The Resurrection of Ireland

The Sinn Féin Party, 1916–1923

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Irish nationalists: politicians and rebels

On 16 June 1904, as Leopold Bloom walked the streets of Dublin, he paused to browse in a bookshop at Merchant's Arch. Nearby, in a small cluttered room at the back of a house on Fownes Street, the author of a bizarre political tract was nearing the end of his labours. Between 2 January and 2 July, Arthur Griffith's *The resurrection of Hungary* made its first appearance as a series of articles in the columns of his weekly newspaper, the *United Irishman*. It was a strange manifesto.[1] By Bloomsday twenty-four of its twenty-seven instalments had already been published, but although Griffith had provided a massively detailed treatment of Austro-Hungarian relations in the mid-nineteenth century he had, so far, barely mentioned Ireland. Nonetheless *The resurrection* became for many years the bible of the Sinn Féin party which Griffith dominated for over a decade, and with which he remained closely associated for the rest of his life. Not only did its final chapter lay down a blueprint for a political programme, part of which would be implemented many years later, but its very title hints at images that inspired radical Irish nationalism.

By the early twentieth century most Irish people were prepared to exploit the opportunities provided by their citizenship of the United Kingdom. Many grievances and injustices had already been remedied. In the course of the preceding decades Ireland had already experienced a social revolution, and most of the land which had been conquered and confiscated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was by now restored to the Catholic, Gaelic-Norman majority of the population – or at least to the dominant section of that majority. The Wyndham Act of 1903 accelerated the transfer of land ownership by providing

[1] In November 1904 the articles were published as a booklet consisting of ninety-nine pages of text and costing one penny. This was the same price as an issue of *The United Irishman*, and one-third the price of a pint of Guinness. Its mixture of lively journalism and pedantic detail is illustrated by the chapter headings, which ranged from 'And how the emperor of Austria lost his temper' to 'The meeting of the Hungarian diet of 1865'. The contents will be examined in more detail in pp. 17–18.

generous state loans to tenant farmers. But a small minority of nationalists deprecated all such reforms and insisted on regarding the country as oppressed, deracinated and moribund. These radicals believed that the Irish people should be jolted out of their trust in British measures, their bland acquiescence in an improved version of the status quo; only as a fully separate state could the nation be regenerated. Some members of this faction planned to fight for a republic on the French or American model, while Griffith argued that Ireland should follow the peaceful example provided by Hungary in the mid-nineteenth century.

For many decades their cause had seemed hopeless, but they revealed an almost religious faith as they awaited and prepared for a national resurrection. It was appropriate that a symbol often associated with them was that of the phoenix rising from its own ashes; failure, however often repeated, was no more than a prelude to ultimate triumph. Eventually the most daring of these revolutionaries seized the unexpected opportunities which became available to them. On Easter Monday 1916 they staged a rebellion, and although it failed their action brought their cause the mass support which the Irish people had always denied it. Soldiers soon joined forces with politicians, and for the next few years virtually all those who sought a fully independent Ireland were able to work together within the Sinn Féin party. (Some also worked through another body, the Irish Republican Army.) By now, however, Sinn Féin had been transformed into a movement vastly different from anything which Griffith could have imagined as he wrote *The resurrection of Hungary* in the weeks before and after Bloomsday.

In February 1922 Joyce's *Ulysses* was published in Paris. A month earlier Griffith had been elected president of an independent Irish parliament remarkably similar to that which he had advocated in 1904. Only his opponents recognized him as the president of an Irish republic which he had not sought and which he now disowned. This paradox illustrates the complex history of the ideas which he propagated, the party which he led, and the conflicts in which he became embroiled.

Sinn Féin, the political manifestation of the Irish revolution, was born in the aftermath of a doomed rebellion and died in the bitterness of a civil war. In most respects it was a new organization, although it retained the name of Griffith's party, together with some of its predecessor's structures and policies. It represented a synthesis of different beliefs, traditions and methods. It was a coalition between two forms of Irish nationalism, one committed to the establishment of an Irish republic by revolutionary measures, the other aiming at a more limited degree of independence which would be achieved through political organization and passive resistance. Although dominated by soldiers, the party became a triumphant political force; although committed to a goal which necessitated

violence, it helped lay the foundations of a democratic state; although successful and massively popular, it was soon repudiated and abandoned by almost all its members; and although its ultimate enemy was the British government, many of its heroic struggles were fought against fellow nationalists. Its first opponent (and also its first victim) was the moderate home rule movement, or the Irish Parliamentary Party.

Home rulers and their enemies

The home rule party had dominated Irish public life for decades. Inaugurated in a diffident manner by Isaac Butt in the early 1870s, re-established in an imperious style by Charles Stewart Parnell some years later, it had succeeded by 1885 in crushing or marginalizing all rival forms of Irish nationalism. It was faction-ridden, and at local level its organization remained weak, but outside the unionist stronghold of the north-east it faced no serious competition. The party was able to disengage itself from its involvement in the Land War and from its tactical co-operation with Irish republicans. It replaced this short-lived 'new departure' by a strategic alliance with the British Liberals which lasted until the First World War. In social terms the home rule movement became increasingly conservative, and it prospered through its close links with those tenant farmers who benefited from the land acts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However the fact that so much of its programme on the land question was implemented by British governments made the party appear irrelevant to many who had supported it as an agent of social change;[2] home rule became its only significant remaining objective, and its survival became ever more dependent on achieving this one aim.

The Parliamentary Party was an inclusive, 'catch-all' movement which thrived on imprecision. Its ranks included mutually suspicious and even mutually hostile groups which could be expected to quarrel among themselves once home rule had been achieved. Its members were encouraged 'to restrict discussion to generalities about the "national cause" to which no interest group could take exception. Vague slogans could win acceptance from a far more diverse army than any well-formed, and therefore controversial, programme of future action could have done.'[3] For over thirty years nationalist

[2] Paul Bew, 'Sinn Fein, agrarian radicalism and the War of Independence, 1919–1921', in D. G. Boyce (ed.), *The revolution in Ireland, 1879–1923* (London, 1988), p. 224.

