

Introduction: Ireland 1880–2016: Negotiating Sovereignty and Freedom

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Introduction

By the late 1870s the effects of the Great Famine seemed to have worked themselves through the structure of the Irish economy and the fabric of Irish society. The drastic demographic check (of 1845–1855) had settled into what would remain an enduring pattern until the 1960s, with emigration rates generally outstripping the natural rate of population growth, resulting in a continuous population decline that was unique in Europe. Moreover, the high portion of the young and single in the emigrant outflow strengthened the conservative bias in many areas of Irish social and cultural life.¹

The structure of the Irish economy had also taken firm shape. The balance of Irish agriculture (the bedrock of the economy) had shifted decisively towards grassland production. The range of successful, export-orientated manufacturing output was narrow and agri-related, with beer, whiskey, biscuits and a few niche luxury products prominent; otherwise, the manufacturing dispersed throughout the urban centres of the south and west was principally serving local demand. The commercial role of Dublin was important (as principal hub of trade with Britain and of wholesale distribution countrywide), with lesser port towns serving a similar role more locally. The underlying trends were clear: Ireland was firmly embedded in an increasingly integrated UK economy, with a well-developed communications system, and with rising literacy, as the adoption of English (and the abandonment of Irish) as the main vernacular advanced irreversibly.² The major exception to this profile was the north-east corner of Ulster, an expanding industrial enclave, based, from the mid-nineteenth century, on shipbuilding and a cluster of related industries that eclipsed linen as the mainstay of a local industrial zone

1 J. J. Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society, 1848–1918* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1973), 1–35.

2 C. Ó Gráda, *Ireland. A New Economic History 1780–1939* (Oxford University Press, 1994), 213–376.

that saw Belfast become the only recognisably industrial Victorian British city in Ireland.

By 1880 the Catholic Church in Ireland was reaching a position of remarkable cultural dominance over much of the country. An increasingly confident Catholic bourgeoisie, in town and country, fortified in its social and cultural influence by the thinning out through the Famine and post-Famine emigration of the rural underclass, supported the authority of an expanding establishment of religious personnel and institutional infrastructure (schools and health facilities as well as places of worship). The rich associational culture generated by this Catholic community was marked by a growing insistence on conformity, not only in relation to church teaching and religious observance, but also in social mores and behaviour. Its confidence was also the confidence of a missionary church, expanding throughout the Anglophone world.³

In Ulster, evangelical Protestant revivalism from the 1850s produced a heightened religious sense that rivalled the Catholic version. Allowing for clear distinctions between the Presbyterian and the Episcopal communities (in theology and devotional practice, and also in social and cultural life), the more fundamental cleavage was between Catholic and Protestant, running 'to a greater or lesser extent' through all spheres of social life.⁴

The extent to which Ireland seemed increasingly securely integrated into the British state and empire is striking. The economies of both islands were fully integrated. The pull of cultural integration was strong. A centrally administered system of elementary education resulted in rising levels of literacy in English. The Protestant hold on the higher reaches of the Irish administration remained strong (fuelling resentment among educated Catholics), but throughout the British Empire there were few impediments to profitable employment for ambitious Irish people in search of a career – in the army, civil service, professions, the stage and journalism, domestic service, nursing, and, at the lower end of the scale, the unskilled.⁵

3 P. Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience: A Historical Survey* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1985), 192–258; D. W. Miller, *Church, State and Nation in Ireland, 1898–1921* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973).

4 B. M. Walker, *Ulster Politics: The Formative Years, 1868–1886* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1989); for the contested world of sport, see P. Rouse, *Sport and Ireland: A History* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 149–242.

