening in Cyprus by some of those interviewed, indicates an interest in the situation in that country prior to their decision to join the IRA. Some saw the reorganizing of the IRA as the Irish equivalent of the international anti-colonial

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<sup>55</sup> Vias Livadas, *Cypriot and Irish political prisoners, held in British prisons, 1956-1959* (Nicosia, 2008), p. 117.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, p. 60.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*.



guerilla armies that were emerging at this time. The response of the interviewee's suggests events in Cyprus had a politicising effect on them as teenagers and for some it was the catalyst in stimulating their interest in political activity. Joining the new IRA of the 1950s was a logical conclusion to a developing political interest which began with an interest in groups such as EOKA.

Seamus Murphy from Castledermot in County Kildare, who joined the IRA in 1953, pointed to his interest in anti-colonial groups such as the Mau Mau in Kenya and EOKA as being a pivotal reason why he joined the IRA.<sup>58</sup> He saw the Cypriots as being another international group engaged in an anti-imperialist conflict prior to joining the IRA.

Sean Lynch from Longford, also had a strong interest in events in Cyprus. Lynch's interest in the political situation in the Mediterranean predated his decision to join the IRA. When asked how he perceived the Greek Cypriots at the time he replied:

Oh I was always very interested in EOKA and that. I got books and read about EOKA. I got a book about General Grivas. They were opposing the British. I considered them something like our own. They were sometimes better than us because they were doing something about it. I had great respect for EOKA and General Grivas.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with Seamus Murphy (2 Feb. 2011).

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Sean Lynch (4 April 2011).

Again this statement disproves the view that those from a republican tradition were simply motivated by non-ideological reasons. While an IRA tradition existed in Sean Lynch's home, the fact that he could identify the IRA's objective with other liberation movements around the world certainly demonstrates an international political awareness. While tradition may indeed have had a bearing on his thinking initially, his awareness of what was taking place in Cyprus show that ultimately he saw the objectives of the IRA in a broader ideological and international context.

The interest that Lynch had in Cyprus prior to joining the IRA also highlights the opportunities that existed for a reorganizing IRA, by magnifying the ideological and political parallels between themselves and the Cypriots. The fact that EOKA had embarked on their campaign in 1955, a year before the IRA's Operation Harvest in December 1956, further enhanced some young people's admiration for EOKA's efforts to gain independence. In many ways EOKA set an active example to young people in Ireland through its armed campaign. It also reinforced the impact of IRA propaganda that pointed to armed struggle as the only way to remove the British.

The response of Donal Donnelly from Omagh in Co Tyrone also gives an indication of the degree of sympathy and awareness for EOKA among many of his peers growing up in the nationalist community in the Northern State. In Donnelly's case the fusion of tradition, state discrimination and an international awareness, again point to a young person in the process of developing a definite ideological position.

Donnelly pointed to *Reuter's News* and the *Irish Press* as being the main sources of information where people in Tyrone were made aware of the goings on in other parts of Europe. He recalled:

We use to discuss (the Cyprus situation) everyday at school... There was this great understanding. They were trying to join Cyprus up with the Greek Republic. We were in the same situation in the six counties, as we thought. In their case they had a minority Turkish population and in our case we had a unionist population.<sup>60</sup>

Donnelly also added: 'We had a lot of similarities we followed that Cyprus thing, we wished them every success'.<sup>61</sup> When the IRA began to re-establish itself in the 1950s the international situation in places such as Cyprus, helped to lay the foundations for future recruitment. Donnelly indicated that this international news had a huge influence in his decision to join the IRA at the time and in popularising the organization in places such as Tyrone. While Donnelly and his peers in nationalist parts of Tyrone felt sympathy for the Cypriot people, a revived IRA offered younger nationalists the opportunity to emulate the deeds of EOKA by joining an emerging IRA and establishing self rule on the island of Ireland.

This sympathy and solidarity was explicitly used in Dublin in the early 1950s to recruit new members by the republican movement. Seán Garland also alluded to an international awareness and interest among his generation about EOKA and pointed to the situation in

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<sup>60</sup> Interview Donal Donnelly (2 Dec. 2011).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

Cyprus as being just one of a number of topical international conflicts at the time that certain young people were interested in. Garland stated: 'I know that in the 1950s, Joe Crystal, who was in the IRA at the time, he broke away in early 1956, but he use to have a slogan around town saying Cyprus now Ireland when?.. This became a cry within the IRA, when was the campaign going to start'.<sup>62</sup>

Garland's response signifies how external political situations in Europe reinforced the determination of the IRA to begin attacks on the border. Not only was there a degree of admiration for EOKA that the IRA was keen to capitalize on, but also a growing desire to emulate their anti-colonial guerilla campaign in Ireland among young Dublin republicans. His response reflects a similar feeling among activists in Longford and Tyrone, who also spoke of at having an interest in EOKA's political struggle prior to joining the IRA.

In 1956 and 1957 something as prosaic as graffiti daubed on walls in urban areas of Dublin hinted at the far reaching influence of an anti-colonial revolt on a foreign Mediterranean island. This graffiti was actually a collection of IRA recruitment slogans in praise of EOKA. Poems such as one by a Conleith Martin called 'Cyprus Abu' that celebrated the actions of EOKA and was aimed at a young nationalist or republican audience. The poem encouraged young Cypriots and Irish people to 'Fill your mind with the slenderest hope, We who have hunted the jungle, Will welcome the Lions loudest roar, And the trail of his blood we will follow, from center to bleak rocky shore'.<sup>63</sup> These slogans and poems complemented the editorials and feature articles in the *United*

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<sup>62</sup> Interview with Seán Garland (12 Jan. 2012).

<sup>63</sup> *United Irishman*, Oct. 1956.

*Irishman*. It not only commented on the contemporary actions of EOKA, but also made an effort to trace the history of the independence movement and articulate an international anti-colonial ideological perspective.

One editorial gave a comprehensive, albeit subjective overview of the history of Cyprus going back to the sixteenth century. The fact that Cyprus had also been partitioned added to the similarities with Ireland which the republican movement was keen to accentuate. A number of treaties were outlined over the course of Cypriot history such as the Treaty of Lausanne in 1924. It was mentioned that in 1939 Cyprus sent troops to the war in the hope that it would speed up independence.<sup>64</sup> The editorial noted ‘the parallels with Ireland’ where it claimed partition and promises of self rule were ploys by the British to maintain their interests in the country and that full independence could never be achieved in these circumstances. They claimed that the British were historical duplicitous with the Cypriots and that the armed campaign which EOKA was involved was the only alternative left to them. The paper demonstrated its support stating ‘the sympathy of all Irishmen will be with the struggle against our common enemy, for our common objective the God given right to rule our own country in our own way’.<sup>65</sup>

Feature articles by *Fear Feasa* in the *United Irishman* also gave an overview of the history of Cyprus dating back to the fourth century. The idea of a union between Greece and Cyprus known as Enosis, that first emerged in the nineteenth century, was highlighted. They printed this chronology of different treaties between the British and the Cypriots,

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<sup>64</sup> *United Irishman*, Dec. 1955.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

which ultimately did not end in political reunification or independence. Again the Republican movement stressed that passive measures needed to be reinforced with armed action and applauded the approach by EOKA. Clearly trying to depict itself as Ireland's answer to Enosis, it stated that 'It is the same as Ireland's combination of the IRA and Sinn Féin'.<sup>66</sup>

Student rallies organized by the republican movement prior to the border campaign attempted to mobilize students in support of the impending armed action as part of its approach in removing partition. This demonstrated how the movement acknowledged alternative forms of participation in the republican movement was possible, again informed by what was happening in Cyprus and Greece. A demonstration was held outside the GPO and chaired by IRA member Joe Crystal in 1955. The republican movement claimed that the rally was an extension of an international form of protest where students mobilized behind independence movements. It claimed 'practically every independence movement especially where the fight is against England- is backed 100% by students. A striking example is Enois in Greece'.<sup>67</sup>

The actual outbreak of the military conflict between 1955 and 1958 was reported regularly in the movements propaganda. Like the situation in the East African colonies, republican propaganda challenged the British media's depiction of the insurgents as terrorists and highlighted the alleged behavior of the British Army. In 1956, a monthly column appeared in the *United Irishman* known as 'World Affairs'. Terms such

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<sup>66</sup> *United Irishman*, June 1956.

<sup>67</sup> *United Irishman*, Jan .1955.

‘terrorist’ which were applied to EOKA by the British press were refuted in the series and allegations of British human right abuses were highlighted. ‘World affairs’ in July dedicated its coverage to the ongoing conflict, with a headline titled ‘British Atrocities In Cyprus’, a list of alleged British atrocities which were committed appeared in the paper. The same edition of the *United Irishman* also covered a written petition to the UN by the inhabitants of a village in Cyprus known as Pedoula complaining about the killing of locals by the British army.<sup>68</sup>

This coverage also showed the republican movements intent to expose the British Army as an inhumane occupation force in the Mediterranean, that further bolstered their argument that armed action was the only remedy for removing them from Ireland. Cyprus was highlighted to as an example to a new generation of Irish republicans when it was stated ‘Their resistance forces are growing and backed by a spirited population are striking back with increasing strength. There is a lesson here for the Irish people’.<sup>69</sup> The coverage lasted until the peace agreement between Cyprus and Britain. The peace negotiations and their outcome was supported by the republican movement claiming that ‘in the end the Cypriots triumphed over their conquerors’, the promise being the IRA was the Irish manifestation of EOKA and that the prize of freedom was available to committed members.<sup>70</sup> The appeal was not confined to those from a republican tradition but to young people in 1950s Ireland from different political backgrounds whose motivation encompassed an international perspective.

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<sup>68</sup> *United Irishman*. July 1956.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *United Irishman*, June 1959.

## AFRICA

While the end of the Second World War saw a re-evaluation of IRA policy in an effort to rebuild the organization, simultaneously a huge process of decolonization was taking place on the African continent. This process saw nearly fifty sovereign states achieve independence after the Second World War.<sup>71</sup> The post-war years in Africa witnessed political conflict across the continent between nationalist independence movements and those who wanted to maintain the status quo. In many ways the independence movements in India in the late 1940s had a domino effect which spread to Africa. This was boosted by the emergence of a number of native African leaders who were educated in western universities and exposed to ideas of self determination, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya was one such leader.<sup>72</sup> The anti-colonial activity which swept across Africa was often extensively reported in the Irish media. The republican movements developing international analysis from 1948 onwards covered some of these conflicts.

By offering solidarity with many of the independence struggles in places such as Kenya and Algeria, republicans offered themselves in their propaganda as an extension of this African anti-colonial drive. The IRA and Sinn Féin offered the opportunity of emulating the actions of their African counterparts like they had with the situation in Cyprus. Again, this appealed to young Irish teenagers.

The response of those interviewed reveals how the IRA in the early 1950s tapped into an awareness of anti-colonial movements in Africa and effectively molded its propaganda to

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<sup>71</sup> H.S Wilson, *African decolonization* (London, 1994), p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> A.S. Cleary, 'The myth of Mau Mau in its international context', *African Affairs*, vol. 89, No. 355(Apr, 1990), pp.227-245. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/722243>, (1/2/2012), p. 228.



fit neatly in to this global anti-colonial jigsaw. New IRA volunteers could then feel they were not operating in isolation but were part of a larger self-determining movement.

It should be noted that republican propaganda tended to concentrate on non-constitutional independence movements in Africa and Asia rather than these which managed to achieve independence without having to resort to armed methods. Therefore from a propaganda perspective liberation groups in Africa involved in successful attempts in attacking the British by armed action was an example of how independence could be gained in this way. Also, the IRA saw themselves as a revolutionary organization involved in the removal of the contemporary political and constitutional arrangements rather than a reformist organization.

Willaim Roger Louis argues that the approach of the British in the 1950s in Africa and Asia was to reach out to a sympathetic section of the population in its colonies while simultaneously it would physically disengage. Louis argues that 'Influence would thus be maintained by transferring power. Nationalism would be channeled into constructing nations in harmony with British interests. British interests would be sustained by means other than domination'.<sup>73</sup> The IRA and its members who shared a similar ideological outlook to EOKA and the Kenyan Mau Mau, which was a commitment to the removal of British imperialism and capitalism were never going to be appeased by such an approach. Therefore armed struggle in Algeria, Kenya or Cyprus or by other groups of a

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<sup>73</sup> Wm Roger Louis, 'The dissolution of the British Empire' Judith M. Brown and W. Roger Louis (ed.) *The twentieth century* (Oxford, 1999), p. 329.

similar ideological persuasion such as the IRA became the inevitable method by which to achieve their objectives.

### **Kenya 1952-1960**

One country which experienced an anti-colonial uprising in the 1950s was Kenya. A revolt by an insurgency group known as the Mau Mau took place between 1952 and 1960. The Mau Mau was a militant group drawn from the Kikuyu tribe, who were involved in an uprising against the British colonial administration at the time. The revolt was typical of other anti-colonial uprisings of the period in post-war Africa. While the conflict ultimately ended in the defeat of the Mau Mau's, there followed a British withdrawal in 1963. The Kenyan uprising became a leading international news story in the 1950s and was hailed in some quarters as a liberation struggle, while depicted as a terrorist uprising by others; ultimately the conflict demonstrated a willingness on behalf of those living under colonial rule to use armed struggle in an effort to achieve independence.

Both the British and Irish media dedicated much of their international news sections to events in Kenya at the time. What is significant about the coverage of the anti-colonial independence struggle, is how they were interpreted and transmitted at the time depending on the particular outlook of the commentators. Arguably one of the key tools which colonial authorities used in their efforts to combat anti-colonial movements was the utilisation of propaganda in order to delegitimize and depoliticize insurgents. This is

common in conflicts where a dominant power attempts to contain or crush revolts. For example perceptions of the Mau Mau's cultivated in some sections of the British and in some cases the Irish media, often depicted them as uncivilized savages with a non-political agenda. Cleary states that the 'myth of the Mau Mau' was manufactured by the British to forestall the decolonization of Kenya.<sup>74</sup> Caroline Elkins' recent study of Kenya in her book *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of the Empire in Kenya* demonstrates how hostility by the colonial forces to the idea of Kenyan independence often manifested itself in negative depictions of the Mau Mau's, who were described as 'scum, filthy pigs and savage animals who had to be wiped out'.<sup>75</sup>

In Ireland, the national newspapers often devoted much space to what was happening from the troubled colony. By and large, much of the coverage in the national print media was sympathetic to the idea of Kenyan independence. It should be noted that the *Irish Times* often covered conflicting views within its correspondence page. The letters illuminated the diverse views within a section of Irish society at the time with regard to Kenya. The significant amount of letters which were published by the editor on the conflict gives an indication of its topical nature. In January 1954 a letter from a Mr BH Taylor condemned the Mau Mau's as a terror group.<sup>76</sup> From examining the sentiments expressed in *The Irish Times*, a majority of the contributions were signed by people from middle class Dublin addresses who were largely favorable to the British position. Nonetheless this was often challenged by others such as TD Dan Breen who wrote a

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<sup>74</sup> A.S. Cleary, 'The myth of mau mau in its international context', *African Affairs*, vol. 89, No. 355(Apr, 1990), pp.227-245. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/722243>, (1/2/2012), p.238.