[3] David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish life, 1913–1921: provincial experience of war and revolution* (Dublin, 1977), pp. 92–3.

Ireland was overshadowed by this one party, either in its original united and disciplined form or else in the changing shapes of its different factions. From 1900 until his death eighteen years later its leader was John Redmond, who was accompanied (often unhappily) by his deputy, John Dillon, and it was supported by all but a small minority of Irish nationalists.

To maintain this mass democratic following was in itself a triumph, since the party failed to translate its popularity into the achievement of its main objective. For decade after decade Westminster consistently ignored or rebuffed the demand made by the vast majority of Irish electors, and yet their faith in parliamentary methods remained largely intact. The habit of seeking British support became ingrained, and one radical nationalist lamented long afterwards that the people were preoccupied by performances in the House of Commons. 'To all appearance Ireland had abandoned Physical Force and thrown its all on the political spell-binders at Westminster.'[4]

The process of democratization proceeded slowly, despite the changes in land ownership, and the Protestant ascendancy retained much of its old dominance. By the outbreak of the First World War many intelligent and ambitious young people felt frustrated and resentful. In 1911 Catholics comprised 74 per cent of the population, but they accounted for only 46 per cent of those who worked in insurance companies, 44 per cent of barristers and solicitors, 42 per cent of commercial travellers, 39 per cent of auctioneers, 36 per cent of civil engineers, and 35 per cent of bankers and bank officials;[5] 78 per cent of policemen were Catholics, but five years later thirty-three of the thirty-seven RIC county inspectors were Protestants.[6] The mass of the population might reasonably feel that it was excluded from many of the country's better-paid or more prestigious occupations, and a sense of victimization was one of the driving forces behind Irish nationalism. Yet despite the remaining injustices, and despite latent (at times, blatant) anti-British sentiment, those radicals who demanded drastic social or political changes could attract only a few followers. In most respects the 'wild Irishman' was no more than a British caricature, and a large majority of the population sought moderate aims by political means.

Redmond varied his tactics in the course of the long struggle for home rule, and having attempted to conciliate unionists between 1893 and 1903 he sought to overcome them in the years after 1909.[7] But his basic strategy remained unal-

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[4] J. J. Walsh, *Recollections of a rebel* (Tralee, 1944), p. 16.

[5] *Census of Ireland, 1911. General report, with tables and appendix* (London, 1913), pp. 9–10.

[6] Henry Duke, *Hansard*, 87, col. 414 (9 Nov. 1916).

[7] Paul Bew, *Conflict and conciliation in Ireland, 1890–1910: Parnellites and radical agrarians* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 193–4, 199.

tered. He depended on his alliance with the Liberal party – even though in some respects the Conservatives proved to be more thoroughgoing reformers, and even though the Liberals' return to office in 1905 seemed to bring home rule no closer. Irish unionists grew uneasy as their British protecters relaxed their vigilance, and their most energetic Conservative champion, Walter Long, found it difficult to defend a union which did not seem to be endangered.[8] But after the deadlocked 1910 elections it seemed as if the Nationalists' long years in the wilderness had come to an end. Asquith's Liberal government now depended on Irish support for its survival, and it introduced a new home rule bill soon after the House of Lords' power of veto had been abolished. Under the protective umbrella of the 1911 Parliament Act a devolved legislature would be elected in Dublin within three or four years. It appeared that the Nationalists' faith in the Liberals and in British democracy had been vindicated, and that their patience would be rewarded at last.

The Conservative opposition and its unionist allies realized that they could no longer block home rule by constitutional means. They resorted to treason. Inspired by Sir Edward Carson they formed a paramilitary force, smuggled German arms into unionist Ulster, and threatened rebellion against the government. Andrew Bonar Law and his Conservatives were able to combine principle with cynicism as they incited their unionist protégés to defy the Liberal cabinet and a majority of MPs. Irish moderates were embarrassed and discredited. In the words of one republican observer, 'it seemed to the Irish people that the English desired to have it both ways. When they [the Irish] sought to enforce their national rights by the methods of Fenianism they were told to agitate constitutionally, and when they acted constitutionally they were met by the methods of Fenianism.'[9] In the Curragh Incident of April 1914 a group of army officers made it clear that they would resign their commissions rather than obey any orders which involved suppression of the Ulster Volunteers; they claimed the right to pick and choose between the various instructions which they received from their superiors, a liberty which (as Labour spokesmen and others pointed out) they would not tolerate among the soldiers under their command. For virtually the only time in recent British history a government felt it could not rely on its army, and there were widespread fears of civil war in both Britain and Ireland.

At least part of the reason why home rule perished was that the Tories refused to regard it as anything less than revolutionary and destructive;[10] thereby they precipitated a more full-blooded upheaval which destroyed far more of the

[8] John Kendle, *Walter Long, Ireland, and the union, 1905–1920* (Dun Laoghaire, 1992), p. 53.

[9] Bulmer Hobson, *A short history of the Irish Volunteers* (Dublin, 1918), p. 92.