5 On Catholic social mobility pre-1914, see S. Pašeta, *Before the Revolution: Nationalism, Social Change and Ireland's Catholic Elite, 1879–1922* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999); F. Campbell, *The Irish Establishment 1879–1914* (Oxford University Press, 2009); also, K. Jeffery (ed.), *An Irish Empire? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

The closing years of the nineteenth century saw a strong reaction against this seemingly inexorable ‘assimilationist’ trend in Irish life. Across a broad cultural front – language, literature, arts and crafts, sport and, ultimately, politics – a cohort of activists stirred to challenge what they denounced as provincial and derivative and to advocate the cultivation of native (indigenous, authentic, Irish) cultural modes. Arnoldian Celticism and dollops of anti-modernist romanticism were strong ingredients. The anti-colonialist impulse – resentment at condescension – featured in the writings and propaganda of many of the challenging collectivity of cultural activists who produced a bumper crop of ideas, organisations and cultural works in the decades from 1880 to the eve of the Great War. Creativity, self-confidence and self-respect were watchwords of all the revivalist groups – against passivity, slack imitation and low self-esteem.⁶

Home Rule and its Critics

There is a sense in which a demand for some form of self-government may seem the natural political corollary of this broad wave of activism for confident, creative national development along ‘Irish lines’. But the wave of cultural revivalism may also be read as a critique of the inadequacy or incompleteness of the demand for ‘Home Rule’, articulated as a claim for the restoration of the rights of an ‘historic Irish nation’, even as the remaining marks of distinct nationhood were being eroded and abandoned apace. This was the argument of Douglas Hyde and the Gaelic League and of the propagandists of the Irish-Ireland movement. But it also reflected an instinct of many cultural activists (whatever their position on the political or constitutional issue) that Catholicism should not be the default, defining characteristic of ‘Irishness’.⁷

The solid electoral support for Home Rule (more than 80 per cent of the Irish parliamentary seats at all general elections in Ireland from 1885 to 1910) was a strong indication of general nationalist sentiment rather than

6 P. J. Mathews, *Revival: the Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, the Gaelic League and the Co-operative Movement* (Cork: Cork University Press for Field Day, 2003); R. F. Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland 1890–1923* (London: Allen Lane, 2014); D. Kiberd and P. J. Mathews (eds.), *Handbook of the Irish Revival: An Anthology of Irish Cultural and Political Writings 1891–1922* (Dublin: Abbey Theatre Press, 2015).

7 Mathews, *op.cit.*; also T. G. McMahon, *Grand Opportunity. The Gaelic Revival and Irish Society, 1893–1910* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008).

a stated preference for a specific constitutional formula. As Conor Cruise O'Brien perceptively remarked:

The Irish electorate which voted for Home Rule did not consist of men who, having considered all possible constitutions for Ireland, decided that autonomy within the empire was the best solution. It consisted of men who wanted independence, who were assured by men whom they trusted that Home Rule was the best they could get, and re-assured, by the opposition of men whom they disliked, that Home Rule must be worth having. If the Unionist Ascendancy said that Home Rule was trafficking with treason and marching through rapine to the disintegration of the Empire, then Home Rule sounded all right.⁸

Likewise, it may be said that Irish unionist sentiment (especially in Ulster) clearly encompassed rational fears regarding what an Irish legislature with even limited powers might become – a stepping stone to a separatist Irish state with a triumphant Catholic majority and an inclination towards economic interventions (e.g., protectionist measures) that would jeopardise the economic prosperity of Ireland's few major exporting manufacturers, and, in particular, of east Ulster's industrial enclave. Moreover, unionist anxiety that Home Rule would be the harbinger of Rome rule had a rational basis, given the rise of ultramontanism and the visible evidence of Irish episcopal ambitions in, for example, the sphere of education. But Ulster unionist sentiment also reflected a more visceral anti-Catholicism, on theological grounds, but also on grounds of conscience, ethno-cultural historical fears and prejudices, seasoned with an ingrained colonial-settler sense of cultural superiority. With the progressive Ulsterisation of unionist militancy and resistance to Home Rule from the early twentieth century, this deep-seated instinct became crucial in mobilising popular Protestant opinion.⁹