<sup>75</sup> Caroline Elkins, *Britain's gulag: the brutal end of the empire in Kenya* (London, 2005), p. 246.

<sup>76</sup> *Irish Times*, 6 Jan. 1954.

letter in 1954 supporting the Mau Mau's, who he claimed were a legitimate independence movement.<sup>77</sup> Other broadsheets at the time such as the *Irish Press*, which was the paper most widely read by many of the families of the people interviewed, certainly indicated a much more sympathetic or even supportive position of the Kikuyu people's armed insurrection led by the Mau Mau.

There was a degree of regard evident for the Mau Mau's in Ireland at the time among sections of the wider media and the population. A residual nationalist feeling from the War of Independence years coupled with an anti-partition sentiment all contributed to a sense of solidarity with the Mau Mau revolt and the plight of the Kikuyu tribe. For example, the conditions of Mau Mau prisoners were highlighted in Dáil Éireann in 1953, Fine Gael TD Oliver J. Flanagan who called on the government to make representation on humanitarian grounds 'concerning the treatment of the natives of Kenya by the British military'.<sup>78</sup> Also in 1953 a public meeting was held in the Mansion House in Dublin that was chaired by Peadar O'Donnell and was attended by representatives of all the main political parties. Speaking was a Mr. Mbiyu Koinange, an executive member of the Kenya African Union, a group who supported the Mau Mau insurgents. At the meeting the speaker argued that black propaganda was used to undermine a 'person fighting for freedom' in Kenya.<sup>79</sup> He also highlighted a number of issues in relation to the acquisition of land that he claimed resulted in the impoverishment of the Kikuyu natives.

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<sup>77</sup> *Irish Times*, 7 Jan. 1954.

<sup>78</sup> DD wed 9 Dec. 1953.

<sup>79</sup> *Irish Times*, 22 Dec. 1953.

At the meeting, Mr. Donal, Nevin T.U.C offered Irish solidarity with the Kenyan freedom fighters. Ben Briscoe of Fianna Fáil also offered support, while Dan Breen TD stated that the Kenyan's were entering a period 'of struggle that we entered into 30 years ago'.<sup>80</sup> The Labour Party was represented by its chairman, T.A Kyne, who echoed the comments of the other speakers and stated that he looked forward to the eventual freedom of Africa. The broad based support from TD's and Trade Union Leaders, gives an insight in to a degree of sympathy and empathy which existed in Ireland towards the plight of the Kenyan insurgents.

This degree of support and awareness of the plight of the Mau Mau within sections of the political establishment was also reflected in the pages of the *United Irishman* from 1948 onwards. An important point is that, broad sections of the Irish political establishment gave their support and spoke of solidarity with the Mau Mau revolt. Those who flirted on the margins of the republican movement acted within this contemporary political and social environment. Obviously the motivations of the IRA and Sinn Féin were different from the majority of TD's mentioned above, but the concept of national independence and support for it remained.

This anti-colonial sentiment in the early 1950s was for some from non-republican backgrounds pivotal in their decision to join the IRA. Seamus Murphy who joined the IRA in 1953 was attending boarding school when he first became interested in the situation in Kenya. From a middle class non-republican background, Murphy highlighted the anti-colonial conflicts at the time as being the key reason why he joined the IRA. His

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<sup>80</sup> *Irish Times*, 22 Dec. 1953.

awareness in politics was first stimulated by what was happening primarily in Kenya. He stated that he followed the situation in Kenya closely and that many of his contemporaries had awareness and sympathy for the Mau Mau. He perceived the IRA at the time as having the exact same objectives as the anti-colonial movement in Kenya and when they began to reorganize in the early 1950s stating that: ‘at the same time I decided to join Ireland’s anti-colonial organization the IRA’.<sup>81</sup>

One Leitrim interviewee who came from a Fianna Fáil background, spoke of having an interest in anti-colonial activity in Africa, from adolescence into his early adult years. He stated that his family had an exhaustive interest in international affairs, where World War Two and the anti-colonial conflicts often dominated social discussions. Asked if he had sympathy for other anti-colonial movements in Africa or Cyprus at the time, he stated: ‘Oh Yes. It was happening in different parts of the world, and in India..... Yes definitely’.<sup>82</sup>

When Seán Garland was asked what international conflicts he was aware of growing up he said: ‘I became aware of Kenya and that when I left school’, he added that ‘people had a knowledge and were concerned, because it was a British colony’.<sup>83</sup> Garland’s response again reflects the topical nature of the Kenyan situation even among tenement dwellers in Dublin.

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with Seamus Murphy (2 Feb. 2012).

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Leitrim Person (2 March 2010).

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Seán Garland (12 Jan. 2012).

Donal Donnelly's response also confirmed a degree of awareness, and indeed support, for the Mau Mau that existed among his contemporaries in county Tyrone. When asked what international conflicts that young people such as himself had an interest in he said: 'other people who we had great sympathy for at the time and who we were supporters of, were the Mau Mau'.<sup>84</sup>

Not only did the republican movement have the potential to take advantage of the possible sympathy for the Kenyan anti-colonial movement, there was an organic solidarity evident with the Mau Mau. The fact that the revolt in Kenya was against the British obviously enhanced the degree of shared solidarity with the Mau Mau that the republican movement was keen to accentuate.

As early as 1952, *The United Irishman* demonstrated its support for the African anti-colonial struggle. It did so in a number of ways. Republicans' attacked and discredit the widespread perception of the nature of the Mau Mau revolt cultivated in sections of the British media, which depicted the Kenyan natives as an uncivilized and savage race, in order to depoliticize the insurrection.<sup>85</sup> These deliberately cultivated racial stereotypes were challenged in republican propaganda. Republican writers keen to expose the draconian attitude of those who advocated imprisonment without trial and hanging as a means of dealing with the Mau Mau insurgents. Indeed, given the recent exposure of quite shocking human rights abuses that took place at the time as documented by Prof Caroline Elkins, the republican propaganda could be regarded as foresighted.

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with Donal Donnelly (2 Dec. 2011).

<sup>85</sup> A.S. Cleary, 'The myth of mau mau in its international context, *African Affairs*, vol. 89, No. 355(Apr, 1990), pp.227-245. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/722243>, (1/2/2012), p. 228.

One of the most striking aspects of that can be gleaned from republican literature at the time was the genuine attempt to challenge stereotypical racial comments attributed to the Mau Mau and the Kikuyu tribe. One particular debate that took place in the Kenyan Legislature in 1952, and featured in the Irish media. It was reported in the *Irish Times* and reprinted by the *United Irishman*, in order to highlight the racist lexicon used to describe a section of the Kikuyu people. The debate illuminated the draconian attitude of the colonial rulers in dealing with the Mau Mau revolt. The racial tone of the comments made in the legislature certainly elucidate a bigoted attitude on behalf of the authorities in Kenya who depicted the conflict as a civilized colonial institution being challenged by uncivilized natives. It was this section of the Kenyan political establishment that was often responsible for the media's depiction of the conflict. During the debate, the speaker E.S Grogan reflected this racist attitude which underpinned the views of some of the Kenyan settlers when he described the Mau Mau tribe as the 'most cowardly tribe in Africa.'<sup>86</sup> He advocated the imprisonment and killing of people from the Kikuyu tribe as well as 'the charging of about one hundred of theses rascals and hang twenty five per cent of them in front of the remainder, who should then be sent back to the tribal reserves to tell the rest'.<sup>87</sup>

The republican movement exposed and condemned this attitude and pointed to evidence of how dangerous stereotypes were cultivated in order to justify mass killing by the authorities. Another article defended the native Africans involved in the anti-colonial struggle and challenged racial stereotypes stating, 'nor are they anti-Christian, on the

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<sup>86</sup> *United Irishman*, Dec 1952.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*



contrary, they are ordinary folks like you and I, who abhor foreign domination, no matter who the foreigner', the writer went on to add that 'the members of the Mau Mau are nether anti-Christian or anti-white'.<sup>88</sup>

The depiction of the Mau Mau by some sections of the British media was also rejected by many rank and file IRA members. The response from some indicated strong support for the Mau Mau, while the negative propaganda about their African counterparts only intensified young people's support for them: Donal Donnelly stated:

The war in Kenya, we were great supporters of the Mau Mau. The Mau Mau stories... I couldn't tell you how offensive the profile of the Mau Mau were. They had them doing all kind of things, drinking the blood of girls and this sort of stuff, all part of this initiation right, all bullshit propaganda.<sup>89</sup>

The negative portrayals of the Mau Mau reinforced a feeling of solidarity among Irish teenagers such as Donnelly, particularly in Northern Ireland where he had pointed to daily experiences of discrimination.

Indeed, Donnelly's response indicated a natural solidarity which existed with the Mau Mau where negative portrayals of the Kenyan insurgents were decoded and rejected among young people in places such as Tyrone. The discrimination that young nationalists felt living in Northern Ireland, which was alluded to by all those interviewed from there,

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<sup>88</sup> *United Irishman*, Feb 1953.

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Donal Donnelly (2 Dec. 2012).

also contributed to a more probing view of how the establishment portrayed the Mau Mau or indeed any international insurgent groups in pursuit of national independence. The fact that the Mau Mau were castigated and condemned in the conflict more than likely enhanced their appeal to young northern nationalists.

Interestingly, some of those interviewed spoke of how they saw the Mau Mau and the native American Indians as a people dispossessed and felt that they had a similar history to northern nationalists. One interviewee mentioned how his father, who had a major influence in stimulating his interest in republicanism, often talked about the plight of the native American Indians. He stated that his; ‘father had a great interest in the American Indians and the injustice that was done to them’.<sup>90</sup> For him, being a republican or being attracted to the republicanism of the IRA at the time meant having a degree of solidarity with people from different ethnic backgrounds who were engaged in anti-colonial movements. When asked if he could make a connection with them and the situation in Ireland, he responded: ‘yes definitely, they were disposed and that sort of thing’.<sup>91</sup> The IRA who challenged depictions of the Mau Mau as uncivilised, resonated with politically inclined young teenagers who rejected these negative portrayals in both the south of Ireland and in the north.

While the responses from the interviewees’ alluded to an anti-colonial mentality among some Irish teenagers which resulted in support for the Mau Mau, it should be noted that in the 1950s, some young Irish people joined the British army and were often sent to

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<sup>90</sup> Interview with Leitrim Person (2 Mar. 2010).

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*

Kenya. In the early 1950s, a recruitment drive by the British army offered a career in the army as well as relatively good wages.<sup>92</sup> The *United Irishman* often commented on this. One of the key messages the IRA constantly promulgated in its literature was its criticism of Irish people that joined the British army. Obviously the fact that new British recruits would be used against the IRA in an armed campaign was the primary reason for its condemnations. However, they also strongly discouraged young people to enlist in an army which would be used in conflicts against colonial revolts such as in Kenya.<sup>93</sup> The war in Kenya was according to the republican movement a struggle for freedom by Kenyan people and that Irish people should support the Mau Mau.

Again emphasising its solidarity with the Mau Mau cause against the British, an appeal to join the British army in the *Cork Examiner* by the 'poppy day' organizer in County Cork was condemned by republicans. The killing of Kenyan insurgents by Irish people in the British forces was morally reprehensible and was equated with the killing of Irish republicans. At times the republicans resorted to referring to Catholic church literature which it claimed called on young people not to join foreign armies. *The United Irishman* stated that for young people to join foreign armies unaware that the aims were morally unjustified, while also appealing to parents not to permit their sons to fight on behalf of colonial forces which would result in their sons' 'spiritual and physical deaths'.<sup>94</sup> It added that 'it proves difficult to reconcile this commentary with the fact that thousands of young Irishmen are at present serving with the British forces in Malaya, Kenya and Korea'.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> *Irish Times*, 9 Sept. 1950.

<sup>93</sup> *United Irishman*, Dec. 1952.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

Another headline article titled ‘This Kenyan Business. Is it any business of ours?’ repeated its condemnations of young Irish people who joined the British army. The headline article reinforced the IRA’s message that ending the British Empire was an international struggle. Also, the IRA made no differentiation between the actions of the British army in Kenya or in Ireland. The objective, in both instances, it was argued, was to repress the independence movement by any means, stating that, ‘should we not realize that some of our own fellow countrymen are actually helping to perpetuate these outrages. Isn’t it a fact that there are Irishmen serving in the British army, Navy and Air force and if they are not actually members of the terror force in Kenya, they are certainly by membership of those forces accomplices in their crimes’.<sup>96</sup>

While it may have suited the IRA’s objectives to try and court an international anti-colonial sentiment at the time, its pronouncements certainly do indicate a genuine sense of solidarity with the Mau Mau and also a degree of embarrassment at the fact that young Irish people joined the British army. The *United Irishman* claimed that ‘natives of British colonies will tell you that Irishmen in British colonies are the cruelest agents out there’.<sup>97</sup>

*Resurgent Ulster* was a northern republican paper first published under the auspices of the republican movement in 1954. The paper had a particular northern emphasis; it too had an international aspect to its propaganda. It often dedicated lengthy articles to the situation in Africa. The natives in the African colonies were compared to the nationalist population in Northern Ireland. The northern publication, that was sold in nationalist

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<sup>96</sup> *United Irishman*, Jan. 1954.