[10] Patrick O'Farrell, *Ireland's English question* (London, 1971), p. 175.

system which they wished to preserve. They began the process of radicalizing Irish nationalists, of pushing them into support for drastic measures which would have been unthinkable in the early years of the century. On the Conservative and Unionist leaders lies the ultimate responsibility for redirecting the course of Irish politics. Bonar Law and Carson were to be deeply shocked and repelled by much that happened in Ireland during the decade which followed their defiance of parliamentary government, but without their example the Irish revolution would not have come about. General Maxwell, who suppressed the Easter Rising, appreciated this influence when he remarked that the Ulster Volunteers were responsible for Ireland's inflammable situation: 'from this date the troubles. The law was broken, and others broke the law with more or less success.'[11]

Already before the outbreak of the First World War Redmond's Parliamentary Party had been gravely weakened by the unionists' armed challenge. After September 1914, when the Home Rule Bill was simultaneously enacted and suspended for the duration of the war, the party did little more than follow Asquith's earlier advice to his opponents that they should 'wait and see'. Its members watched in dismay when the Conservatives returned to office in May 1915 as the junior partners in a wartime coalition. Nationalists could only hope that this shift in the political balance of power would not be followed by any dilution of the concessions which Redmond had earlier squeezed from the Liberal government. As disillusionment spread among home rule supporters their fervour and optimism seeped away.

Police records provide one indication of this weakening support for the Parliamentary Party. Every month the RIC prepared sets of figures relating to the United Irish League (UIL), the party's national organization. The statistics are unlikely to be accurate in detail, but they nonetheless provide a revealing general impression of its drift after the Redmondites had been blown off course by the unionist wind. Every year between 1913 and 1918 there was a drop in the police estimates of party membership, from 132,000 at the beginning of the period to 105,000 at the end. The number of branches fluctuated, but here too there was an overall decline, from 1,244 to 1,077.[12] In July 1915 it proved impossible to hold a convention in North Tipperary to choose a successor to the deceased MP because, in Redmond's words, 'the branches of the organisation have been allowed to die out'.[13] Subventions from the United Irish League of

[11] Maxwell, 'Report on the state of Ireland since the rebellion', 24 June 1916, Cab.37/150/18.

[12] 'United Irish League meetings', CO.904/20/2.

[13] Paul Bew, *Ideology and the Irish question: Ulster unionism and Irish nationalism 1912–1916* (Oxford, 1994), p. 145.

America virtually dried up when Redmond urged Irish Volunteers to join the British army after the outbreak of the First World War; by 1915 he was obliged to reverse the normal direction of the flow of money sent across the Atlantic, and he supported the American organization with funds from Ireland.[14] Even though Irish revolutionaries did not seize the initiative until the Easter Rising and its aftermath, the Nationalists had lost their momentum before the outbreak of the war. Carson had already knocked Redmond off his pedestal before Clarke or Pearse, de Valera or Griffith were able to do so.

The unionists were only one of several forces whose combined efforts formed a broad (if often unconscious) coalition of interests opposed to the cause of home rule. Another was the 'Irish-Ireland' movement which, despite its commitment to cultural and non-political objectives, nonetheless helped undermine the bases of the party's support and beliefs. In the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth, the Irish people had changed their vernacular from Irish to English, and in contrast to many of its European counterparts Irish nationalism expressed itself in the language of the occupying power.[15] A small minority took a different path; working mainly through the Gaelic League, its members hoped to create an Irish-speaking Ireland which would throw off British cultural (rather than political) domination. For centuries Catholicism had been the traditional badge and shield of Irish identity, differentiating the majority of the island's population from Protestant Britain. But both political and cultural nationalists rejected this equation; many of their early leaders were Protestants, and they all wished (at least in theory) to appeal to the million Protestants who lived in Ulster. In some quarters it was hoped, improbably, that the propagation of a separate language would smooth over Irish sectarian divisions. The more radical among the cultural nationalists planned not merely to reform and regenerate the Irish people; they also hoped to achieve a separate state in which the people's distinctive identity could be fostered by a sympathetic government. They saw this as a natural and logical progression.

Early in the twentieth century a new intolerant mood emerged, a determination that Irish would be made 'essential' or compulsory for educational

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[14] Francis M. Carroll, *American opinion and the Irish question, 1910–23* (Dublin, 1978), p. 42; Alan J. Ward, *Ireland and Anglo-American relations, 1899–1921* (London, 1969), p. 80.

[15] On the Irish experience see Garret FitzGerald, 'Estimates for baronies of minimum level of Irish-speaking amongst successive decennial cohorts: 1771–1781 to 1861–1871', in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 84, C (Dublin, 1984), pp. 117–55 (summarized in *IT*, 10 June 1985); on parallel developments elsewhere see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism* (2nd edn, London, 1991), pp. 73–5.

advancement; it would become what English had been in the past, the language of opportunity.[16] The Gaelic revival movement achieved some success in ensuring that knowledge of Irish became a prerequisite of higher education, but the British authorities blocked its attempts to 'nationalize' both the educational system and public appointments in the Gaeltacht (the remaining Irish-speaking districts which were concentrated on the Atlantic coast). Its members tended increasingly to think in terms of capturing the state machine as a first step towards implementing their programme.[17]

Nationalism rescued the Irish language revival from what many people dismissed as mere scholarly antiquarianism, and the Gaelic League's political neutrality became harder to maintain. Douglas Hyde prided himself on being a 'non-political' president throughout the first twenty-two years of its existence, but even he singled out the Parliamentary Party for attack.[18] Eoin MacNeill – who with perfect symbolism was the main inspiration both for the Gaelic League in 1893 and the Irish Volunteers twenty years later – was able to write in 1908 that 'while I believe in working the language movement honestly for its own ends, I cannot hide from myself the conviction that this movement is also steadily building up the foundations of political freedom'.[19] Some years later the MP for West Kerry referred to 'the poison of the Gaelic League', and complained that Irish language students were nearly all anti-party men.[20]

Long before the First World War the failure of a purely cultural movement had become apparent, and some of those who were committed to a linguistic revolution came to believe also in the necessity of a military struggle. Patrick Pearse and Eamon de Valera were merely the most prominent among those idealists who concluded that their aims could be achieved only by rebellion. And a growing number of radicals saw cultural nationalism simply as one of many weapons which could be used to fight the British; for them 'the Irish language was valued not for itself but as a symbol of national distinctiveness. Beyond that, it was fit only for children and for others who needed protection against English civilization.'[21] Many cultural revolutionaries rejected the constitutional

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[16] See R. V. Comerford, 'Nationalism and the Irish language', in Thomas E. Hachey and Lawrence J. McCaffrey (eds.), *Perspectives on Irish nationalism* (Lexington, 1989), pp. 33–5. Also see below, pp. 236–9.