Varieties of nationalism, socialism and (principally through the suffrage issue) early feminism – singly or in combination – provided the ideological passion for the Irish revolutionary 'generation of 1914', dedicated to achieving personal freedom and creating the 'good society'.¹⁰ Self-help, creativity and innovation were their watchwords. Thus, in an Irish context, the 'vivid faces'

8 C. Cruise O'Brien (ed.), *The Shaping of Modern Ireland* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), 2.

9 A. Jackson, *The Ulster Party. Irish Unionists in the House of Commons, 1884–1911* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); P. Bew, *Ideology and the Irish Question: Ulster Unionism and Irish Nationalism 1912–1916* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 1–70.

10 R. Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980); For an Irish family portrait, see D. McMahon (ed.), *The Moynihan Brothers in Peace and War 1909–1918: Their New Ireland* (Dublin and Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 2004).

open to the prospect of revolution (and active in organisations dedicated to radical, if not necessarily revolutionary, change in the cultural and political disposition of the country) were to be found in the Gaelic League, in literary and drama circles and in a host of more explicitly political causes and campaigns, as well as in suffragist, trade union and philanthropic organisations and activities.¹¹ Poets, artists, intellectuals and journalists featured prominently, but they were not the whole story of an impatient national revivalism. A rising cohort of the educated lower middle class anxious to ‘move up’ and a cadre of local leaders formed in the land struggles of 1879–1886, in the councils of the Gaelic Athletic Association, and, after 1899, in elected local government bodies, constituted its vital sinews.¹²

Yet, for all this energy and the profusion of ideas and talents, the commanding heights of not only the political but also the economic and social landscape of Edwardian Ireland were firmly held by the respectable bourgeois property-owners, in all parts of the island and among all denominations. The success of the Land League – the Land Acts of 1881–1906 leading to peasant-proprietorship – provided a solid foundation for an essentially conservative rural society, with a bourgeois leadership integrating comfortable farmers, shopkeepers, merchants, professions, commercial interests, journalists and clergy.¹³ Land-hungry smallholders and the shrinking army of landless labourers could do little but swell the emigrant ranks or wait on ameliorative measures from the government or the church. There were, however, competing voices and visions. A whiff of Jacobinism clung to the clandestine Fenians. More robustly, on the left, the new trade unionism among the unskilled and the socialist message had gained a promising foothold within elements of the Irish working classes by the early twentieth century.¹⁴

And yet, the Catholic bourgeoisie was the dominant social formation for which the Home Rule party was the natural political vehicle. It stood for a firm commitment to constitutional politics, with a dash of literary Fenianism in its rhetoric, and an essentially conservative position on property, law and order, and social attitudes and behaviour. For all the personal rivalries and rancour that bedeviled the ranks of the Irish parliamentarians at Westminster

11 Foster, *op. cit.*, particularly 31–177.

12 *Ibid.* Also, T. Garvin, *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland 1858–1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); P. Maume, *The Long Gestation: Irish Nationalist Life 1891–1918* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1999).

13 For the classic account of the ‘challenging collectivity’, see S. Clark, *Social Origins of the Irish Land War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979).

14 D. Nevin (ed.), *Trade Union Century* (Cork and Dublin: Mercier Press, 1994); E. O’Connor, *Syndicalism in Ireland, 1917–23* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1988).

(and among their supporters at home) there was a powerful imperative to keeping the ‘politics of community’ dominant, rather than allowing more divisive issues (notably class, but also other ‘divisive’ issues, such as women’s suffrage) to intrude.¹⁵

The exception to this general profile was Ulster. Ulster was not uniformly different to the other provinces in its ethno-religious profile: Ulster’s distinction was that it was in religious identities a more evenly divided province (44 per cent Catholic, 53 per cent Protestant in 1911). Communal politics were also paramount here, and the Protestant tenant farmers in Ulster were no less purposeful than those elsewhere during the land agitation in demanding the best deal available for themselves. But from the emergence of Home Rule, and certainly from its Parnellite triumph in the 1880s, two distinct communities, with opposing political positions, hardened and moved progressively into two mutually exclusive and totalising narratives of identity and political objective.