<sup>97</sup> *United Irishman*, Oct. 1953.

parts of Northern Ireland, pointed to the Mau Mau fighters as a legitimate independence movement and applauded them in the paper, while the actions of the British were strongly criticised. The title of one article was ‘Africa for the Africans.’ The piece accused the British of being responsible for the repression of people in African countries and using sophisticated military expertise to kill and repress the natives. The northern edition of the republican movement’s paper expressed an organic solidarity with the plight of the people in African countries under colonial rule. Representations of the Mau Mau, who were depicted as savage-like in much of the British media, were again challenged by northern republicans. Offering solidarity with the Kenyan resistance movement, the paper said, ‘Britain is engaged in another campaign of terror against another small nation which the main difference between are own is dark skin’.<sup>98</sup>

Like the *United Irishman*, *Resurgent Ulster* also attempted to expose some of the actions of the British in its propaganda as well as the racist attitude of some pro-colonialist supporters in Britain. The words of a Scottish nationalist at Cambridge were reprinted by republicans to emphasise the racist attitude of some in Britain when speaking of the Mau Mau he was quoted as saying ‘savages have to be dealt with savagely’.<sup>99</sup> Accusations of torture and the rape of Kenyan women appeared in the article. The use of imprisonment camps in Kenya was pointed to as inhumane places which were used to torture the natives into submission. ‘Reduction camps, which are really concentration camps, are used to convince the naughty Mau Mau how essentially wicked they have been in not

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<sup>98</sup> *Resurgent Ulster*, May 1954.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

accepting British exploitation'.<sup>100</sup> The article basically attempted to expose what it saw as the hypocrisy of the British, who they argued used propaganda to depoliticize the Mau Mau. The fact that young northerners such as Donal Donnelly and his peers in Tyrone supported the Mau Mau and rejected negative media portrayals of them, emphasizes how the anti-colonial sentiments expressed in *Resurgent Ulster* had the potential to appeal to young northern nationalists. The example of the Mau Mau's also demonstrated a practical way of challenging the status quo at the time, which these northern nationalists perceived was discriminatory.

In October 1953 the conflict in Malaya between the British and the Malayan insurgents appeared in republican propaganda. Between 1948 and 1960 Malaya experienced a war between the Malaya National Liberation Army and the British backed colonial government. Again the efforts of the anti-colonial revolt and the use of guerilla warfare were applauded, while accusations that the anti-colonial movements were communist or terrorist were both untrue and hostile descriptions according to the paper. While the Malaya fighters were communist guerillas, republican propaganda denied this. Indeed the paper accused the Irish media of echoing the same interpretation of the conflict in Africa as could be seen in the British media. They also pointing to the role of its generals such as General Templar in Malaya as one of the 'the cruelest of British agents'.<sup>101</sup> The fact that De Valera had met with Churchill during this period was commented on and was a source of embarrassment for republicans given the British policy in Malaya and further reinforces the fact that a genuine sense of solidarity existed with the insurgents in Malaya

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<sup>100</sup> *Resurgent Ulster*, May 1954.

<sup>101</sup> *United Irishman*, Oct. 1953.

when the writer stated ‘what these unfortunate inhabitants of Malaya and Kenya must have thought of the Irish when they witness such an exhibition’.<sup>102</sup>

## **Algeria**

The conflict in Algeria also featured in republican propaganda. Algeria was colonized by French settlers in 1830 and had witnessed a social and political system emerge which was based on racial inequality. By 1954 this had culminated in a nationalist uprising by the Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN). The conflict, which lasted for eight years, resulted in French disengagement and Algerian independence.

This conflict was reported on closely in Irish republican literature and, as with Kenya, sections of young nationalists were politically aware of the Algerian revolt prior to joining the IRA. In other cases new IRA recruits developed an interest in the Algerian struggle as it played out on the world media. As before, the republican movement explicitly identified with the Algerian conflict in its writings and supported the objectives of the FLN, whose guerilla style tactics were endorsed. It was argued that this was the only method to challenge the imperialist system and by forcibly removing the French colonial power.

A series of articles appeared in the *United Irishman* which traced the history of different Algerian separatists from Abdel Kader to Morkram. A re-publication of a *Newsweek* article in 1957 featured in the paper.<sup>103</sup> The French system of ruling Algeria was

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<sup>102</sup> *United Irishman*, Oct. 1953.

<sup>103</sup> *United Irishman*, Sept. 1957.

highlighted which according to the *United Irishman* was based on discrimination. In a lengthy article in 1960 the *United Irishman* laid out the history of the struggle in Algeria and again offered its solidarity to the FLN.<sup>104</sup>

Seán Ó Brádaigh who was working in the *United Irishman* by the mid 1950s, stated that developments in Algeria were being followed closely by republicans at all levels.<sup>105</sup>

Gerry Haughinn an ordinary IRA member in Lurgan pointed to the situation in Algeria as one of the international conflicts with which he identified. When asked if he had an awareness of international conflicts, he said: ‘yes certainly, I tell ya. The 56 campaign.. You would certainly have had sympathy for EOKA ,Castro, and what do you call him in Algiers. You would have had, you certainly would have had sympathy with them’.<sup>106</sup>

Donal Donnelly also saw the conflict in Algeria as similar to that of the Mau Mau:

The French were doing the same to the FLN in Algeria.... Again there was a comparison there with Ireland. The French claimed that Algeria was part of metropolitan France the same as the British claimed that the north of Ireland was an integral part of the United Kingdom... So we were in favor of the Mau Mau, EOKA, FLN and Castro and Nasser.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> *United Irishman*, Mar. 1960.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Seán Ó Brádaigh (2 Feb. 2010).

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Joe and Gerry Haughinn (6 July 2010).

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Donal Donnelly (2 Dec. 2010).



The international situation in Crumlin Road prison and the Curragh Camp was often discussed among IRA activists during the period. This discussion reflected the unifying concept of self determination among people of different countries, religion and tribes and resonated with republicans at the time.

### **Egypt and the Middle East.**

From the late 1940s in to the 1950s, Egypt witnessed political conflict erupt between Egyptian nationalism and western interests. The republican movement was keen to demonstrate its support for the Egyptians in their effort to achieve complete independence from Britain. In Ireland, the republican movement was keen to accentuate the point that similar unfinished revolutions were gestating in the Middle East against the British. Again, like the situation in Kenya, the fact that Egypt was in conflict with Britain, further enhanced its image as an international ally which the republican movement were keen to promote. By the early 1950s it pointed to the growing resentment to the British influence in Egypt and its proactive approach in resisting the British as an example of how Arab nationalism in the Middle East was empowering the Egyptian people against the British. The example of Egypt was pointed to by republicans as an index in how to deal with the British.

Egypt had been granted independence from Britain in 1922. The treaty which was agreed, however, had given Britain a significant degree of influence in the country. In 1936 another agreement was signed in Egypt as a result of Mussolini's expansion policies. It allowed the British to station troops in the Suez Canal area. The treaty also stated that

Egypt's aspiration to reunite with parts of Sudan would be the subject of further negotiations.<sup>108</sup>

The early 1950s in Egypt have been described as a period when 'increasingly, Egyptian politics became a patriotic struggle to remove the occupying power with the King and politicians competing in anti-British attitudes'.<sup>109</sup> The following years saw the breakdown of Anglo Egyptian relations. Failure to reach agreement on Sudan, which the Egyptian's demanded should be integrated back in to Egypt, resulted in the government bringing the British government to the security council of the United Nations.<sup>110</sup> The divisive issue of the Suez Canal also emerged. Indeed, the tension between the two countries at times erupted into violence in the early 1950s.

As early as 1950, the republican movement covered the growing tension between the Egyptians and the British. The *United Irishman* backed Egyptian calls for the evacuation of Sudan by the British. It also identified with the growing Arab nationalist sentiment in the region. The *United Irishman* denounced the British for reneging on the terms of a treaty signed in 1936 between Egypt and Britain, which it claimed ignored the nationalist aspirations of the Egyptian people. Calls for national independence from Britain, whether it was in Kenya or Egypt, were reprinted in the *United Irishman*, to demonstrate that the independence struggle in Ireland against the British was not parochial but rather an international issue. While King Farouk was removed in 1952, in a coup by Nasser's army officers, this did not alter the republican movements view of the situation in Egypt.

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<sup>108</sup> Donald N. Wilber, *United Arab Republic: Egypt*, (Connecticut, 1969), p. 218.

<sup>109</sup> H.S Wilson *African decolonization* (New York, 1994), p. 130.

<sup>110</sup> Donald N. Wilber, *United Arab Republic: Egypt*, (Connecticut, 1969), p. 220.

In December 1950, King Farouk was quoted as saying ‘come what may, my government will persistently and unhesitatingly continue its efforts to realise national aspirations’.<sup>111</sup> The *United Irishman* enthusiastically welcomed threats made by the Egyptian leader which intimated that if the British did not do as the Egyptians requested they would use force against them. The newspaper nonchalantly declared, ‘if political measures failed, the Egyptians had other options open to them’.<sup>112</sup> The republican movement enthusiastically endorsed these sentiments and advised the Egyptians not to compromise with the British. Indeed, even Israel’s success in removing the British was pointed to as evidence of the successfulness of armed struggle. It stated ‘The Jews in Israel taught the peoples of the east the only way to get rid of the British was but force of arms’.<sup>113</sup>

In 1951 the simmering row about access to the Suez Canal between Britain and the Egyptians made the front page of the *United Irishman*. Indeed, the actions of the Egypt in attempting to regain their control over the Suez Canal were applauded by the republican movement. In a leading article entitled, ‘Sworn To Be Free, Egypt and Persia Show The Way’, the writer praised both countries for attempting to wrest control of the region from Britain.<sup>114</sup>

It also praised the Egyptians for threatening to remove Egyptian services to British troops in the Suez canal area and to boycott British goods. The *United Irishman* championed what it called the courage of the Egyptians in repudiating the terms of the 1936 treaty.

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<sup>111</sup> *United Irishman*, Dec. 1950.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *United Irishman*, Nov. 1951.

Parallels were inevitably drawn with the Anglo Irish treaty of 1921. The paper pointed to the Egyptians as a source of inspiration to the Irish when it argued that ‘this is a tonic to our people have been waiting for, this is the tonic which will make us men again. We have cringed long enough, let us stand up as men and claim our own’.<sup>115</sup> This praise for the Egyptian spirit perhaps also magnified the republican movements’ disillusionment with wider Irish society. Republicans often evinced frustration at the apathetic attitude of the Irish public and their slackness in adopting more pro-active approach on the issue of partition. In 1951, republicans commended an Egyptian student who picketed the Adelphi Cinema in Dublin over the screening of a British film which, he claimed, misrepresented the Egyptians. The article concluded by saying ‘would to God our Irish people have the same courage’.<sup>116</sup>

The killings at Ismailia by the British army which left fifty Egyptian dead in 1952 made headline news, not just in the mainstream media in Ireland, but also in the republican movement papers. Again, republicans were at pains to point to the sacrifice made in other countries such as in Egypt in order to resist the British. The front page of the *United Irishman* in February 1952 led with an article titled, ‘The dead of Ismailia.’ The actions of the British army in the killings were strongly condemned. The killings were seized on in the republican propaganda, which depicted the British as ruthless oppressors in both Ireland and around the world. The words of the Fenian, John Mitchel, were used to condemn the actions at Isamilia. “Empire of hell, when will the cup of abomination be

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<sup>115</sup> *United Irishman*, Nov. 1951.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

full.”<sup>117</sup> The dead were honored by the paper, while readers were reminded of the words written about the death of Terence Mac Sweeney in 1921 by an Egyptian poet ‘we of Egypt have know the English as we have known them, They never change. In their law wrong is justified, in their law, justice is denied. What is the crime of Ireland, what is the crime of the Nile?’<sup>118</sup> The article continued, ‘Irish republicans, we mourn for our brothers, for the men who died opposing England in Egypt as much our brothers as the men who died in Clonmult. Sympathy and the brotherhood stretch beyond political boundaries and suffering Ireland will go on its knees to pray for suffering Egypt’.<sup>119</sup>

The coup by Nasser in 1952 was welcomed by the republican press. Donal Donnelly instances Nasser as a figure that he and his contemporaries supported and admired.<sup>120</sup> By 1956, Nasser had nationalised the Suez Canal, which resulted in the conflict between the British and the Egyptians. The new wave of Arab nationalism was heralded by republicans as an example to small nations seeking independence. In 1956, a ‘World Affairs’ section appeared in the *United Irishman* and gave explicit support to Nasser. It praised his political decisions when coming to power, which were to order the removal of all foreign occupying troops, and secondly, that the government would end all outside economic control of Egypt’s economic resources, which, they argued, was the cause of poverty in Egypt.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> *United Irishman*, Feb. 1952.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Donal Donnelly (2 Dec. 2010).

<sup>121</sup> *United Irishman*, Sept. 1956.

## **Celtic Nations**

It is also worth remembering that members who joined the IRA in England were also in close association with other independence groups in the 1950s that collectively wanted independence for the individual countries known as the ‘Celtic nations.’ Independence groups from Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and Brittany in France, interacted in London in the 1950s through political activism and public meetings. Current members and future IRA members also took an interest in these organizations with whom they shared a solidarity. Seán Mac Stiofáin, who joined through his involvement initially with the Anti-Partition League, also read political material belonging to these groups and attended a number of their rallies:

I got to know members of other movements at the Celtic Nations rally in Trafalgar Square and became friends with several of them. Among them were people from Wales who were producing an excellent paper, *The Welsh Republican*. I was introduced to a man from the Breton organization, Breizh Atoa, who had been sentenced to death by the French but escaped and came to Ireland. I got copies of the *Celtic Times*, edited by a Scot named David Stevenson.<sup>122</sup>

Alongside anti-soviet and anti-colonial struggles, the political objectives of the Celtic nation groups were also part of a wider influence on young IRA activists at the time.

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<sup>122</sup> Seán Mac Stiofáin, *Memoirs of a revolutionary* (Edinburgh, 1975), p. 53.

## **Conclusion**

The IRA's reorganization took place at a time when the world witnessed the beginning of the Cold War and the process of decolonization take place. While internationally, the world was divided between western capitalism and eastern communism, the IRA, from 1948 onwards, managed to articulate an anti-imperialist position, regardless of whether the regime was a western colonial force or an eastern Soviet regime. Defending and offering solidarity to insurgents in countries such as Poland and Hungary against the Soviet Union resonated with some young nationalists who went on to join the IRA and it also offered the re-emerging organization an international aspect that had a currency in a country such as Ireland, where communism was widely reviled.

However, the IRA's position in this regard was complex. Some of its members, particularly the new leadership, were opposed to communism, while some of its rank and file members were associated with members from communist organisations. The degree of support evident in republican literature and among the membership for Castro, show how the wider organization was ultimately in favour of small countries taking ownership from powerful imperialist or corrupt regimes, whether they were capitalist or communist. The decolonization movements in Africa, Malaya and Cyprus were championed by the republican movement, where unconditional solidarity was offered. This again gave the re-emerging IRA added appeal in the eyes of many young people, particularly among some of the respondents who evinced an interest in these international news stories prior to joining up. While the republican movement's vision of what the new dispensation in Ireland would look like were independence achieved was not mapped out in forensic

detail, it succeeded in articulating an instinctive solidarity with small countries seeking independence, a position which resonated in Irish society and reconciled both anti-communist and anti-western colonial sentiment.