[17] John Hutchinson, *The dynamics of cultural nationalism: the Gaelic revival and the creation of the Irish nation state* (London, 1987), p. 293.

[18] D. George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (3rd edn, Dublin, 1995), p. 239.

[19] Michael Tierney, *Eoin MacNeill, scholar and man of action, 1867–1945* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 104–5.

[20] Thomas O'Donnell to Dillon, 14 Oct. 1914, cited in J. Anthony Gaughan, *A political odyssey: Thomas O'Donnell, M.P. for West Kerry, 1900–1918* (Dublin, 1983), p. 97.

[21] Tom Garvin, *Nationalist revolutionaries in Ireland, 1858–1928* (Oxford, 1987), p. 102.

methods of the Parliamentary Party, along with what they believed to be its complacency and corruption. MacNeill loathed the way in which 'Ireland's representatives wheedled, fawned, begged, bargained and truckled for a provincial legislature.'[22]

Every setback experienced by Redmond and his followers in their battles with the Conservatives and Ulster unionists made them more vulnerable to the attacks of enemies within their own camp. They were assailed and undermined by the 'separatists', those nationalists who sought a far more thorough degree of separation or independence than was provided by the Home Rule Bill. Over time the party became increasingly exposed to critics who demanded more assertive tactics than negotiation and compromise with British ministers.

The IRB and the Volunteers

Among the fiercest opponents of moderate nationalism was the Irish Republican Brotherhood, or IRB, whose aim was the achievement of a fully independent Irish republic. It was the successor of the Fenians, the more flexible of whom had engaged in electoral politics and had co-operated briefly with Parnell in the 'new departure' of 1879, but most of whose members repudiated even a tentative flirtation with constitutional methods. Wariness of political activity was an enduring characteristic of Irish republicanism. The brotherhood was dedicated to achieving its aims by conspiracy and rebellion, and its members were always a small minority, unrepresentative of most Irish nationalists; it was a secret society like the Italian Carbonari, a revolutionary underground like the Russian Bolsheviks.

The IRB infiltrated the various bodies which flourished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in particular it concentrated on the two main expressions of 'Irish Ireland', the Gaelic League and the Gaelic Athletic Association. Long before the 1916 Rising the brotherhood had begun to appropriate the Irish language and Gaelic games.[23] In turn it was observed closely by the British authorities, and its activities were reported to Dublin Castle by spies and informers.[24] This surveillance was eased after 1905 when the Liberals returned to power, largely because of an over-confident belief that (in the words of one senior Castle official) 'there is no evidence that the IRB is anything but

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[22] Eoin MacNeill, *Daniel O'Connell and Sinn Féin* (Dublin, 1915), p. 15.

[23] Garvin, *Nationalist revolutionaries*, p. 98.

[24] Leon Ó Broin, *Revolutionary underground; the story of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, 1858–1924* (Dublin, 1976), pp. 117–20.

the shadow of a once terrifying name.' Such views were reinforced by a similar impression that the usual result of its meetings was no more than the 'liquidation' of its American funds through an increased consumption of porter and whiskey.[25]

For decades the brotherhood followed Mr Micawber's practice and waited for something to turn up, hoping that it would be able to exploit some favourable opportunity; in the words of the old Fenian John O'Leary 'we cannot say when the time will come – only that it will, and that we must be ready.'[26] Like most revolutionary movements it survived on a meagre diet of faith and hope, and the struggle was never so 'pure' as when it was not actually taking place.[27] But while there was much rejoicing at Britain's embarrassments, such as its military defeats and diplomatic isolation during the Boer War, the IRB remained unable to exploit the openings which these might have offered. In 1902 John MacBride discussed the prospects of a war involving Britain and concluded 'we are disgraced forever if we miss another opportunity'.[28] When Britain's ally Japan attacked Russia two years later a London-based IRB member remarked that 'this war is not, so far, as satisfactory as I could wish. I want Russia to win, of course. Still, I'm getting great hopes of a big European fight wherein England shall get her deserts.'[29] At least for the time being, he was disappointed. One policy recommended by the IRB was 'to attract the attention of England's enemies by acts of disloyalty', but this, too, seemed to produce no results.[30]

Denis McCullough, a future president of the IRB supreme council, had been told by his father 'you can't do much son, but you must carry on the tradition'.[31] For many in the brotherhood this aim sufficed, although by the second decade of the twentieth century direct links with previous rebellions were becoming ever more tenuous. Nonetheless a precarious line of succession was maintained, and James Stritch, who had participated in the rescue of Fenian prisoners in Manchester in 1867, was among those interned after the Easter Rising.[32]

Shortly before the First World War the IRB was purged and revived by Tom

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[25] James Dougherty (assistant under secretary), Dec. 1903, cited in W. F. Mandle, *The Gaelic Athletic Association and Irish nationalist politics, 1884–1924* (Dublin, 1987), p. 137; Ó Broin, *Revolutionary underground*, p. 134.

[26] Cited in *Irish Freedom*, Oct. 1914, editorial.

[27] Maurice Goldring, *Pleasant the scholar's life: Irish intellectuals and the construction of the nation state* (London, 1993), p. 41.

[28] MacBride to John Devoy, n.d. [1902], William O'Brien and Desmond Ryan (eds.), *Devoy's post bag* (Dublin, 1948), II, p. 349.

[29] P. S. O'Hegarty to Terence MacSwiney, 15 Feb. 1904, MacSwiney MSS, UCDA, P48b/375.

[30] *Irish Freedom,* June 1911, editorial.