The associational culture – and not only through the Orange Order membership and the Catholic Ancient Order of Hibernians, but also direct church-centred religious and social practice – reinforced the underlying reality of two distinct confessional communities. In areas where economic competition or congested urban settlement and dislocation were most marked, confessional division sometimes descended into sectarian conflict. The Protestant bourgeoisie had, through the Orange and other loyal orders, a mechanism for ensuring the primacy of ‘community’ politics over alternative sirens of identity or interests. The ‘politics of community’ would endure, indeed solidify, proving resistant to sporadic challenges from cross-community, class-based initiatives and interventions, and comfortably keeping mainstream trade union-based or political labour firmly in its subordinate place into the post-1922 decades.¹⁶

Cultural and civic activism with a cross-community dimension was not entirely absent in Ulster.¹⁷ But from at least the turn of the century the

15 For the continuing disruptive force of agrarian radicalism (notably land redistribution), see P. Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation in Ireland 1890–1910: Parnellites and Radical Agrarians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); F. Campbell, *Land and Revolution: Nationalist Politics in the West of Ireland 1891–1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

16 For a detailed examination of early tensions, see H. Patterson, *Class Conflict and Sectarianism: The Protestant Working-class and the Belfast Labour Movement, 1868–1920* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1980).

17 For Protestant interest in the Gaelic Revival, see J. Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1992), 419–23; also D. Ó Doibhlin (ed.), *Duanaire Gaedhilge Róis Ní Ógáin* (Dublin: An Clóchomhar, 1995).

political polarisation that saw the strengthening of a distinct Ulster unionist voice (distinct, that is, from the more dispersed southern unionists), was reflected in every sphere of life. Its early institutional forms anticipated the later partition realities. Thus, when Irish university education was reconfigured (from the old Royal University) in 1908, the new structure established a National University of Ireland with constituent colleges in Cork, Dublin (the old Catholic University) and Galway: but in Belfast, the stand-alone university was titled the Queen's University, Belfast.¹⁸ If the Catholic bourgeoisie was the dominant element within the nationalist front, from 1905 the more assertive Ulster Protestant bourgeoisie took the initiative within Ulster unionism from the older landed leadership, intent on forging communal solidarity and harnessing to effective political purpose the more elemental sectarian passions of 'the Orange street'.¹⁹

The Impact of the Great War, and its Aftermath

The introduction of the third Home Rule Bill in 1912 precipitated a succession of political (and in time, military) shocks in Ireland that would last until 1923. The militarisation of political and, briefly in Dublin, industrial confrontation happened quickly, with the founding of the Ulster Volunteer Force, the Citizen Army and the Irish Volunteers, all established during 1913. All were established with a declared defensive purpose. However, in common with a surging wave of militarisation across the continent of Europe (whether through state-controlled armies or an assortment of embryonic revolutionary militias), the Irish volunteers were enthused by much heady rhetoric on the pure nobility of manly soldiering, and a corresponding contempt for the trimming and trading of the politics of persuasion and compromise, characteristic of representative parliamentary government.²⁰

This surging wave crested in 1914. The outbreak of war transformed the political landscape in Ireland. It allowed the intractable problem of Ulster to be deferred until the war's end, and it provided the opening for both Redmond and Carson to establish firm *bona fides* for their preferred (if clearly

18 T. Dunne (ed.), *The National University of Ireland 1908–2008* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2008); T. W. Moody and J. C. Beckett, *Queen's Belfast 1845–1949: The History of a University* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959).