According to those interviewees who demonstrated an ideological and political awareness in their teenage years, the organization had renewed relevancy to these young people in the 1950s who saw the IRA as Ireland's answer of these contemporary revolutionary movements whether they be in Kenya, Cyprus, Hungary or Cuba. It also gave an added legitimacy to the IRA and the validation of the use of armed action to achieve its ideological objectives.

Attempts by the colonial rulers, and a sympathetic media, to depict all groups who challenged their interests as backwards, uncivilised, blind followers of an irrational tradition ironically have echoes in the similar depictions of Irish republicanism by some contemporary academics. The response of the interviewees and the material in republican news sheets, challenges historians such as Garvin and McGarry and others who suggest that the IRA and its membership at the time were an insular organization motivated purely by communal bonding or obsessed with upholding a backward tradition. The material produced by the republican movement at the time and the strong and lively interest in events outside of Ireland among its membership speaks of an ideological sophistication and global awareness that existed within the IRA in the 1950s.



## Chapter 5

### **‘We thought we were the only hope’. The economic and social appeal of the IRA.**

One of the key reasons why the IRA re-emerged in the 1950s was due to the paucity of left wing alternatives during the decade. The re-growth of the movement ran parallel with the deteriorating economic situation which the country experienced during the decade. As will be demonstrated, the majority of new IRA recruits were drawn from small farming and working class communities from both sides of the border. This chapter will examine how, from 1948 onwards, the IRA and Sinn Féin re-emerged at a time when southern Ireland in particular, was in the throes of an economic crisis.

The reinvigorated republican propaganda continually stated that the remedy to issues such as chronic emigration and poverty was the creation of an Irish Republic as envisaged in 1918. The first obvious step in the republican movement’s view was an end to partition. This chapter challenges the view that the republican movement at the time was only concerned with the issue of partition, as being a matter of simply removing the border. As has been argued in chapter 1 the removal of partition was seen as the first step in creating a new society.

Economic factors such as unemployment and emigration and how they contributed to the growth of the IRA is nuanced. In some cases the IRA was seen as a radical organization

committed to addressing social issues, given the conservative political and social context of the time, while in other cases joining the IRA was in itself an expression of apathy at the existing political system, whereas the total lack of social and economic opportunity for young people made any organization outside of the political system an attractive option. While the other chapters have explored the role of tradition as well as the political discourse both at home and internationally it was the prevailing economic despair in the south of Ireland which was also a key factor that made the IRA an attractive option for teenagers.

Interestingly, it should be noted that while the republican movement's shift towards socialism and its support for the civil rights movement in the 1960s, was in many ways a renewed attempt to resurrect support for the organization, in the mid-1950s, in terms of membership and electoral support, it was a far larger organization than it was at any time in the subsequent decade. From an analysis of the experiences of IRA members, it will be shown that the IRA and Sinn Féin did shore up an instinctive anti-establishment sentiment among its targeted audience of young people disillusioned with the economic situation.

Some might argue that given the emergence of the social welfare state in Britain and in Northern Ireland, this was a more attractive alternative than what the republicans movement advocated. However, in relation to the north, the unequal nature of that state in terms of access to employment, discrimination in housing, the denial of cultural expression with the introduction of the Flags and Emblems act in 1953, as well as the

existence of a state militia of B-Specials, contributed to a view among many nationalists that the concept of the social welfare state had no benefit for them against this sectarian backdrop. Civil rights campaigner Bernadette Devlin elected to Westminster in 1968, gives an insight into the mindset of nationalists living under the 1950s when encountering social welfare civil servants, ‘My father worked and paid insurance all his life, but they made us feel they were paying out money to the unworthy poor who had the bloody cheek to be orphans’.<sup>1</sup>

### **The social and economic environment.**

There is a view held that the failure of the IRA’s border campaign was the catalyst in directing a radical policy shift within the republican movement in the 1960s, which resulted in their embrace of revolutionary socialism by the end of the decade. It is also widely assumed that the republican movement’s redirection towards socialism enhanced its appeal to working class communities in the 1960s, in contrast to the preceding decade. Ó Broin contends that the ‘new departure was a far cry from the socially conservative, narrowly defined political nationalism of the IRA and Sinn Féin just a decade earlier’.<sup>2</sup>

Others have challenged the degree of radical evolution that the IRA underwent in the 1960s, claiming that the motive behind it was born solely out of a need to attract support for an organization teetering on the brink of collapse in the early 1960s, rather than a genuine conversion to revolutionary Marxist Leninism. Jim Lane a veteran of the border campaign and self-avowed socialist, writing in 1989, described the IRA by the late 1960s,

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<sup>1</sup> Bernadette Devlin, *The price of my soul* (New York, 1969), p.45.

<sup>2</sup> Eoin Ó Broin, *Sinn Féin and the politics of left republicanism* (New York, 2009), p.201.

as a reformist organization which ‘indulged revolutionary posturing and phraseology’ but which never ‘genuinely attempted to forge a Leninist type of revolutionary Marxist party’.<sup>3</sup> Lane maintains that the leftward shift was a tactical maneuver rather than a genuine conversion to socialist or communist doctrine by the new leadership. This bolsters the argument that in the 1950s the social and economic concerns of republican ideology was based more in the economic reality of the time as opposed to being fashioned solely as a tactical tool.

Gerry Lawless another IRA veteran of the period contended that the degree of change which happened over the twenty year period was largely cosmetic stating that in ‘the absence of serious social policy in Sinn Féin, it really amount to acceptance of the status quo’.<sup>4</sup> Both Lawless and Lane, self-declared Marxists, also described the movement in the 1950s as essentially conservative. In contrast, Matt Treacy’s recent study of traditional republicanism of the IRA in the 1950s, raises the more radical aspects of Catholic social teaching, which underpinned the movement’s social and economic policy. He suggests that the organization offered a relatively radical alternative on issues of social justice and ideas around the development of how ‘the Irish economy on a thirty two county basis ought to be organized’.<sup>5</sup> It could be argued that the degree of social radicalism accredited to the IRA in the 1960s is overestimated, while its radicalism of the 1950s has been undervalued.

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<sup>3</sup> Jim Lane, *The republican movement and socialism , 1950-1970* (Cork, 1989), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Gerry Lawless, *40 years of the IRA: where the hillside men have sown* (Dublin, 1967) available at; workers liberty, [www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org) (2 Nov. 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Matt Treacy, *The IRA 1956-1969: Rethinking The Republic* (Manchester, 2011), p. 27.

The demographic recruited to the organization in this period was mostly from the ‘working class and small farming backgrounds’.<sup>6</sup> However, by 1967, the IRA and the wider movement, several years into its new social and political departure were in a very poor state in terms of membership and popular support. Mick Ryan then a member of the Army Council, reported to an IRA meeting in Tipperary, that the IRA had just over two hundred members and slightly more than six hundred active members of Sinn Féin.<sup>7</sup> Yet intelligence reports from 1954, show that there was five hundred active members of the IRA.<sup>8</sup> It is also worth reiterating that Sinn Féin did elect four TD’s three years later. These figures challenge the view that the organization in the 1950s was not as buoyant in terms of working class membership or support when compared to the following decade.

If anything the effects of unemployment and emigration was felt more acutely among the working class and the rural poor in the 1950s. Kilmurray argues that in the Republic of Ireland, the political establishment saw emigration as the remedy to the worsening economic situation.<sup>9</sup> Public meetings and marches became a feature of Dublin street politics in 1953, that at times witnessed clashes between the Gardaí and demonstrators.<sup>10</sup> Street demonstrations and sit down protests became a form of political campaigning activity not seen in decades, where often activists were brought before the courts on civil disobedience charges.<sup>11</sup> In 1957, the Unemployment Protest Committee was established.

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<sup>6</sup> Matt Treacy, *The IRA 1956-1969: Rethinking The Republic* (Manchester, 2011), p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Brian Hanley and Scott Millar, *The lost revolution: the story of the Official IRA and the Worker’s Party*, (Dublin, 2009), p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> Memorandum on IRA organization and activities , 27 Oct. 1954 (NAI, DFA/10/A/12).

<sup>9</sup> Evanne Kilmurray, *Fight, starve or emigrate, a history of the unemployed association in the 1950’s*, (Dublin 1993), p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> *Irish Press*, 2 July 1953.

<sup>11</sup> *Irish Times*, 1 July 1953.

One of its members Jack Murphy was elected to the Dáil in 1957 after a campaign that focused on a discontentment at the continuation of unemployment.

The growing sense of anger at economic hardship magnified the opportunity for potential new organizations to capitalize on social discontent. Many former IRA members from the 1940s were key organizers in the Unemployment Protest Movement such as Sam Nolan and Packie Early, who were also members of the Irish Workers League by the 1950s.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the country many rank and file IRA members were involved in these organizations such as Jim Lane and others in Cork. Nonetheless, tension did emerge between the membership on the ground and IRA officers over the unemployment protests. The republican leadership in Cork would not allow the Unemployment Protest Movement use of a Sinn Féin building despite the fact that some individual IRA members supported the campaign.<sup>13</sup> Despite this, future IRA activists in Cork and Dublin began their political activism around this time. While the methods of the unemployment campaigning group may have been at odds with the IRA leadership, there certainly was a sense of solidarity among grass root members, who felt that their role as IRA activists was to bring about the demands of ordinary people agitating for better living standards, despite the views of some IRA officers.

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<sup>12</sup> Evanne Kilmurray, *Fight, starve or emigrate: a history of the unemployed association in the 1950's*, (Dublin 1993), p. 28.

<sup>13</sup> Jim Lane, *Miscellaneous notes on the republican and socialism in Cork city, 1954-1969* (Cork 1987), p.4.

## **Post Colonial crisis**

Metaphorically and in many cases literally, those who reached adulthood by the 1950s were children of the previous revolutionary generation. As has been discussed in chapter 2, being associated with republican militarism from the 1916 to 1921 period, was something that the main political parties and in particular Fianna Fáil were keen to be associated with. As a result, political rallies were often replete with militant republican iconography from that period. While the military actions of the revolutionary period was celebrated and permeated many aspects of Irish life three decades later, the economic and social realities for many of this generation was circumscribed by unemployment, poverty and emigration in the Republic of Ireland. Jim Lane felt that; ‘confidence at the politicians in Leinster House at the time was at a very low ebb’ due to the deteriorating economic conditions .<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, the election of an unemployment candidate to the Dáil was a damning indictment of the political establishment over thirty years after independence, where living standards had steadily declined. Even though Irish society from the top down was saturated in displays of militant republican iconography many of the new generation began to question whether the outcome of the revolutionary period between 1916 to 1921 had simply replaced one elite with another, despite the militant republican posturing of politicians and their ability to utilize a republican tradition to maintain the status quo.

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<sup>14</sup> Jim Lane, *Miscellaneous notes on the republicanism and socialism in Cork city, 1954-1969* (Cork,1997), p. 2.

The republican movement's constant criticism that the revolution had been a failure on a number of levels, including its failure to end poverty as well as social and economic marginalization met with a receptive audience in the 1950s. It also demonstrated an ideological position that did not see the extension of the southern political and social system on an all Ireland basis, as a suitable outcome to the revolution of the early 1920s. The economic situation in republican propaganda was elevated as another example of the failure of the older generation to bring the promise of the revolutionary period to a successful conclusion.

For instance in 1956 they contended that partition and the link with sterling meant that Ireland was only a satellite economy of Britain and that Irish politicians were merely administering a sham economy. They claimed that former IRA members who became constitutional political leaders such as Sean Lemass did not have 'any real control over our economic life, they must follow a pattern set by London'.<sup>15</sup> In an article titled 'We face Economic Collapse', it was claimed that only a total break with Britain on a number of fronts could save Ireland from economic and social Armageddon stating 'Now that is what foreign rule means. And whether you live in Kerry or Antrim, Tyrone or Tipperary, until you break it, you will continue to suffer as a result from it'.<sup>16</sup> Another front page article in the *United Irishman* in October 1956 reinforced this view, 'We say kick the politicians out of Irish life. Return to the revolutionary principles of 1916-1921. Break the British connection-economic political and cultural. Irish republicanism will give our

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<sup>15</sup> *United Irishman*, April 1956.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*



people a stake in this land. Together we will build a great nation. Let us start building now'.<sup>17</sup>

The response of one particular IRA member gives an insight into how this message resonated with young members and is a window into the mentality of its membership at the time. It also demonstrates how some IRA members saw themselves as the last chance to rescue a country staring into the abyss. Mick Ryan recalls having a conversation with the then Chief-of-Staff Seán Cronin while on IRA duty in a border area devastated by economic disadvantage and emigration at the time, Ryan recalled :

I drove up (to Leitrim) with Cronin, we were dropped off at this little gateway, the guy driving us said that the house there was Sean MacDermott's house, his sister was still alive at the time. On the way up we could see the abandoned houses around Leitrim and Cavan. When we got up to the house and knocked at the door, she came out and showed us to a room at the back of a fire and Cronin stopped, we were changing into our gear and he said, typical, he had the mind of the writer, he said "you know Mick this country is really on its knees, it's really on its knees". I'll never forget it and that's what was the driving force, we thought that we were the only hope to prevent the total annihilation of Ireland as a nation.<sup>18</sup>

The sense of despondency expressed by Ryan, that the country was facing complete annihilation three decades after southern independence as well as a deep-seated

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<sup>17</sup> *United Irishman*, Oct. 1956.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Mick Ryan (2 Jan. 2012).

resentment towards former revolutionaries who in becoming constitutional political leaders were perceived to have had done little if anything to improve living standards was not confined to the IRA or its support base. In 1958 Noel Browne formerly of Clann na Poblachta offered a critical analysis for the continuation of the poverty post independence in Irish society in an article written in the *Irish Times* titled ‘Gombeen paradise, created by gunmen’, he blamed ‘our gunmen’ turned political leaders ‘between them in over forty years.... created this socially decadent, economically bankrupt’ country.<sup>19</sup>

John Regan argues that little significant social change emerged from the 1916 to 1922 period.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, since partition the continuum of a ready made disillusioned socio economic base existed, at a time of acute recession, this base required a means of expression which groups such as the IRA could provide. Jim Lane who joined the IRA in Cork in 1954 had a close association with left wing socialists in Cork city.<sup>21</sup> He claimed that economic recession was a key reason why people joined the IRA in the stated period.<sup>22</sup>

It should be noted that this growing disillusionment among a new generation was not confined to the urban working class or rural supporters of the IRA. For example, in middle class circles the establishment of Tuairim raised many issues about the nature of Irish society experiencing its post-colonial crisis of the 1950s. Tuairim was a middle class

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<sup>19</sup> *Irish Times*, 28 Nov. 1958.