[31] McCullough, interview with Richard Mulcahy, 1961, RM, P7/D/14.

[32] Sean O'Mahony, *Frongoch: university of revolution* (Dublin, 1987), p. 137.

Clarke and his group of young followers, and only then could it be taken seriously as a revolutionary force. Denis McCullough represented the earnest new mood; as he reminisced long afterwards, 'I cleared out most of the older men (including my father) most of whom I considered of no further use to us.'[33] Despite such zeal the IRB's numbers remained tiny, its influence slight and its prospects negligible. Bulmer Hobson remarked later that until 1913 it was no more than 'a little secret movement meeting in back rooms'.[34] Its members continued to look to the past for example and inspiration, and they hoped to imitate or even transcend the record of earlier generations. Yet it was not inspiration which Irish revolutionaries needed, but practical instruction, example and opportunity. These were provided by Edward Carson, James Craig and the Ulster Volunteers.

Unionists were able to achieve in a matter of months what IRB members had dreamed of doing for many decades, but what they could not even attempt because of public indifference, police surveillance and their own fear of British repression. Even though the cabinet in London and the chief secretary in Dublin Castle were broadly sympathetic to Irish nationalists, Britain's ability to avert rebellion in Ireland was displayed against only one section of the population. Judges and generals, peers and policemen were all prepared to turn a blind eye to the formation of the Ulster Volunteers, and in many cases the 'establishment' offered encouragement and support to these potential rebels against the crown. The unionists organized a mass movement, and they trained and supplied their own army. They committed themselves to staging a rebellion if they could not achieve their objectives by peaceful means; they would take arms against the government unless it abandoned a policy which had been approved by a large majority in the House of Commons. They undermined Irish nationalists' faith in British politicians and in democratic methods.

Along with other, more moderate observers the IRB envied and emulated the unionists. Many nationalists reasoned that if the Conservative Party, reinforced by elements in the House of Lords, the British army, the judiciary and the worlds of business and finance, were all ready to support or incite one section of the Irish population in its plans for rebellion, the authorities would be unable to restrain others (who supported the government's home rule policy) from imitating this example. But the initiative came from outside the brotherhood, from Michael O'Rahilly, who was a supporter of Griffith and a member of the Gaelic League. He persuaded Eoin MacNeill, a distinguished historian of medieval Ireland, to write an article in the League's journal *An Claidheamh Soluis* proposing that nationalists should follow where the unionists had led. O'Rahilly,

[33] McCullough, statement, 14 Oct. 1957, McCullough MSS, UCDA, P120/29(1).

[34] Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse: the triumph of failure* (London, 1977), p. 212.

MacNeill, Bulmer Hobson and a small group of others then decided to convene a public meeting in the Rotunda, the largest hall in Dublin;[35] 7,000 people attended, an Irish Volunteer Force was founded, and its numbers increased rapidly; by the end of 1913 a paramilitary body had been established in nationalist Ireland as a mirror image of the Ulster Volunteers. The unionists' example was contagious, and their parading of emotion, their posturing and their oratory all helped eradicate the national fear of looking ridiculous.[36] Although Hobson was the only member of the IRB who was involved in the preliminary steps which led to the founding of the Volunteers (and he would soon be purged by his more radical and impatient colleagues) the brotherhood promptly infiltrated the new army and occupied many of its key positions. For the first time since the days of the Land League extreme republicans were in association, if under cover, with a large body of Irish public opinion.[37] But the IRB was anxious to avoid alarming the moderate majority. It was content that the president of the new force should be MacNeill, a widely respected supporter of the home rule cause.

The formation of the Irish Volunteers was a direct response to the combination of excitement and anger which Carson's actions had provoked, to the feeling that he had stolen a march on Redmond, and to the widespread hope that the advantage which the unionists had gained would be nullified if nationalists followed their example. In his speech at the meeting which launched the Volunteers, MacNeill declared that the Ulster Volunteer movement had established the principle of Irishmen's right to decide and govern their own national affairs.[38] Many nationalists shared his respect for the Ulstermen's defiance of the British government. The IRB newspaper *Irish Freedom* rejoiced that 'the sheen of arms in Ulster was always the signal for the manhood of the rest of Ireland . . . By the Lord, it is good to be alive in these days.'[39] Pearse had 'boldly preach[ed] the antique faith that fighting is the only noble thing, and that he only is at peace with God who is at war with the powers of evil';[40] after the unionists' initiative such righteous combat now seemed less remote. The more moderate Arthur Griffith saw Ulster unionism as marching to national salvation in the spirit of Sinn Féin and political nationalism.[41]

Within a few months of their formation the Irish Volunteers numbered

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[35] Aodagán O'Rahilly, *Winding the clock: O'Rahilly and the 1916 Rising* (Dublin, 1991), pp. 93–9.

[36] Maureen Wall, 'The background to the rising: from 1914 until the issue of the countermanding order on Easter Saturday 1916', in Kevin B. Nowlan (ed.), *The making of 1916* (Dublin, 1969), p. 161. [37] Robert Kee, *The green flag: a history of Irish nationalism* (London, 1972), pp. 501–2.

[38] Hobson, *History of the Irish Volunteers*, p. 30. [39] *Irish Freedom*, Jan. 1914, editorial.

[40] Pádraic H. Pearse, 'The murder machine', *Political writings and speeches* (Dublin, n.d.), p. 14.