19 A. Jackson, *Ireland 1798–1998* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 215–44; T. Bowman, *Carson's Army: The Ulster Volunteer Force 1910–1922* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

20 See Foster, *Vivid Faces*, 221–57.

incompatible) solutions to the impasse; by urging their respective volunteer corps to join the war effort. However, for all Redmond's authority he faced opposition: a minority voice, but a vital one. A cluster of anti-recruitment groups openly campaigned against the war. Not all of these were pacifists. The socialists led by Connolly opposed a capitalist war between rival greedy empires and called for international solidarity between the working classes in resisting war. And the clandestine Irish republican movement – the Irish Republican Brotherhood – on both sides of the Atlantic was intent, as its revolutionary credo decreed, on using the war (and 'England's difficulty') as Ireland's opportunity to stage an armed revolt against British rule and to establish an Irish republic by force of arms.

The 1916 Rising was a relatively minor military episode, with fatalities no higher than 470 (the majority, civilians). However, the British response to the Rising was the trigger for a decisive shift in public opinion among the nationalist population, a shift on which the leaders of the Rising had gambled. The execution of fifteen of the leaders and the arrest of more than 3,500 others, many of whom had been active in cultural nationalist movements but had no connection with the Rising, had a significant impact on public opinion. As details of the lives (and bearing in death) of the rebel leaders became known, admiration for their ideals and character, if not yet retrospective approval of their actions, spread widely.²¹

The British mistakenly named the Rising a 'Sinn Féin' rebellion, thereby ensuring that 'Sinn Féin' now became a flag of convenience for all advanced nationalists who were prepared to praise the courage and ideals of the 1916 leaders and endorse the separatist cause for which they died. The end of 1917 (with the return of the interned prisoners and a new burst of organising) saw the launch of a reorganised Sinn Féin, with the surviving Rising commandant, Éamon de Valera, as president. The resurgent Sinn Féin placed itself at the head of the pan-nationalist opposition to the threat of conscription in Ireland during 1918. But the nationalist demand for 'self-determination', bought in blood by the 1916 sacrifice, had now moved on from Home Rule; for some, it had now moved to a non-negotiable republic.²²

Ulster unionists had also paid heavily in blood for their devotion to empire and the cause of the Union, notably at the Somme in July 1916. They were no more accommodating regarding Home Rule in late 1916 or during 1917 than

21 On the Rising, see C. Townshend, *Easter 1916: The Irish Rebellion* (London: Allen Lane, 2005); F. McGarry, *The Rising, Ireland: Easter 1916* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

22 M. Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland. The Sinn Féin Party 1916–1923* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

they had been during 1913–1914. The war years polarised further nationalist and Ulster unionist positions. With the general election at the end of 1918, under an enlarged electorate, the victory of Sinn Féin throughout most of nationalist Ireland set the bar high for the constitutional status of the Irish national state that was now being demanded. However, the Ulster unionists, with a majority of the seats in Ulster, were no less firm in their resolve to remain within the union. Some form of partition settlement was now inevitable. The issue, as indeed it had been since 1913, was its territorial extent and the duration of ‘Ulster’s’ exclusion from an Irish Home Rule state.²³

In January 1919, the inaugural meeting of the secessionist assembly (Dáil Éireann) in Dublin, attended by elected Sinn Féin deputies, reaffirmed the already declared Irish Republic, established a rival apparatus of government, and sent delegates to seek recognition of the Irish State at the peace talks in Paris. The opening of the Dáil was also accompanied by the first military action against crown forces (a few policemen) by the reconstituted Irish Volunteers (or Irish Republican Army – IRA as it became known). The War of Independence (1919–1921) was a guerilla campaign, prosecuted unevenly across limited areas of the country by IRA volunteers against crown forces. It was not a war that lent itself to a decisive victory for either side. The political pressures to find a solution were considerable, on both sides. Public opinion at home and abroad (notably in the United States and the dominions, where constituencies of the Irish diaspora were exercised by events in the homeland) pressed the British government to reach an accommodation. The IRA capacity to fight was not inexhaustible.²⁴ The elected Dáil may have succeeded in raising finance and maintaining a rudimentary apparatus of public administration and justice, but it was a constant challenge for it to gain the unequivocal recognition of its authority from the military leadership of the IRA. Moreover, given the nature of the guerilla campaign in the unsettled conditions of 1919–1921, the military leadership enjoyed primacy of authority over the political. In fact, for a solid core of die-hard republicans, the vesting of ultimate authority in the army command was the only cast-iron protection of the republic against backsliding by compromising politicians.²⁵ This

23 *Idem.*, *The Partition of Ireland, 1911–1925* (Dundalk: Dublin Historical Association, 1983).