<sup>20</sup> John Regan, *The Irish counter revolution 1921-1936* (Dublin 1999), p.382.

<sup>21</sup> Jim Lane, *Miscellaneous notes on republicanism and socialism in Cork city, 1954-1969* (Cork, 1997 ),p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Matt Treacy, *The IRA 1956-1969: rethinking the Republic* (Manchester, 2011), p. 10.

pressure group who included people such as Garret FitzGerald which challenged traditional attitudes around issues such as economic protectionism, the role of the church and partition.<sup>23</sup>

Members of Tuarim were often from privileged middle class backgrounds and had a stake in Irish society in the 1950s, therefore a more middle class liberal partitionist type of reform was advocated, which working class nationalistic minded people may not have been attracted by.<sup>24</sup> Its Dublin branch was made up mainly of UCD graduates, one member of Tuarim, Jim Dolan became the first Irish man to work for the World Bank in 1962.<sup>25</sup> The new thinking that was conceived by this intellectual milieu did challenge the cultural economic and social orthodoxy at the time and influenced opinion on a number of issues in the terms of government policy in the subsequent decades. Conversely, the IRAs working class base had little stake in Irish society, therefore a more radical overhaul of the political and constitutional arrangements or an armed campaign was not perceived to be strange or daunting to a disempowered section of young people.

For instance, some of those interviewed stated they had little prospect of social mobility while educational attainment was at times impossible. In some cases second level education was denied to them due to lack of money. Seán Garland for example went to O'Connell's secondary school in Dublin for a short period, leaving at the age of thirteen due to his family's economic situation. He explained the reasons why he could not pursue his education:

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<sup>23</sup> Tomas Finn, *Tuarim*, (Manchester, 2012), p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid,p17.

They were to provide me with the necessary school material, like pencils and books and what not, but they were very slow in coming, until the point that I got tired of waiting for it. I was sitting in the classroom everybody else had the goods that was needed except myself, so I said, here I'm quitting, get out. I got out and got a job which was probably for the best because my family was in dire need.<sup>26</sup>

Garland like other interviewees pointed to a number of factors which contributed to his politicization as a teenager. As a young person, the fact that he was denied education cannot be overlooked in his decision to become politically active. The IRA, which stated an end to partition was the first step in improving overall living standards had a similar appeal which organizations such as Tuarim had to young middle class people.

Indeed, the reason Sinn Féin received a significant degree of support during the 1950s was also a reaction to this economic vacuum in Irish society. The four seats which Sinn Féin won in the 1957 general election 'partly reflected its commitment to a radical social policy in a period of economic crisis as well as support for the border campaign'.<sup>27</sup> Sinn Féin, which denied the legitimacy of Leinster House, still received over sixty five thousand votes, only three and a half per cent behind the Labour Party. This strongly indicates how the republican movement was seen by some sections of society as a legitimate group which represented more than just a vow to end partition. The fact that a section of the electorate were willing to cast their votes for people who would not take

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Seán Garland (12 Jan. 2012).

<sup>27</sup> JJ Lee, *Ireland 1912-1987: politics and society, Ireland 1912-1985* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 327.

their seats if elected elucidates this point. While this electoral support was also a reaction to the deaths of Seán South and Fergal O’Hanlon, it is just as conceivable to argue as Lee has, that it was the first significant expression of no confidence in a thirty year old state in the throes of economic and social distress as well as the yearning for a new ideological approach to social and economic issues.

The rise and subsequent demise of Clann na Poblachta between 1948 and 1953 further bolstered this disillusionment at the political system among a section of Irish society. The latest manifestation of IRA men who chose to take the constitutional route by establishing Clann na Poblachta, was initially enthusiastically embraced by a section of the electorate. As mentioned previously some future IRA members such as Tomás Mac Giolla initially contemplated joining the party.<sup>28</sup> While other young people came from republican backgrounds whose family supported Clann na Poblachta.

Its brief existence appealed to a section of Irish society where a type of republicanism intertwined with a renewed emphasis on social issues, offered ‘a considerable reservoir of republican and radical support.’<sup>29</sup> The arrival of Clann na Poblachta in the late 1940s, which preceded the re-emergence of the republican movement, was a new generation of former militants who aimed to initially challenge the mainstream political parties around social issues. Its impotency, however, within government in terms of delivering on partition or alleviating the worsening economic conditions in the early 1950s resulted in it being rejected by the electorate in the 1951 election where it lost eight of its ten seats.

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Tomás MacGiolla, *United Irishman*, (Jan. 1966)

<sup>29</sup> Eoin Ó Broin, *Sinn Féin and the politics of left republicanism* (Dublin, 2009), p196.

The failure of Clann na Poblachta to implement a radical republican programme, ensured that the new IRA of the 1950s could fill this vacuum. While some micro-radical political groups existed on the margins of Irish society, there was an absence of any well-organized group with the centuries old tradition of challenging the status quo such as the republican movement.

Seán Garland alluded to having an interest in the Irish communist group, then called the Irish Workers League prior to joining the IRA. Yet IRA slogans on walls around Dublin at the time declaring ‘Freedom Calls’ coupled with IRA arms raids in Britain, was in his mind, proof of a bona fide organization involved in political activity. The lack of political alternatives to the young Garland is evident when he stated: ‘Well, I had no interest in joining Fianna Fáil and Labour were very sparse on the ground’.<sup>30</sup>

His colleague Mick Ryan joined the IRA in 1955 and later became a committed socialist by the 1970s. He indicated a number of different influences which contributed to his interest in the IRA, as well as his experiences of social disadvantage, he said of joining the IRA: ‘It was a radical step at the time, there was nothing else. Like naturally as working class and growing up in pure poverty at the time, but we weren’t socialist’.<sup>31</sup>

Another Dubliner Tom Mitchell came ‘from a working class Dublin background, was influenced by Connolly and Larkin but he had no time for communism.’<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Sean Garland (12 Jan. 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Mick Ryan (2 Jan. 2012).

<sup>32</sup> Matt Treacy, *The IRA 1956-1969: rethinking the Republic* (Manchester, 2011), p. 40.

Jim Lane from Cork who joined the IRA in 1954, reflected a strong left wing sentiment among the Cork IRA, he certainly saw social issues as part of his developing ideology, while his socialist tendencies may not have reflected the views of the IRA leadership, he revealed how social issues were important to some new IRA recruits such as himself : ‘From an early stage, I associated with a small circle within the movement who saw themselves more as socialist republicans (rather) than simply republican’.<sup>33</sup> This response demonstrates how socialist inclined members in Cork felt comfortable, initially at least, to join or exist within the IRA in the early 1950s.

Lane also indicated that some members who did join in the early 1950s, did see a possibility that the IRA and Sinn Féin, could possibly at some point be steered in a more socialist direction. It also suggests that in some ways the republican movement, while relatively small in numbers was in a sense a ‘broad Church’ where a wider consensus existed that the organization did have the capability to challenge the political and economic status quo.

Some of those who joined in Cork had a strong track record of socialist activity. Jim O’Regan had fought on the republican side in the Spanish Civil War. Norman Letchford an English man was a member of the communist organization, the Workers League of Ireland. Gerry Higgins was a member of the Cork Socialist Party while Mick Fitzgibbon, a trade union activist was an ex-internee and friend of Irish communist Mick O’Riordan. According to Lane, they all remained close friends with O’Riordan. While the communist

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<sup>33</sup> Jim Lane, *Miscellaneous notes on Republicanism and socialism in Cork city, 1954-1969* (Cork,1997) ,p. 1.

newspaper praised the courage of new generation of IRA activists during the border campaign, Mick O’Riordan did question the tactics of the IRA, which according to Lane disappointed them as they were quite convinced at the time that the IRA was a better and more practical vehicle for pursuing change than the communist organization initially.<sup>34</sup> Some new recruits that joined the IRA such as Seamus Murphy from Co Kildare was a member of the Irish Workers League, as well as an IRA activist.<sup>35</sup> While he did see the leadership as being conservative he did feel that ending ‘British Imperialism’ in Northern Ireland complimented the thinking of the more left wing activists such as himself, who felt that the logical outcome of ending partition would be a renewed focus on left-wing or socialist advancement.<sup>36</sup>

Tyrone member Donal Donnelly, contended that in Crumlin Road jail that socialism and social issues were discussed, he pointed to Dessie O’ Hagan from Lurgan and Leo Mc Cormack from Dublin as the most socialist inclined members in the prison. He felt however that the Soviet Union’s repression of Catholics had a detrimental effect on developing a more socialist analysis of how Irish society was organized among potential left wing activists within the IRA, he stated:

If there was socialism,... underlying it all was an appreciation and support for the working man and the common people, but this did not reveal itself as an understanding of the dialectic. It was discussed among us. It always went back to the

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<sup>34</sup> Jim Lane, *Miscellaneous notes on republicanism and socialism in Cork city, 1954-1969* (Cork, 1997 ) ,p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Seamus Murphy (2 Feb. 2011).

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Seamus Murphy (2 Feb. 2011).



image of the Soviet Union (Catholic persecution). People would say there was no famines in China since Mao Tse-tung took over, we kind of had an admiration for Mao but not for Stalin.<sup>37</sup>

The view expressed by Mick Timoney from Derry who joined the IRA in the stated period illustrates the ideological motivation around social and economic issues among some new recruits in the 1950s, he stated that:

I joined the IRA not merely to end British involvement in Irish affairs, but I believed that a united Ireland would generate a new national consciousness, a dynamic idealism, which would if not solving, then proceed more rapidly to a solving of Irelands economic and social problems.<sup>38</sup>

### **Formation of social ideology**

While there was a general disillusionment across sections of Irish society about the economic situation, officially the republican movement needed to devise a social policy which would incorporate a more detailed analysis of their brand of republicanism. Catholic social teaching was the ideological template which they used. This ideological model was the basis of all the main political parties policies between the 1920s and the 1950s, and underpinned social and economic policy in the south of Ireland during the period.<sup>39</sup> This did demonstrate a willingness on behalf of the IRA and Sinn Féin to

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Donal Donnelly (2 Dec. 2012).

<sup>38</sup> Sean Cronin, *Irish nationalism: a history of its roots and ideology* (Dublin, 1980), p. 174.

<sup>39</sup> Maurice Curtis, *A challenge to democracy: militant Catholicism in modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2010), p .9.

engage in these issues and offer its own particular view that had the potential to resonate at the time.

As has been discussed previously some historians point to the variety of approaches of Sinn Féin and the IRA, in terms of their social policy over the decades, as evidence of an organization with no set of ideological boundaries or as proof of an absence of genuine political ideology. With the exception of the early 1940s, when the IRA was under the militant leadership of Seán Russell, the IRA did articulate a form of republicanism that has attempted to address current social issues. While there may not have been a rigid ideological roadmap in place, in terms of social and economic issues by the IRA over the decades, the fact is that nearly all manifestations of the IRA from the Civil War, reflects an organization that has attempted to address these topics, albeit, often with very different ideological templates and at times not matched with the same level of importance as ending partition or armed struggle among some of its activists.

For example, the establishment of a socialist republican party Saor Éire under the auspices of an IRA leadership led by Peadar O'Donnell and Frank Ryan was probably the most significant example of a political and social concern in the early 1930s. Saor Éire endeavored to lead 'working class and working farmers, of Ireland to over throw British imperialism and its ally capitalism'.<sup>40</sup> While the 1940s witnessed the near destruction of the IRA, due to its militant led leadership under Sean Russell, a range of left wing ideologues filled the Curragh camp in the 1940s. The purely militant leadership of Russell demonstrated the dangers of ignoring the social question and of the inherent

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<sup>40</sup> *An Phoblacht*, 10 Oct. 1931.

dangers of relying solely on tradition. Obviously, the 1960s saw the IRA and later Sinn Féin and the Worker's Party view republicanism as a means of addressing social issues, when they viewed the objective of the republican movement as part of a wider class struggle. The split of the republican movement in 1970s and the establishment of the Provisional's also saw the organization tackle social issues within its policy documents. The *Éire Nua* document underpinned the Provisional's economic social policy in the early 1970s. It stated that 'Irish Labour and the means of production have been exploited in the interests of foreign capitalists and their allies, native capitalists. The rightful owners of the wealth have suffered as a consequence'.<sup>41</sup>

The IRA in the 1950s also addressed economic and social issues. Speaking in Newry at a public meeting in 1953, Sinn Féin President Tom Doyle clarified the position of the republican movement, he stated that 'It is sometimes said that Sinn Féin is only concerned with political freedom, when the ordinary man on the street is more taken up with bread and butter problems. This is another red herring that is constantly been drawn across our path. For Sinn Féin and the republican movement in general, 'freedom has always has a three fold aspect, political freedom, social and cultural freedom and economic freedom'.<sup>42</sup> While Doyle's statement did not elaborate on economic and social policy, it did nevertheless indicate an ideological position which saw the ending of partition inextricably linked with the creation of a new society.

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<sup>41</sup> Sinn Féin, *Eire nua* (Dublin, 1972), p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> *United Irishman*, Feb. 1953.

An attempt to develop social teachings from 1948 onwards saw Sinn Féin set forth a range of radical policies based on Catholic social teaching. The republican movement articulated an ideology that rejected capitalism, communism and imperialism. Within republican publications such as the *United Irishman* and *An Glór Uladh*, the new approach to the social question became apparent from the late 1940s onwards. It was stated that neither were correct ideological templates on which a fair society could be built. While communism was rejected due to its totalitarian nature, the view of the republican movement from 1948 onwards was that British and US imperialist's were also dominating smaller countries for their own benefit.<sup>43</sup> Given the international context of the time which saw the beginning of the Cold War and a pervasive Catholic influence in Ireland, the IRA's readjusted approach created a space for the republican movement to offer a fresh view on social and economic ideas.