[41] *Sinn Féin*, 24 Aug. 1912, editorial. For Griffith's Sinn Féin movement, see below, pp. 21–33.

about 150,000. They could be seen as an Irish manifestation of Europe's 'generation of 1914', young men who were dissatisfied with what they saw as a dull or decadent world, idealists who (in at least some cases) revelled in the excitement of militarism and the prospect of heroic conflict.[42] The Parliamentary Party was deeply suspicious of these developments and it adopted its traditional methods of dealing with potential threats; it tried to infiltrate and neutralize the new body, first at local level and then in the form of an ultimatum by Redmond to MacNeill and his colleagues. In turn the Volunteer leaders were wary of politicians, indoctrinating their troops with a belief in the nobility of the soldier's calling and warning them against the snares of constitutionalism. MacNeill later instructed them 'on no account to divert their own attention from their own work to the work of political elections . . . Party management and Volunteer organisation go badly together.'[43] The revolutionaries' cult of violence and their scorn of politics are illustrated by the declaration in *Irish Freedom* that 'under existing conditions war is the final court of appeal . . . the battle is to the strong rather than to the glib of tongue, to the tall talker, to the election agent, to the adroit manipulator of ballot papers'. The writer (probably Hobson) continued: 'we do not care, fellow-countrymen, what you arm for. We only care that you arm.'[44] In the course of the next decade this distaste for the compromises of civilian and political life would flourish and fester. In the short run, however, the secret society had little to show for its efforts. The only serious attempt to arm the Irish Volunteers was the Howth gun-running of July 1914, and it was planned by a group which included Roger Casement, Erskine Childers, Darrell Figgis and Alice Stopford Green. None of them was a member of the IRB.

The Irish Volunteers' popularity did not mean that Irish nationalists had been converted *en masse* to the idea of revolution. The limited appeal of the radicals is illustrated by the split within the force which took place a month after the outbreak of the First World War, after Redmond had urged its members to join the British army and to fight 'in defence of the highest principles of religion and morality and right . . . wherever the firing line extends'.[45] As many as 150,000 may have followed Redmond, while only a small number remained with MacNeill and the IRB men who manoeuvred in his shadow; estimates range from a minimum figure of 2,000 to a maximum of 12,300.[46]

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[42] See Robert Wohl, *The generation of 1914* (London, 1980), pp. 215–17.

[43] *Irish Volunteer*, 4 Sept. 1915. [44] *Irish Freedom*, Dec. 1913, editorial.

[45] Denis Gwynn, *John Redmond* (London, 1932), pp. 391–2.

[46] Tierney, *Eoin MacNeill*, p. 154; O'Rahilly, *Winding the clock*, p. 109. The RIC inspector general put the figures at 9,700 out of a total membership of 156,000 (report, Dec. 1914, CO.904/95).

This re-emergence of the tradition of armed defiance of a London government, first by the Ulster Volunteers and then by their IRB-influenced nationalist counterpart, represented a grave threat to the Parliamentary Party and to the methods which it followed. Ultimately the consequences would prove fatal. The resort to military measures by both unionists and nationalists also transformed a third group whose actions and fortunes already intertwined with those of the republican revolutionaries, and which would in future years become even more closely linked with them: Sinn Féin.

Arthur Griffith

The Sinn Féin party was the most important of several new political movements which emerged in the first decade of the twentieth century. Its dominant figure was Arthur Griffith, 'an extraordinarily clever journalist' according to the chief secretary, Augustine Birrell, who was one among many victims of his pen.[47] He was a gifted writer and a cantankerous politician, an obsessive compiler and manipulator of statistics, a theorist who revelled in improbable past and present models for a future Irish state. Unlike most other radical Irish nationalists he was hard-headed and down-to-earth in his concern with economic questions, and he showed little sympathy for the clichéd shamrocks, wolfhounds and round towers which were cherished by so many of his contemporaries. He hoped to build an 'ascetic, sober and industrious urban middle-class nation', and he has been described, harshly, as wanting the Irish to be free so that they could make their own pots and pans.[48] He hated British rule but did not simply reject British wealth and power; Ireland, too, should have its place in the sun. Some years later one admirer described his newspaper as being urgently of the present, and as escaping the musty odour of ransacked files; 'it looked forward gladly to hope of the future, rather than sadly backward to the defeat of the past'.[49]

Griffith was often narrow-minded. One famous example of his intolerance was his opposition to Synge's *Playboy of the Western World,* which he regarded as 'a story of unnatural murder and unnatural lust, told in foul language'. He

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[47] Leon Ó Broin, *The chief secretary: Augustine Birrell in Ireland* (London, 1969), p. 120.

[48] Hutchinson, *Dynamics of cultural nationalism,* p. 169; William Irwin Thompson, *The imagination of an insurrection: Dublin, Easter 1916* (New York, 1967), pp. 171–2.

[49] Brinsley MacNamara, *The clanking of chains* (Dublin, 1920), p. 16.

even suggested that it was the production of a moral degenerate.[50] Yeats was denounced in the columns of *Sinn Féin* (probably by Griffith himself) for his disparagement of 'Paudeen' and 'Biddy' in his 'To a wealthy man'. The poem was attacked as 'drivel' and Yeats himself, although praised for his earlier work, was accused of setting an example of immorality to the young men of his country.[51]

But Griffith was also honest and courageous, he mellowed with the years, and at times he could be supple and imaginative. Long afterwards it was claimed that 'all the journalists of Dublin spoke well of him in private, which is the greatest tribute to any man'.[52] He was on good terms with the socialist James Connolly who disagreed profoundly with him on many issues, and with James Joyce who entertained him in the Martello Tower in Sandycove. Joyce might later describe Griffith as an 'indignant little chap', but he nonetheless praised Griffith's writing for its intelligence and directness.[53] He paid an indirect and improbable tribute in the Cyclops episode of *Ulysses*: John Wyse informed the inhabitants of Barney Kiernan's pub that the person who gave Griffith the idea for Sinn Féin was none other than Leopold Bloom.[54]

Griffith constructed an idealized image of Grattan's Parliament in the late eighteenth century, and he recommended it as a model for the Irish future. He took his stand on the Renunciation Act of 1783, by which the British parliament abandoned all future right to legislate for Ireland, and he preferred to forget that this act had been superseded by the Act of Union less than two decades later.[55] He paid no attention to the most fundamental principle of the British political system: that every parliament could repeal any previous legislation, including all restrictions on its own powers. Like Montesquieu, he based his theory on a misreading of the British constitution.