24 The revolutionary years are best covered in C. Townshend, *The Republic. The Fight for Irish Independence, 1918–1923* (London: Allen Lane, 2013); D. Ferriter, *A Nation and not a Rabble: The Irish Revolution 1913–1923* (London: Profile Books, 2015); P. Hart, *The I.R.A. at War 1916–1923* (Oxford University Press, 1993).

25 For close study of military/civilian tension, see T. Garvin, *1922: The Birth of Irish Democracy* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1996).

suspicion of the tribe of politicians was not unique to militant Irish republicans in the aftermath of the Great War, nor would it be confined to the short revolutionary interval of 1919–1921. On the contrary, the tortuous issue of the relationship of the army of the republic (the IRA) to the evolving (and democratically endorsed) structures of Irish government after 1922, would cast a long shadow on Irish politics and insurrectionary action for the rest of the century.²⁶

If the establishment of an Irish Free State represented the best that could be wrested from Britain in 1921, it was clearly, in territorial extent and constitutional status, considerably less than the Irish republic for which the martyrs of 1916 had died. Yet, when Civil War erupted in 1922/23 it was not (as was feared and highly possible during 1913–1916) a military conflict between armed UVF and armed Irish Volunteers, but a split within Sinn Féin and the IRA on the constitutional status of the Irish national ‘state’ to be established as a result of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Partition scarcely featured in the bitter Dáil debate on the Treaty. The British government had already taken what would prove to be the decisive step in resolving the ‘Ulster Question’ left over from the autumn of 1914, with the Government of Ireland Act in 1920, establishing two subsidiary ‘Home Rule’ parliaments (with limited devolved functions under Westminster control) in Ireland; one in Belfast for six counties in Ulster and the other in Dublin for the remaining 26 counties. The offer fell well short of the minimum the Sinn Féin-controlled Dáil would accept (to say nothing of republican militants in the IRA leadership). In July 1921 a truce opened the way for the negotiations that would conclude with the Treaty of December 1921 and the establishment of a 26-county Irish Free State with dominion status.

So far as the issue of Partition was concerned, by the end of 1921 the bird had flown. The Ulster Unionists maximised the territory they could take, consistent with a secure, permanent majority for unionist dominance, and established in Belfast the devolved administration provided for in the 1920 Act. The priority was security, not only against the external ‘threat’, but, more urgently, security against the enemy within. This enemy was, in effect, the Catholic, nationalist minority (about a third of the population), lodged

26 For historical context, see M. Mulholland, ‘Political Violence’, in R. Bourke and Ian McBride (eds.), *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 382–402; for the republican mindset, see R. W. White, *Ruairí Ó Brádaigh: The Life and Politics of an Irish Revolutionary* (Indianapolis, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2006).

against its wishes in Northern Ireland, severed from the larger ‘majority’ nationalist community on the island of which it felt itself an integral part.²⁷

The establishment by the new northern administration of a special constabulary force – in effect, a Protestant citizen militia – enforced at a local level the majoritarian will upon which the northern state had been established. The threat posed by the IRA was no doubt real, but it was exaggerated by the Belfast regime, not only during 1920–1922 but also at regular intervals in later decades. Collins may have been prepared to countenance covert support for IRA actions within the six counties; but the strains of the War of Independence in the most active areas of the other three provinces, followed by the bitter internecine conflict of the Civil War, meant that the Dublin government was unable to provide any practical support (militarily or in any other way) to the nationalist minority in Northern Ireland.²⁸