The influence of Catholic social teachings has obviously underpinned the right wing ideology of Fascist organizations in Europe in the 1930s, as well as the Blueshirts and right wing organizations in Ireland. Indeed a conservative ethos was evident among some within the IRA leadership. Seán Garland claimed that Anthony Magan supported the Bishops during the Mother and Child controversy in 1951.<sup>44</sup> The Mother and Child scheme which was devised by Noel Brown advocated new medical care for mothers and their children which would be provided for by the state. The scheme was opposed by right wing elements at the time as well as the Catholic Bishops. This conservatism among

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<sup>43</sup> *An Glór Uladh*, Aug. 1955.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Seán Garland (12 Jan. 2012).

some of the leadership was also extended to literature censorship. Seán Garland recollects a debate while being interned in the Curragh:

In the Curragh camp I recall, discussions..... a debate on censorship. The leadership in the prison were in favor of censorship....., of books coming in, I was at the meeting, I was concerned, why should we allow priests or anybody else, tell what books we should read or what films we see.<sup>45</sup>

In the 1940s some IRA and Sinn Féin members had been influenced by Ailtirí na hAiséirghe, a radical nationalist party with fascist sympathies.<sup>46</sup> Then again as previously mentioned other members had communist sympathies while others were involved in trade union activity. This reflects, as has been stated a range of different ideological perspectives among the organization at the time which encompassed the make up the IRA membership.

Given the conservative or indeed reactionary nature of Irish society of the 1950s, the republican movement it could be argued offered a less restricted environment in the eyes of some new members, initially at least, for pursuing socialist or alternative economic views or simply being the most obvious organization to join which fundamentally challenged the political establishment. As with any radical movement committed to political or social change, those who joined had varying degrees of knowledge on specific policies. Others who joined the IRA in the early 1950s were oblivious to the influence of

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Matt Treacy, *The IRA 1956-1969: rethinking the Republic* (Manchester, 2011), p. 33.

Catholic social teachings, socialism or the idea of the social welfare state and were motivated primarily with the ending partition. As stated previously, Tony Meade was of the view that some members felt that when partition ended; ‘all would be well with the world’ and that all social economic problems would disappear.<sup>47</sup> Despite this fragmented knowledge of socio-economic policies, the republican movement within the economic vacuum and the pervading disillusionment sought to develop some form of strategy both from a desire to transform society and to increase membership.

While this may be demonstrative of an organization riddled with ideological contradictions in terms of economic issues, the consensus among the leadership and the rank and file that ending partition was the primary focus temporarily parked glaring ideological differences which would resurface in the 1960s. Nevertheless it does not mean that the IRA and Sinn Féin’s denunciations of the governments handling of economic issues did not resonate and appeal to a disillusioned generation or that the movement did not have an appeal in this regard.

If any sort of coherent economic or social policy was to be articulated which appealed beyond the core IRA structure in the late 1940s, the republican movement had to publically reject communism. The republican movement needed to tailor their approach to the political realities of the 1950s. Relatively radical aspects of papal encyclicals were the economic template of the republican movements position.

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Tony Meade, in ‘The Patriot Game’ TG4 Documentary (March 2007).

The encyclical *Rerum Novarum* which was written at the end of the 19th century under the direction of Leo XIII contains a number of aspects which were underpinned with egalitarian principals.<sup>48</sup> Socialism was condemned for ‘interfering with private property which underpinned the family’, while the encyclical emphasised ‘that workers should be entitled to fair conditions so as to be able to provide for their families.’<sup>49</sup> The encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* was issued in 1931. *Quadragesimo Anno* echoed many of the teachings of *Rerum Novarum*. It stated that Catholics needed to reject socialism.<sup>50</sup> However, it could be argued that it also demonstrated relatively progressive views in regards to worker rights and wages. For instances the encyclical stated; ‘Labour, as our predecessor explained well in his Encyclical is not a mere commodity. On the contrary, the workers human dignity in it must be recognised, it therefore cannot be sold like a commodity’.<sup>51</sup>

Some IRA members such as Mick Ryan who became leading members of the Worker’s Party and the Official IRA, felt that *Rerum Novarum* was a radical document for young working class members such as himself, given the political and social context of the 1950s. When asked was there any discussions about socialism within the IRA, he stated that:

The nearest you got to a socialist flavor was *Rerum Novarum* and that appealed to some of us. I can’t remember who was teaching us that, but someone made a point of

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<sup>48</sup> Matt Treacy *The IRA 1956-1969: rethinking the Republic* (Dublin, 2011), p. 28.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid p. 30.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid p 31.

<sup>51</sup> Pius XI *Quadragesimo Anno*, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius11/p11quadr.htm> viewed (2 March. 2010).

teaching us it. I found it very good it gave an added meaning to things. Being working class, I thought this was very good you know.<sup>52</sup>

Ryan's response does indicate that given the social and political constraints of the 1950s, in regards to communism, that papal encyclical inspired ideology did have a potential appeal to working class teenagers such as himself. While new members may not have been deeply knowledgeable about its different aspects, it did express a vision of society that some IRA members were broadly supportive of. Sean Garland maintained that: 'There was issues, (social), but the north was the dominant one....they weren't mobilising on social issues'<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless the republican movement did articulate a fresh perspective on economic matters within their propaganda that did appeal to some.

### **New Republican Policies**

Detailed accounts of Sinn Fein's economic policy can be found in their election programmes throughout the 1950s, that can be viewed in the *United Irishman* and in election manifestos. The republican movement was not keen to broaden their campaign into mass-mobilisation around social issues with other like minded groups. Nonetheless a number of interesting proposals are worth looking at which illuminate radical socio-economic alternatives which certainly would not have been out of line with the republican movements socialist orientated programmes in the 1960s and 1970s. Republican's advocated relatively radical proposals around issues such as natural

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with Mick Ryan (2 Jan. 2012).

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Seán Garland (12 Jan. 2012).



resources, housing rights, banking and education. Again most new recruits may not have been familiar with these particular issues, but they do reflect an organization that was outside the established political fold that was willing to challenge existing social constructs with a view to offering an alternative ideological perspective.

For example, the reorganization of the monetary system was advocated by republicans, in order for the national government to have full control over issues of banking.<sup>54</sup> The curtailment of investment by foreign banks was advocated, which it was felt resulted in Irish people's savings not being reinvested in Irish capital.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, in the early 1950s this view was not restricted to republicans or Catholic social movements. The monetary report from the Irish Banking Commission warned that the Irish currency was at the control of the English sterling.<sup>56</sup> Mr. O'Laughlin from the banking commission argued for a more independent economic position, stating that 'owing to the punts attaching to the English sterling there has been disastrous consequences for Irish agriculture'.<sup>57</sup>

Sinn Féin proposed a number of policies with in their literature around industrial development which at times had an almost socialist facet to it. Sinn Féin's policy rejected industrial competitiveness and stated that the key objective of industrial development was to create full employment rather than being a solely profit-making venture by private enterprise. In a series of detailed documents produced by the party it called for native control of industry and argued against foreign investment stating that 'foreign capitalist

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<sup>54</sup> *United Irishman*, July 1956.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

and speculators are not interested in developing the natural economy' warning that free trade would be detrimental to Irish economic development.<sup>58</sup> The utilization of Ireland's natural resources for the benefit of native industry rather than private companies, which was one of the key economic issues championed by the IRA in the late 1960s was first articulated by the republican movement in the 1950s.<sup>59</sup>

Toward the end of the border campaign Sinn Féin also published a number of pamphlets which outlined their opposition to becoming part of a wider European common market which they felt benefited the economic interests of bigger European countries as well as speculators and capitalists. Two of the pamphlets issues were titled 'Sinn Féin Opposes EEC Tie' and 'The Border and the Common Market'.<sup>60</sup>

A two-page analysis of Sinn Féin's position on education written by Gearoid O'Mongain titled 'Basis For An Irish Educational System' condemned the fact, that only one in fifteen children attended secondary school. O'Mongain believed that 'real education, must be made available to every citizen in the country by providing a scheme which would make it free to all and in accordance with the needs of the individual and the community'.<sup>61</sup> This certainly had the potential to appeal to young working class people at the time who were often denied second and third level education.

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<sup>58</sup> *United Irishman*, Nov. 1958.

<sup>59</sup> *United Irishman*, Aug. 1958.

<sup>60</sup> *United Irishman*, April 1962.

<sup>61</sup> *United Irishman*, June 1948.

Also in terms of education the republican movement advocated a reorganized educational system based on vocational and corporative concepts. While obviously not socialist it did nonetheless reflect a genuine effort to tackle issues around education by applying its own particular ideology. Republicans attended gatherings organised by the Folk High School movement which advocated quite a radical and progressive education system similar to those in Scandinavian countries.

The *United Irishman* which covered a meeting attended by advocates of corporatism praised the Scandinavian system under discussion, which placed an emphasis on other areas of study such as agriculture and co-operative systems as part of the school curriculum. The paper applauded the system based on a cooperative model where the state ‘subsidised these schools, and other movements such as the cooperative units, trade unions etc, helped maintain the premises’.<sup>62</sup> Lectures were given by a Fr Breen from county Wicklow who spoke about the working of the educational movement in Ireland. He also pointed to the positives of the Folk High School Movement. Summarising the event the *United Irishman* contended that ‘the overpowering emphasis on cooperation at all levels of this enterprise was very apparent and that a serious study by all groups for their own betterment and that of their neighbours and consequently the country as a whole is not only desirable but of the most urgent necessity’.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *United Irishman*, Oct. 1960.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Worker's Rights**

In the early 1950s, the republican movement began to comment on worker's rights. Addressing issues which affected ordinary workers such as unemployment and emigration certainly had the opportunity to resonate among the working class and rural poor at the time. It also demonstrated awareness on behalf of the republican leadership, for a need to make their version of republicanism relevant to a growing urban constituency, in the 1950s and displayed a pragmatism in the development of social and economic concepts.

While issues of worker's rights, unemployment or emigration, certainly did not dominate its propaganda, the fact that it did feature, had the potential to appeal to both traditional and a non-traditional republican constituency. It also showed a marked advancement in engaging in issues of social justice within its propaganda from the 1940s.

Republicans contended that the achievement of a thirty-two county Republic, was the only template upon which to build a just society which would guarantee truly equitable conditions for workers. The fact the only partial independence had been achieved was according to them was the root cause of injustice which affected ordinary workers across Ireland. In its propaganda, it was argued that only the complete transformation of political situation in both the north and south of Ireland, could truly see an improvement in conditions for ordinary workers. The IRA and Sinn Féin allocated a role to workers in its struggle, when it declared, 'You, the worker, to uproot, the social injustice which has

been maintained here by England, and by traitors here at home, who imitate her corrupt system'.<sup>64</sup>

The early part of the decade did witness a number of industrial disputes, which accompanied the deteriorating economic situation and as has already been mentioned, witnessed the emergence of the Unemployment Protest Movement. The *United Irishman* commented on this. For instance, in 1951, 1000 Bord na Móna workers went on strike in demanding a shorter working week and better work conditions.<sup>65</sup> An article titled 'Slave Labour' in the *United Irishman*, offered solidarity to the striking turf workers, where the issue of pay was raised in its propaganda. The paper condemned the fact that workers had to work a forty eight hour week while it claimed that most Irish workers only had to work forty hours a week. The article claimed that pay conditions were an 'insult to workers'.<sup>66</sup>

The republican movement tried to present themselves as the definitive trade union, where all issues of workers concerns would be addressed when the overall objectives of the movement had been achieved. Republicans claimed that the first role of Irish Labour Movement should be to realign itself with the republican movement.<sup>67</sup> It was not unusual at the time for IRA members to be trade union activists for instance Eamon Boyce was a member of the ITGWU. He viewed the IRA as being a compatible organization to join for trade union activists and viewed the organization as one committed to the issue of worker's rights, he pointed to his relationship with Trade Union activist and former IRA

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<sup>64</sup> *United Irishman*, Jan. 1952.

<sup>65</sup> *Irish Times*, 5 April 1951.

<sup>66</sup> *United Irishman*, Dec. 1951.

<sup>67</sup> *United Irishman*, Mar. 1953.

prisoner Mattie O'Neill as being a crucial factor in his recruitment into the IRA.<sup>68</sup> Donal Donnelly who joined the IRA in County Tyrone, pointed not only a strong tradition of republicanism in his family, but also of trade union activity, his father was involved in the rail workers strike in the 1930s.<sup>69</sup>

Mick Ryan also demonstrated an ability as well as an awareness for trade union activity prior to joining the IRA. His first political activity he pointed to was the creation of a trade union in his job in a shipping company:

I knew what the seamen were getting. Now that was a different job, but there was chaps that went to the secondary school with me and they were still were only getting a couple of pound a week so myself and this chap decided we would form a union. I was only seventeen at the time. Liberty Hall was only down the street, so we went down to Liberty hall. Frank Higgins and myself and asked to see a man. We said this has to be secretive if we are found out we would be fired. The man said that will be ok but we need a certain amount of people before we form a union. So we secretly went around.<sup>70</sup>

Again Ryan's activity demonstrates how the IRA attracted left-wing politically inclined teenagers and offered working class young men like Ryan, a potential support structure in these labour issues.

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Eamon Boyce (9 Feb. 2010).

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Donal Donnelly (2 Dec. 2012).

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Mick Ryan (2 Jan. 2012).

It can be argued that the view propagated by Sinn Féin, that the conditions of the ordinary worker would improve when the IRA's ultimate objective was fulfilled, was a cynical attempt to recruit new members. It should be noted that in the early 1950s, there is clear evidence within republican literature which did equate the removal of partition with an improvement in social conditions for workers. The position of the republican movement was that the 'The freedom of Ireland not only consists of driving the British forces out of our country, but also uprooting the evils of British imperialism and substituting a social order where workers of all grades shall receive a decent wage and the best possible conditions of employment'.<sup>71</sup> While pronouncements such as this may have been vague in detail, it was a declaration emphasizing a vision of a society where conditions for workers would improve and considering the dire economic situation it is not wrong to say the republican movement were not solely cynical in these pronouncements but did in fact desire a better country to live in.

In 1953 an article in the *United Irishman* titled 'The Worker's Rights'.<sup>72</sup> It offered an all Ireland approach in tackling the unemployment problem. Statistics were produced which claimed that 86,000 and 60,000 people were unemployed in both the south and north of Ireland respectively. Once more, British imperialism in the north and its 'satellite' economy established in the south since 1921 was the 'common origin of both economies' where it was claimed 'breeds unemployment and its brother evils, unjust wages and bad working conditions'.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> *United Irishman*, Dec. 1951.

<sup>72</sup> *United Irishman*, Mar. 1953.

<sup>73</sup> *United Irishman*, Mar. 1953.