The resurrection of Hungary was a variation on the same theme; an argument in favour of reforming Ireland's relations with Britain along the lines of the

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[50] *Sinn Féin*, 2 Feb. 1907. Other nationalists shared these views. Pearse also attacked Synge as a kind of evil spirit and believed that 'it is not Ireland he libels so much as mankind in general, it is not against a nation he blasphemes so much as against the moral order of the universe' (cited in Edwards, *Patrick Pearse*, pp. 102–3).

[51] *Sinn Féin*, 18, 25 Jan. 1913. For details of Griffith's *Kulturkampf* and his quarrel with Yeats, see R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A life. I. The apprentice mage, 1865–1914* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 360, 399, 458.

[52] Desmond Ryan, *Remembering Sion: a chronicle of storm and quiet* (London, 1934), p. 279.

[53] James Joyce to Stanislaus Joyce, 15 Mar. 1905, 6 Nov. 1906, Richard Ellmann (ed.), *Selected letters of James Joyce* (London, 1975), pp. 57, 125.

[54] James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London, 1937), pp. 319–20.

[55] The Renunciation Act was so central to Griffith's thinking that its text formed an appendix to the booklet version of *The resurrection of Hungary*.

Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy. (Ironically, in introducing his first Home Rule Bill in 1886, Gladstone too had alluded to the Habsburg model.[56]) Griffith argued that the Act of Union of 1800, which joined Ireland and Britain in the United Kingdom, was illegal and should be ignored; that a separate Irish legislature should follow 'the Hungarian policy – the policy of Passive Resistance – with occasional excursions into the domain of Active Resistance at strategic points'; and that Ireland and Britain, like Hungary and Austria, might agree to share a monarch – provided that the two nations should be equal and independent.[57]

He proposed that Irish nationalists should launch a campaign of passive resistance against British rule and that their MPs should abstain from Westminster, thereby following the example of the Hungarian deputies who withdrew from the imperial parliament in Vienna. Griffith had read many writings by Hungarian and other historians, but in some respects the booklet was less a work of history than a myth or a parable.[58] His beliefs were unaffected by the collapse shortly afterwards of a similar dual monarchy linking Sweden and Norway, and he was able to dismiss its failure as the consequence of Swedish folly and selfishness.[59] Later he argued that the General Council of County Councils provided 'the nucleus of a National authority' and that it should extend its range of responsibilities until it would become a *de facto* parliament.[60] He denied legitimacy to a sovereign parliament while assigning it to a subordinate tier of government.[61]

Abstention from Westminster was a basic principle of the Sinn Féin movement. O'Connell had toyed with the idea of a 'council of three hundred' which would meet in Dublin, repeal the Act of Union, and re-establish the Irish House of Commons. The policy of abstention had been floated by the *Nation* in 1842, and Davitt had proposed it to Parnell in 1878.[62] Some years later Gladstone was informed 'on reliable authority . . . that Parnell is going to move a definite resolution in favour of a separate parliament for Ireland and when this is refused

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[56] Nicholas Mansergh, *The unresolved question: the Anglo-Irish settlement and its undoing, 1912–72* (New Haven and London, 1991), p. 25.

[57] *The resurrection of Hungary: a parallel for Ireland* (Dublin, 1904), pp. 91, 95.

[58] Brian Maye, *Arthur Griffith* (Dublin, 1997), pp. 98–9; Padraic Colum, *Arthur Griffith* (Dublin, 1959), p. 78.

[59] *United Irishman*, 17 June 1905.

[60] *The Sinn Féin policy* (Dublin, 1907), p. 35.

[61] Peter Murray, 'Citizenship, colonialism and self-determination: Dublin in the United Kingdom, 1885–1918' (Ph.D. dissertation, Trinity College, Dublin, 1987), p. 203.

[62] Oliver MacDonagh, *The emancipist: Daniel O'Connell, 1830–47* (London, 1989), p. 221; Michael Davitt, *The fall of feudalism in Ireland: the story of the Land League revolution* (London and New York, 1904), p. 112.

to withdraw all his men *en bloc*'. He was alarmed by this report, and felt that such a step would be 'by far the most formidable thing that can happen. It will be followed by an assembly in Dublin, which brings into view very violent aberrations.'[63] But there was no evidence of such a dangerous plan being taken seriously by the Parnellites, and it remained dormant until Griffith revived the idea nearly twenty years later; after his death it would develop a new life of its own, and it would be a disruptive influence in Irish republicanism until the end of the twentieth century.

Early in his career Griffith had proclaimed himself a separatist and had demanded 'an Ireland with its own sovereign government and its own free flag'.[64] But he realized that most Irish people did not share these radical objectives and that he would have to compromise his own beliefs in order to win a mass following. The public might be more easily persuaded to support a less ambitious programme, and he believed that an Irish statesman who attempted to introduce a dual monarchy would have won the same widespread support as his hero Ferenc Deák had gained in Hungary.[65] In propounding such arguments he neglected the fact that, for many nationalists, the monarchy was tainted by folk memories of the anti-Catholic bigotry of kings such as George III and George IV, by Victoria's prejudices against the Irish, and by the cloying adulation which unionists lavished on the royal family. In similar fashion Grattan's Parliament was disliked by many nationalists who associated it with the Protestant Anglo-Irish ascendancy.

Griffith was an economic nationalist whose gospel, Friedrich List's *National system of political economy*, argued that nationalism was central to the fostering of economic growth. He was dishonest in his omissions, and he ignored the awkward fact that in the book's 435 pages the only two references to Ireland were at odds with his own beliefs. List remarked that 'territorial deficiencies of the nation can be remedied . . . by conquests, as in the case of Great Britain and Ireland'; and – even worse – he saw the union of Britain and Ireland as an example of 'the immeasurable efficacy of free trade between united nations'.[66] But like any sensible propagandist Griffith selected only what suited his cause.