The sorry chapter of the Boundary Commission, provided for in the Treaty as a sop to nationalists, closed in 1925 with an agreement between Dublin and London to abide by the territorial status quo. Neither government had the appetite to pursue the matter further.²⁹ The Border, for all the nationalist protests, was a reality accepted by both governments and by the Ulster unionist leadership. The northern nationalist minority would have to live with it. And so too would the smaller unionist minority within the Irish Free State. Though many southern unionists had reluctantly come to accept the inevitability of Home Rule – and of some form of Partition – before the outbreak of war in 1914, the impact of the events of 1916 and the subsequent turn of Irish nationalism in a more separatist direction from 1917, followed by the trauma of the War of Independence and Civil War years (in which many southern Protestants/unionists, with traditional loyalty to the crown and its forces, suffered reprisals, intimidation and destruction of property) sapped the morale of the southern Protestant community. War losses, the trauma of the independence struggle, and anxiety at what lay in store, took its toll on the southern unionists, prompting some to uproot and leave.³⁰ Those who remained had to accept, as had the nationalists in the north, that by 1925

27 E. Phoenix, *Northern Nationalism: Nationalist Politics, Partition and the Catholic Minority in Northern Ireland 1890–1940* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1994); M. Harris, *The Catholic Church and the Foundation of the Northern Ireland State* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993).

28 On the issue of early recognition of Northern Ireland by nationalists, regarding the payment of teachers’ salaries, see Phoenix, *op.cit.*, 209–12.

29 J. J. Lee, *Ireland 1912–1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 140–50.

30 A. Bielenberg, ‘Exodus: The Emigration of Southern Irish Protestants during the Irish War of Independence and the Civil War’, *Past and Present*, 218 (February 2013), 199–233.

Partition was firmly established. The minorities on both sides of what was now an international border had to come to terms with their new reality. It was a fate they shared with millions of others in post-war Europe.

By the early 1920s irredentism was rife from the Baltic to the Balkans, with ethnic minorities trapped on the 'wrong' side of the boundaries of many new states. In the light of the historical experience of several of these European minorities in later decades, it is reasonable to ask whether the fate of the Irish minorities under Partition was the worst that could have befallen them. Disappointed, disaffected and fearful many of them undoubtedly were in the aftermath of 1922. But what mattered now was how they would be treated in their new situation, and whether (and to what extent) they might be reconciled to these new circumstances.

Conservative Paths, 1922–1965

The years after 1922 saw both Irish states consolidate their authority and establish effective law and order after the turbulence of the revolutionary decade. A fusion of confessional and political loyalties was the dominant feature of the mutually exclusive national identities proclaimed by the two states and incorporated in their symbols, public rhetoric and rituals. The laws and regulations of each state, allowing for their very different competences, reflected confessional majoritarianism in each case. In both states, constitutional status was the presiding imperative of government policy; in both, the politics of community identity prevailed.³¹

The decades following the end of the Civil War were marked in the Irish Free State by the relentless enlargement of Irish sovereignty, from the stretching of dominion status in the 1920s through de Valera's more aggressive measures in the 1930s, the 1937 constitution (establishing a republic in all but name) and the assertion of unfettered sovereignty through maintaining neutrality in World War II.³² The formal declaration of a republic (and the final departure from the Commonwealth) in 1949 caused little excitement in Anglo-Irish relations, though it prompted the British government headed by Clement Atlee to pass the Ireland Act, guaranteeing that Northern Ireland would not cease to be a part of the UK until its parliament should decide

31 For a sharp comparative analysis, see D. Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands 1912–1939* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

32 For a sympathetic commentary, see D. Ferriter, *Judging Dev* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2007), esp. 123–93.

so.³³ Moreover, the determination to establish a distinct Irish ‘voice’ in international affairs was evident from the outset, in forceful contributions at the League of Nations and later, from 1955, at the United Nations (UN).³⁴ As for Northern Ireland, its status within the UK was never threatened after 1925. De Valera’s march to the republic and continuing anti-partitionist rhetoric in the south served to fortify unionist resolve and the 1949 Act merely copperfastened the constitutional status quo.