Around this time Eamon Boyce was in discussions with Eamon Mac Tomáis, the IRA recruitment officer in Dublin. He indicated how the unemployment marches had impacted on his thinking and the indirect benefit the IRA could harness from the social discontent of the time:

My frame of mind at the time (when joining the IRA) ...in my formative years. I was looking at the ills that were around' he added: In the course of several discussions (with Eamon Mac Tomáis). I realized he was a member (IRA) and he formed the opinion that I wanted to be associated with it. Again another thing, unemployment was so bad that there was an organization in Dublin....., a fella Murphy lead it , it was a very large organization he became a TD. They use to march through Dublin. The situation was such that they had these massive rallies and when they marched, they were always followed by army lorries, with maybe twenty soldiers in each truck, it wasn't even policed by the ordinary Guards, one time, I know for a fact that they broke it up at Cross Guns Bridge, one guy I knew well was a clerk in CIE, they beat him up and threw him into the canal.<sup>74</sup>

Garland contends that among some IRA leaders there 'was a taboo' about associating with other groups outside of the republican movement involved in street politics of this nature.<sup>75</sup> Undoubtedly there was an elitist attitude among some IRA figures who saw the republican movement as the only medium through which revolutionary change could happen, nonetheless some of it future members were radicalized by their experience of

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with Eamon Boyce (9 Feb. 2010).

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Seán Garland (12 Jan. 2012).



the unemployment marches and the republican movements propaganda did tap into a wider simmering restlessness around such issues.

Certainly, the potential for new members from the discontent evident at these public demonstrations offered the IRA an emerging base of discontented people. An editorial in the *United Irishman*, in August 1953 commended the protesters and condemned both the southern and northern political and economic systems, which they blamed for the unemployment crisis.<sup>76</sup>

In his presidential address at the Sinn Féin Ard Féis in 1953, Tom Doyle applauded those who attended the unemployment marches for raising the issue and regretted the fact that republicans were not in a position to organize demonstrations of people who were emigrating ‘what a pity we cannot arrange a demonstration for these emigrants’.<sup>77</sup> In Doyle’s speech we see the germ of a new approach to social radicalism, which would see the republican movement evolve in to an organization involved in social agitation in the 1960s.

Indeed during its internal review of the border campaign in the 1960s, IRA Army Council members Seamus Costello, argued that the IRA and Sinn Féin had done little to support or capitalize on the unemployment demonstration during the 1950s.<sup>78</sup> Doyle’s speech a decade earlier indicated a willingness to engage in other avenues of political struggle by some of the leadership, which perhaps, simply did not have the capability to do so at the

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<sup>76</sup> *United Irishman*, Aug. 1953.

<sup>77</sup> *United Irishman*, Sept. 1953.

<sup>78</sup> Garda report, 9 Dec. 1966 (NAI, Jus 98/6/459 ).

time. Its fixation with using armed struggle inhibited the formulation of a coherent social and economic strategy despite the fact that IRA members such as Eamon Boyce supported these marches and that individual Cork members were actively engaged in them.

### **Social Inequality**

While Sinn Féin and the IRA pointed to papal encyclicals as ideological justification, for social concepts or policy, the rhetoric they deployed indicated at times a near socialist analysis of what was in their view the fairest way Irish society should be organized. For example, it contended that a system of social stratification existed both sides of the border, where a powerful plutocracy dictated social and economic policy, it described it as a 'system that may be summed up as the domination of a nation by a relatively small group of wealthy individuals called capitalists. The raw materials of nature and the fruits belong to this class'.<sup>79</sup> This type of rhetoric which was visible in the republican movements analysis at the time had the potential to appeal to urban youth affected by unemployment, in the same way as social democratic parties in European countries appealed to their respective youth.

The response of some rank and file members suggest that social deprivation cannot be overlooked when examining the gradual appeal of the IRA to some young people particularly from working class backgrounds. This certainly seems to be the case amongst some of those who joined the IRA in urban areas such as Dublin and Cork. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, dilapidated Georgian dwellings still housed many of Dublin's

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<sup>79</sup> *United Irishman*, Mar. 1953.

poor, including future IRA members such as Seán Garland whose family lived in a two room tenement in Belvedere Place. A number of Garland's siblings died at a young age, while his father an invalid struggled to make ends meet while poverty was ever-present. Garland described the tenement he grew in which housed ten families and as many as fifty children as; 'very poor facilities in the tenement buildings, outdoor toilets, you had to get water outside, there was no water in the house and carry it inside', Garland also stated that his whole family which included eight children lived in; 'one room, one big room'.<sup>80</sup> Coming from this type of background it is difficult to argue that the desire for economic and social transformation through political activity was a cynical maneuver for someone like Seán Garland.

In urban areas such as Dublin, non political organizations such as charities were the most prominent groups which championed the needs of the most disadvantaged in the relative absence of any radical social campaigning political groups. A charity such as the Vincent De Paul was viewed as vital assistance in helping struggling families, such as the Garlands:

My father had an accident and he was not working, we had St Vincent De Paul. They would give you vouchers for food in the shop in Summerhill..... We went to Gardiner Street Convent initially as a national school. The nuns there had a food centre; some of us would get food off the nuns because we hadn't got it ourselves, so it was quite tough.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with Seán Garland (12 Jan. 2012).

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Seán Garland (12 Jan. 2012). Interview with Mick Ryan (2 Jan. 2012).

It was mainly the case that charities were the only sole organizations which gave the most marginalized a voice. Annual reports from the 1950s gave a stark example of the degree of poverty prevalent. For example at a meeting in 1953 of the Sick and Indigent Room Makers Society, a Dublin area charity for over a hundred and sixty years, it was stated that poverty in Dublin was at crisis point. Inadequate social welfare payments were at a pre-war rate and were hopelessly inadequate. The fact that hundreds of families lived in tenement dwellings often six to a room, was by any standards a shocking statistic.<sup>82</sup>

For other families who successfully managed to acquire a corporation house from the late 1930s onwards in new schemes in places such as Crumlin, Drimnagh or Ballyfermot, dire social conditions often remained.<sup>83</sup> While nearly all interviewees indicated that they had extremely modest living standards growing up, Mick Ryan's response illuminated a childhood of disadvantage growing up in East Wall in Dublin, which was defined by chronic poverty and fear of eviction. His father could no longer work as a result of being disabled, while an inadequate social welfare system left the family almost destitute :

She (mother) would say "I don't know what I'm going to do to pay the rates". If you didn't pay the rates the corporation would take the house of you. It was a constant thing. She (mother) battled, she got money off the Vincent the Paul, five shilling vouchers and then there was a soup kitchen opened by the Sisters of Charity. You'd get a big can of stew for a penny, the penny dinners we called it, it was a savior.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> *Irish Times*, 15 Oct. 1953.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Mick Ryan (2 Jan. 2012).

A special report in *The Irish Times* in 1953 which interviewed people in Ballyfermot where some of the IRA's Dublin Brigade members came from, also reflected the experiences of Mick Ryan's family in the relatively new corporation housing schemes, of Dublin in the early 1950s. It was reported that life for many was a daily struggle while 'starvation knocks at the door'<sup>85</sup> Eviction was a constant fear for many of the new inhabitants while TB was also prevalent. Interestingly the report indicated that a growing tension between city council officials and locals was apparent. The sense of tension at officialdom which the report referred to, was an microcosm of an anti-establishment feeling among marginalized and disempowered communities, which the IRA could capitalize on.

It should not be ignored that the poverty and economic stagnation of the time was not only a catalyst in elevating the growth potential for non-constitutional organizations such as the IRA or Sinn Féin. One can extrapolate from some of the responses, that becoming an IRA activist also offered young working class teenagers with a bleak career prospects an increased sense of self importance which gave them something important to do. In this regard the potency of a republican tradition played a role. Joining the IRA at a time of economic recession and apathy could be an empowering course of action. Unlike trade union movements or other socially radical groups, membership of the IRA offered other attractive components to it. John Horgan argues that involvement in radical groups can offer a sense of importance as well as a degree of social status.<sup>86</sup> Achieving the new society the republican movement envisaged and articulated, also allocated a role to young

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<sup>85</sup> *Irish Times* 26 Mar. 1955.

<sup>86</sup> John Horgan, *The psychology of terrorism* (New York, 2005), p. 91.

working class men who were denied social mobility due to their working class origins in society. Undoubtedly, the economic recession of the 1950s reinforced these social constraints, being an IRA member took on an added meaning at this time.

The response of some former activists magnifies varying degrees of ideological commitment for joining the IRA. In certain cases some admitted to having little idea about politics prior to joining. One activist from Ballyfermot for example when asked what was his main reason for joining, stated: 'I suppose it was adventurism' when asked had he strong views on politics initially he stated; 'no, not particularly'.<sup>87</sup>

Mick Ryan also reflects this view and his response also highlights the nuanced and complex thinking among some young men who joined. While he did see the IRA as an organization committed to social change for marginalized people like himself, he also indicated that there were individual benefits from involvement. He elaborated on his thinking prior to joining:

I was always searching for something that would make my life worthwhile. I loved the explorers like Scott and the anthracite, never heard of Crean in them days...Like being working class, like we couldn't go to secondary school, even becoming an alter boy was beyond you. Even secondary school, that was out. I kind of felt that this is something I was waiting for; I will be able to achieve something worthwhile in my life.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Interview with Phil Donoghue (26 June 2010).

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Mick Ryan (2 Jan. 2012).

Social disadvantage not only resulted in the IRA becoming a genuine political vehicle for challenging the status quo, it also had the potential to give working class teenagers a certain degree of social standing and respect. The IRA offered an outlet for social or political empowerment for marginalized teenagers, while also giving young working class people a sense of self worth. Indeed in Mick Ryan's case one could surmise that his decision to initially join the IRA was out of a growing ideological perspective, however it also had an almost a vocational like aspect to it, that would gradually developed into a clear socialist ideology over the subsequent decades.

### **Emigration.**

Emigration, which affected Irish society on both sides of the border through out this period, was another area that Sinn Féin and the IRA applied its own ideological perspective and commented on regularly. Given its prevalence at the time, the revitalized *United Irishman* could offer a critique of the problem by applying their version of republicanism. Again the economic and political system which came into being after the signing of the treaty was blamed as the underlying source of the problem. Political corruption which underpinned both the northern and southern administrations needed to be replaced by an all Ireland administration based on republican principles according to the IRA and Sinn Féin.<sup>89</sup> While the republican movement argued that people concerned with worker's rights had a role in the republican movement; they also stated that the first step to tackle emigration was to join the IRA. Republicans in the early 1950s often

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<sup>89</sup> *United Irishman*, Mar. 1958.

distributed leaflets to people intending to emigrate, appealing to them to stay at home and become a member the republican movement.<sup>90</sup>

Being an IRA member or Sinn Féin activist was as not just being committed to ending partition but also being part of an organization which was dedicated to ending emigration. One editorial in 1956 stated that emigration was spiraling out of control and that only the republican movement could stop it stating: ‘We can stop it, You can stop it. The place to begin is in the republican movement which aims to destroy British rule in our land and give this country back to its people. This is a land worth fighting for and if we are worthy of our history, our people, our country and our generation, fight for it we will. Ireland needs all her young men and women. Stand fast and fight for your right to live’.<sup>91</sup>

Constant emigration, undoubtedly fed into a sense of disillusionment at the thirty year old state. This situation was another reason according to the republican movement which justified the establishment of a new corruption-free Republic. Nearly all those interviewed, had people close to them emigrate or were faced with the prospect of emigration themselves. One person from Leitrim when asked if his family were poor, stated that emigration was ever-present, he described the alternative life at home as; ‘a constant struggle. There was no dole or that, people had to live on their bits of land’.<sup>92</sup> North of the border emigration also devastated local communities and impacted on the lives of future IRA members. Donal Donnelly described the situation within his family:

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<sup>90</sup> Henry Patterson, *The politics of illusion: a political history of the IRA* (London ,1997), p. 89.

<sup>91</sup> *United Irishman*, Sept. 1956.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Leitrim member (2 March 2010).



My brother emigrated to Canada. My second eldest brother had already gone. My third brother Jim went to Canada as well and my other brother Eugene went to England and my brother above me Ken went to Scotland. So out of the family of six boys, five of us emigrated and as I said, I went to jail. That was the story for most families, except for the youngest didn't necessarily go to jail.<sup>93</sup>

Eamon Boyce's response when asked to describe social conditions growing up in Drimnagh in Dublin, also reflected a deep sense of despondency due to emigration:

The mail boat sailed out at quarter to nine from Dun Laoghaire, every evening, practically listing sideways with people going across for work. I lived in Drimnagh, and half the road, the husbands went to work in England, they were building up England after the war, a lot of marriages and families were broke up. There was a lot of misery.<sup>94</sup>

Eamon Boyce also instances social issues as being a pivotal motivating factor for joining the IRA in 1952. Boyce revealed that he may not have joined the organization had it not been for the economic and social problems of the decade. Again, Boyce's reaction, contradicts some of the more orthodox views, on why the IRA re-emerged at the time. When asked if IRA members were conscious of the social and economic conditions of the period he replied: 'very much so, it was one of the motives for me, unemployment

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with Donal Donnelly (2 Dec. 2012).

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Eamon Boyce (9 Feb. 2010).

emigration and generally.... things were very bad'.<sup>95</sup> The fact that he was from a traditional republican family, yet he primarily saw joining the IRA as a way of challenging social conditions and emigration, exposes an instinctive social radicalism, that certain IRA members such as himself indicated was an integral element of being an IRA activist.

Boyce's sentiments were also reflected by Wexford IRA member Labhrás Ó Donghaile. He pointed out how the prevalence of emigration impacted on the IRA in his locality, and as how it resulted in recruitment:

Unemployment and the resulting emigration was the scourge of the country in the mid-1950s and the unit was severely hit also. Republicans were the typical people described by Wolfe Tone as the 'men of no property' and were the first to go when the jobs got scarce. Expect for the occasional holiday or family occasion most never came back, written of the register off the Irish nation. The tragic sight of standing room only, for hundreds of emigrants leaving Rosslare for Britain each night in the mid 1950s, was a powerful incentive for volunteers to undo the conquest.<sup>96</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The economic recession and the pervading sense of despair and disillusionment with the political system one generation after independence in the Republic of Ireland created an

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<sup>95</sup> Interview with Eamon Boyce (9 Feb. 2010).