He wished to convert the Irish Parliamentary Party to his views, rather than supplant it, and he hoped that his theories might bridge the gap which divided the separatist minority from the majority of nationalists who still adhered to parliamentary methods. But he failed in his efforts to win over a significant

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[63] Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Parnell and his party, 1880–90* (Oxford, 1957), p. 162.

[64] *United Irishman*, 28 June 1902, cited in Seán Ó Lúing, *Art Ó Gríofa* (Dublin, 1953), p. 81.

[65] Griffith, *Resurrection of Hungary*, p. 95.

[66] Friedrich List, *The national system of political economy* (London, 1885), pp. 176, 123.

number of home rulers, while his moderation alienated many of the more radical separatists who sought an Irish republic freed from all British influences. Yet he clung to the idea of a dual monarchy, even though his most active supporters were full-blooded separatists and he claimed to be one himself.[67] Many of his early admirers soon drifted away, and in preaching the compromise doctrine of a dual monarchy he became his own most fervent convert.

The first Sinn Féin

The origins of the Sinn Féin party were confused and incongruous. The name 'Sinn Féin', meaning 'we ourselves', was already in wide circulation, and as early as 1882 Thomas Stanislaus Cleary wrote a play entitled *Shin Fain; or Ourselves Alone.* Among the characters were 'Erin', 'the Spirit of Irish Fun' and the 'Spirit of Self-Reliance'. One stanza of the chorus, 'Shin Fain', went as follows:

> We craved for bread, they gave us stones;
> We looked for drink, they gave us gall;
> Our calendar was marked by groans,
> Their rise was measured by our fall.
> No more we bow to kiss the rod,
> But to this health a cup we drain,
> Our native sod, our trust in God,
> And under Him, Shin Fain! Shin Fain![68]

A decade later the parliamentarian T. M. Healy referred to 'the good old watchword of old Ireland – Shin Fain – ourselves alone', and at the turn of the century the term was used by members of the Gaelic League.[69] Soon afterwards in Meath a short-lived newspaper was published with the title *Sinn Féin – the Oldcastle Monthly Review*; its principal concerns were the Gaelic League, teetotalism and the misguided 'national' views of some local priests. Griffith claimed afterwards that the idea of describing his policy of national self-reliance as one of 'Sinn

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[67] Donal McCartney, 'The Sinn Féin movement', in Nowlan, *Making of 1916*, p. 40. See Maye, *Arthur Griffith*, pp. 109–10.

[68] Tom Telephone [Thomas Stanislaus Cleary], *Shin Fain; or ourselves alone: a drama of the exhibition* (Dublin, 1882), p. 11; see John Eglinton, *Irish Statesman,* 17 Jan. 1920, p. 61.

[69] Frank Callanan, *T. M. Healy* (Cork, 1996), p. 351; J. J. O'Kelly ('Sceilg'), evidence, 27 Apr. 1948, SFFC, 2B/82/118(39), p. 28; Brian P. Murphy, *Patrick Pearse and the lost republican ideal* (Dublin, 1991), p. 20.

Féin' had been given to him one evening in late 1904 by his friend Mary Butler when she and her sister called to his office in Fownes Street.[70]

Above all else Griffith was a journalist, a man of ink and print, of headlines and deadlines, and from 1899 onwards he edited (and in large part he also wrote) a formidable series of newspapers. But in the early years of the twentieth century he was also involved in a number of committees, lobbies and factions, many of which had the same overlapping membership. It was at his suggestion that Cumann na nGaedheal was formed in 1900 to serve as a loose federation of several of these groups, but the new society soon became little more than a front for the IRB. Two years later Griffith secured the defeat of a motion by the more radical Maud Gonne that the society should transcend its objective of Irish 'sovereign independence' and adhere to the republican tradition.[71] Already he was engaged in seeking a compromise or consensus which would include moderate nationalists.

Griffith's own organization, the National Council, was formed in 1903 as an *ad hoc* body which mounted a protest against Edward VII's visit to Dublin. Its initial aim was 'the stamping out of toadyism and flunkeyism in this land', but it acquired a permanent character of its own and developed into an intellectual pressure-group. It was a movement or a club rather than a political party, and those who wished to join had to be proposed and seconded by existing members before their applications could be vetted by a committee.[72] The Council's literary or propagandistic nature is illustrated by its ability to raise more money in 1906–7 from the sale of pamphlets than from affiliation fees.[73] It was soon pledged to Griffith's idea of a dual monarchy, and for the next few years it became (second only to his journalism) the main channel of his influence.

In March 1905 a group of Ulster nationalists led by Bulmer Hobson formed yet another body, the Dungannon clubs. The fact that their initial aims had included the restoration of Grattan's Parliament could be seen as a tribute to Griffith's theories, but this early moderation was soon abandoned. The clubs were earnest and exacting. All their young members were obliged 'to attend the Gaelic League and to be absolute teetotalers', although those aged above twenty-five were by now clearly beyond redemption and less was demanded of them; it was merely expected that they 'must never be seen drunk'.[74] The

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[70] Griffith to Mère Columba Butler, 12 May 1921, NLI, MS 4577; Mary Ellen Butler, 'When the Sinn Fein policy was launched', in William Fitz-Gerald (ed.), *The voice of Ireland* (Dublin and London, n.d. [1924]), p. 106.

[71] Richard Davis, *Arthur Griffith and non-violent Sinn Fein* (Dublin, 1974), p. 18.

[72] *United Irishman*, 9 Dec. 1905. [73] *Sinn Féin*, 7 Sept. 1907.

[74] Patrick McCartan to Joe McGarrity, 23 Oct. 1906, McG, 17,617(1).