<sup>96</sup> Ruan O'Donnell, *Vinegar Hill to Edentubber: the Wexford IRA and the border campaign* (Wexford, 2007), p.16.

anti-establishment vacuum at a critical time, while the political establishment was perceived to have failed to address the social and economic malaise which was inherited by a new generation. The republican movement's criticism of the state to either tackle partition or the economy had a heightened relevancy for many working class and rural people. The IRA and Sinn Féin's reemergence allowed them to occupy this void and make economic and social pronouncements which addressed at some level the reality of the lives of these young men at the time.

While Sinn Féin could communicate relevant ideas and concepts of a social and economic nature, it was this emphasis on the military objective of ending partition which detracted from a commitment to developing a dedicated coherent social and economic policy, this as has been shown does not mean that the movement was devoid of ideology on these matters or that members did not join as result of wanting to improve social and economic issues. Ending partition was seen as the first step in the republican movement's project. This was against the backdrop of a fragmented collection of socio economic ideas among potential new recruits and indeed the membership. This uncertainty in how best to advance issues of a social and economic nature was also mirrored in middle class circles where groups such as Tuarim debated and explored similar issues during the same period. As has been previously referred to, the internal review of the border campaign by republicans in the 1960s pointed to this lack of a coherent policy as a contributing factor in the decline of the movement. Therefore from a long term perspective the void which was occupied by Sinn Féin at this time did not ultimately succeed in economic and social

terms but it does show how economically and socially the republican message did appeal at some level.

To some disaffected youth it did appear that Sinn Féin and the IRA was the only voice which was addressing them in real terms, not ignoring their dire poverty and giving hope and a promise that when the revolution was complete, social justice and a buoyant economy would be the fruits of their Labour. Many of the respondents have clearly indicated that there was a direct correlation between the economic recession and their motivation for joining the IRA. The rationale for this was not only to prevent the country falling into economic Armageddon, but also to give these young men a sense of purpose and a pragmatic role in their local communities and by default in their nation.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis has found that, by using interviews with veterans and from examining the propaganda news sheets of the republican movement, the IRA in the 1950s were an ideological movement rather than a simple reflection of a communal bonding tradition; it was primarily for this reason that a new generation of young people were motivated to join the IRA in the stated period. This thesis has also challenged the historiography which views the republican movement of the 1950s, as the paradigm of non ideological republicanism, it has not discounted the role that tradition played either; however through the advantages of the interviews the complexities of the period have been highlighted from these primary sources.

It has been argued that the political and social concepts were in the embryonic stages for these young men, which in many ways mirrored and was a consequence of their youth. While tradition in terms of republicanism cannot and never should be underestimated, it was not the sole factor as to why people joined in this period. As has been discussed many people from non republican backgrounds became active members also. It was other existing factors in their environment, not just political, but social, environmental and international influences and events, which contributed and enhanced their developing political and social consciences.

The upheaval and trauma of the Second World War and the post-war fallout had a transformative effect on all countries, whether they were directly or indirectly involved.

These events created a dynamic and uncertain environment, as empires and long standing colonies crumbled. The worsening economic situation which effected a whole generation of young people in the 1950s saw some turn towards the republicanism of the IRA and Sinn Féin as a way of bringing about an improvement in living conditions. The effect of these local and global events, as has been shown had a significant effect on these Irish youths as they viewed themselves as part of a wider ideological independence movement and in that way their thinking was very much of its time. The view put forth by historians such as McGarry and Garvin, who concentrate exclusively on the militant tradition as the overriding reason for recruitment and contend that the republican movement at the time was a ‘introspective tradition’, is contested in this study.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis has examined how the anti-partition activity opened the door for the IRA and Sinn Féin to articulate their own ideological position around the idea of national independence. Ending partition according to the republican movement was primarily the first step in their wider project, which also set out to tackle emigration and improve living conditions. In some ways the idea of the Republic was promoted in republican propaganda as a vague solution to all of the country’s problems; nevertheless it was an ideological position which became increasingly attractive to those from both traditional and non traditional republican backgrounds. This challenges the narrow traditionalist view put forth by Garvin that aspiring to national independence or sovereignty, or in Ireland’s case an end to partition, is a non ideological position driven solely by an unthinking or a backwards ‘naïve tradition.’<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Feargal McGarry, *Republicanism in modern Ireland*, (Dublin, 2003), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Garvin, *News from a new Republic: Ireland in the 1950’s* (Dublin, 2010), p .55.

The nationalist ideological position of the movement and the idea of the Republic, it has been argued, was very much of its time, where the idea that only nations could prosper or reach their full potential when full independence was achieved. As the impact of the Anti-Partition League waned it became obvious that some of the mainstream political parties, condemnations of partition was often populist rhetoric rather than being part of a coherent ideological position which genuinely envisaged an all Ireland sovereign nation and the benefits that would entail. With the exception of Clann na Poblachata and sections of the Labour Party, where attempts were made to articulate an ideological position which married an ending to partition with an improvement in living standards, it has been argued that the mainstream parties had no genuine ideological position on it.

Therefore the exposure of the political mainstream's lack of real conviction to end partition did not see the republican movement simply take over where the Anti-Partition League left off. While the anti-partition activity in many cases developed an awareness around the existence of the border among young people, it also on the other hand saw a section of young people, as well as a section of the electorate, embrace the ideology of the republican movement. This ideology argued, as had Clann na Poblachta and sections Labour, that ending partition was not just about removing a line on a map but rather part of a wider policy in the overall improvement of the country and its citizens. In Labour's case, for example, it was argued by some of its more left wing activists, that it could benefit the working class on a thirty two county basis, a concept similar to what Sinn Féin was proposing in term of economic benefits.

The idea of the Republic and of the new nation state appealed to young men in places like Dublin or Kerry affected by emigration or in places such as Lurgan where discrimination against the nationalist community was a feature of daily life. Embracing the ideology of the republican movement and ending partition as its first tangible act had an appeal to a range of young people in the embryonic stage of ideological development in both urban and rural settings. The argument has been made by Garvin that the IRA's determination to use armed action to achieve independence personified the political backwardness of the movement at the time, however, the complete lack of any alternative way to achieve independence on a thirty-two county basis for centuries, it can be argued, simply saw armed action as the only means to achieve the movements overall ideological objectives. These same methods were used by the FLN in Algeria, the Mau Mau in Kenya and the ANC in South Africa.

With regard to partition, however, the response of some of the interviewees suggests that the tradition of republican militancy did have some bearing on their decision to join. While this thesis challenges Garvin and McGarry's view that the IRA in the 1950s were simply a one dimensional tradition with a fetish for armed action, this is not to say that a republican militant tradition did not have some role during the anti-partition years in attracting recruits. While many were in the formative stages of their ideological development, the prospect of armed action had an added appeal of excitement or youthful adventurism to some young people as it had in the 1920s, which constitutional methods



did not. This however cannot replace the fact that ultimately desiring an end to partition among these young people at the time was an ideologically motivated choice.

Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis examines the role that tradition played in the revival of the republican movement at the time. Tradition did play a role in the republican movement as it has in other generations or as it had in revolutionary movements such as the ANC, the Sandinistas, the Cuban revolution, the Mau Mau insurgents in Kenya and as it continues to have across a range of groups around the world; however what impact or role it plays in the reproduction of different generations of groups or revolutionaries differs dramatically among academic and political commentators.<sup>3</sup> Revisionist academics point to the use of national and local commemorations that remembers patriot dead or the existence of a generational continuity within certain families as evidence of a group, which is more akin to a cult rather than an ideological movement, much in the same way rituals at Mau Mau ceremonies were pointed to by British political commenter's in the 1950s as evidence that the Kikuyu people were a backwards, uncivilized non ideological tribe. Some Irish academics such as Garvin and McGarry use a similar approach by applying a disproportionate importance on the role of tradition to Irish separatist groups at the expense of a proper analysis of political and ideological reasons which motivated IRA membership.

Drawing inspiration from the past or from the sacrifices of fallen comrades or ideological leaders is certainly not unique to the IRA in the 1950s. Pearse and Wolfe Tone were remembered just as Steve Biko is by the ANC or Simon Bolivar is in Venezuela or José Martí is in Cuba. This tradition can also be used to legitimize the ideological objectives

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<sup>3</sup> Eoin Ó Broin, *Sinn Fein and the politics of left republicanism* (Dublin, 2009), p. 11.

of the republican movement by presenting itself as the inheritors of a long political struggle against colonialism.<sup>4</sup> This thesis challenges the narrow view of the role of tradition set forth by McGarry and Garvin and through the responses of the interviewees demonstrates a much more complex and nuanced view of the role it played.

For example, chapter 2 focuses on the role of tradition within the family and local community. The response from the interviewees demonstrates the complexity of how tradition motivated young people. In a minority of cases some of the interviewees from traditional republican families who remained supportive of the IRA after the Civil War did indicate that a republican tradition was something which they were immersed in from a young age. Some spoke of been born into ‘republicanism’, and in these cases tradition did override ideological considerations. The previous generation of republican activity weighted heavily on the new generation of the 1950s. Recollections of republican activity from the War of Independence and the Civil War permeated many aspects of Irish society and were often discussed within the families and in local communities. The widespread regard for the IRA of the 1920s obviously made all political groups keen to be seen as the true inheritors. In many cases this existing tradition was the first introduction to politics for young people in their formative years. Young people from these republican backgrounds and even those who joined other political groups such as Conor Cruise O’Brien and Garret FitzGerald tended to have a broader awareness of history and politics from an early age which stimulated their interest in political activity, more so than people from non political backgrounds.

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<sup>4</sup> Eoin Ó Broin, *Sinn Fein and the politics of left republicanism* (Dublin, 2009), p. 11.

Whether it is Garret FitzGerald or an IRA member from Crumlin, it has been argued that these early childhood influences were the embryonic buds in the formulation of the individuals own particular ideology. Those who came from a background with a republican tradition often had siblings who had no interest in political activity, while others who joined the IRA had absolutely no awareness of a local or family tradition in republicanism. The response, however, of those from these republican backgrounds also pointed to the international anti-colonial situation at the time and the economic recession as motivating factors, which again highlights the problem with circumscribing motivation for joining the IRA as simply following a tradition.

It cannot, however, be ignored that the IRA's propaganda during the period was at pains to prove that it was the rightful inheritor of the revolutionary tradition as was the case with other political groups, given the general regard that Irish society had for its revolutionary past during this period. Often this was a case of political necessity for these other parties. Through popular reading material of the time as well as the school curriculum, an Irish history of resistance was often romanticized and mythologized. Different manifestations of Irish republicanism were part of the same linear struggle which often ignored the different ideological approaches and methods between different manifestations of separatism. The IRA's propaganda displayed a similar depiction of Irish history as centuries of unbroken resistance with a religious sanction. In some cases the opportunity of playing a role in the next chapter in Irish history was a strong and compelling challenge to young men to enlist. The response of the interviewees shows that in some cases this did have the desired effect. For example one member from a deprived

background saw joining the IRA as similar to becoming a priest which he felt was a career denied to working class people. The fusion of religion and resistance in the IRA's narrative gave an almost spiritual dimension to becoming an IRA volunteer and fed into other depictions of Irish history in wider society at the time. Again, while this appealed to only some of the interviewees, it does indicate the potency that the idea of an unbroken tradition did play in the IRA's publicity. However the awareness and interest these veterans had in politics and in particular international events, as well as how these issues were commented on by republicans, puts into context how ideological considerations ultimately outweighed tradition as being the primary motivating reason in recruitment.

The most striking aspect of the republican movement in the 1950s which challenges the view that it was an introspective non-ideological organization, was the emphasis it placed on international movements around the world in its propaganda, as well as the awareness that veterans had of these international conflicts. The ideological sophistication and global awareness demonstrated by the interviewees shows how activists saw their membership of the IRA as an extension of a wider international independence movement. Both urban and rural members and those from traditional republican and non republican backgrounds were aware of both anti-colonial and anti-Soviet movements and located themselves within this wider global jigsaw.

The republican movement articulated an ideological position which championed the rights of indigenous people in Africa and in other parts of the world demanding independence from colonial regimes. Anti-Soviet independence movements which

sprung up at the onset of the cold war were also afforded similar sympathy and solidarity. Some of the interviewees stated that they had an interest in what was happening in places such as Cyprus and Africa prior to joining the IRA and explicitly stated that they joined the IRA subsequently, as they saw it as Ireland's version of the Kenyan Mau Mau and EOKA in Cyprus. At times the example of EOKA was explicitly used to recruit members.

What is also worth pointing out which reinforces the ideological sophistication and global awareness of the movement at the time, is the importance it placed on challenging racism within its literature. Dangerous racist and insulting stereotyping which depicted African groups, particularly in Kenya as inferior disseminated by pro-colonialists in both Britain and Ireland was strenuously confronted by republicans. Readers of the *United Irishman* and other republican news sheets were reminded that racism was a tool used by the colonial authorities and their sympathetic press to dehumanize African natives in order to justify widespread human rights abuses. Readers were frequently reminded that black people in Africa were equal human beings who were entitled to be treated as such.

The view that the IRA in the stated period was only concerned with ending the geographical partition of Ireland is dealt with in chapter 5. As has been stated already ending partition was seen as the beginning of creating a new society which challenged the devastating effects of economic recession at the time. The republican movement showed a marked advancement in developing some type of coherent ideological position since the 1940s in regard to economics. Based on Catholic social teaching the IRA articulated a

relatively radical view on the way Irish society should be economically organized given the context of the time and the lack of left wing influences in Irish society. The policy range has been explored which indicates that the ideological radicalism of the movement in this regard has been undervalued. Certainly, some of the traditionalist accounts of why the movement emerged at the time, fail to acknowledge the ideological appeal the organization had as a consequence of the economic stagnation of the time.

Some of the membership had already an experience of trade union involvement and political protests around unemployment in the 1950s. Some interviewees from republican backgrounds pointed out, that it was emigration and unemployment and the need to rectify the situation, which had a biggest influence in their decision to join the IRA, rather than the fact that they came from a republican background. To some young men and women with an instinctive social radicalism, the republican movement during the period was seen as an organization which could challenge the economic malaise which had beset the country. The deteriorating situation at the time which grew steadily worse over the course of the decade resulted in some members viewing the organization as the only hope which could save the country from economic and social Armageddon. The reorganization of a post-partitioned Irish society, in the form of a socially just unified country, had huge appeal for these members.

In summation this study adds another layer of perspective to this long standing conversation as to why young people were motivated to join the IRA. It shows that what has been previously written is not definitive and that there are other aspects which have

been looked at here which merit study and discussion. It is also important not to see these young people who joined up, solely as being part of a set republican tradition, as it does not allow for a more nuanced conversation to how other national and international factors influenced them to become part of this developing movement in the 1950s.

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