The two states were, essentially, confessional in character, but with marked differences. Craig explicitly proclaimed the Protestant character of the northern state, with his reference to a ‘Protestant parliament and a Protestant state’.³⁵ The Unionist dominance (the very basis of the Northern Ireland state) reached, in time, into all aspects of political, economic and social life: the manipulated electoral system; the broadcasting media; sabbatarianism in restricting access to recreation facilities; preferential or exclusive dealings in public housing allocation, and in all areas of public expenditure in which political influence could be deployed. Security against the ‘enemy within’ was the province of an almost exclusively Protestant formation, the Ulster Special Constabulary, and, in addition, there was the exclusive dominance of the public or civic sphere by the symbols and rituals of the majority.³⁶

The associational culture of the nationalist minority was marked by its own symbols (flags and emblems, names of sporting clubs), and republican and moderate nationalist politics asserted an alternative version of identity and political allegiance.³⁷ This tight communal politics did not go uncontested. Social distress and unemployment spikes, notably in the 1930s, produced occasional flurries of labour- or class-based politics. But these never

33 I. McCabe, *A Diplomatic History of Ireland, 1948–49: The Republic, the Commonwealth and NATO* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1991).

34 M. Kennedy, *Ireland and the League of Nations 1919–1946* (Dublin and Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 1996); J. M. Skelly, *Irish Diplomacy at the United Nations 1945–1965: National Interests and the International Order* (Dublin and Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 1997); M. Kennedy and J. M. Skelly (eds.), *Irish Foreign Policy 1919–1966* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).

35 Northern Ireland House of Commons Debates, Official Report (Belfast: HMSO), vol. 34, col. 1095 (24 April 1934).

36 B. Follis, *A State under Siege: The Establishment of Northern Ireland, 1920–1925* (Oxford University Press, 1995); M. Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State* (London: Pluto, 1980); P. Buckland, *The Factory of Grievances: Devolved Government in Northern Ireland, 1921–1939* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1979).

37 Harris, *op. cit.*; for the long view, see M. Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster: A history* (London: Allen Lane, 2000), and a case-study, A. C. Hepburn, *A Past Apart: Studies in the History of Catholic Belfast, 1856–1956* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1996).

posed a sustained electoral challenge or the threat of insurgency.³⁸ The communal politics of rival ethno-religious identities was normally strong enough (not least when manipulated by local political leadership) to drown out any clamour for class solidarity.

The southern state was formally more open and inclusive of all religious persuasions, guaranteeing religious freedom and citizens' equality through a written constitution, boasting a Protestant scholar (Douglas Hyde) as its first president, and with official republican rhetoric continuously invoking the tradition of Protestant nationalists and the ideals of the United Irishmen. The practices of the central government of the state were not infected with sectarian bias, though clearly there were incidents of jobbery at local level. Yet, the confessional character of the state was unmistakable in daily life.³⁹

The constitution and statute law reflected Catholic moral and social teaching in sensitive areas, such as marriage and the family, contraception and family planning, and censorship (print and cinema). Indeed, social cohesion, such as it was, was the outcome of high levels of conformity to the social values and teaching of the Catholic Church. This was not surprising. Constituting over 90 per cent of the population of the Irish national state, with overwhelming control of schools and commanding a network of church-run hospitals and charitable institutions, the Catholic Church infrastructure gave it enormous influence on all aspects of life. Politicians – for the most part – were deferential or politically attentive to the wishes and the warnings of bishops. A formidable network of organised Catholic laity exercised a wide supervisory and morally vigilant role in the main arteries of social life – from charitable organisations to library committees – ensuring that all such bodies, public or voluntary, would do 'the right thing' by the church.⁴⁰

Sexual behaviour and women's reproductive capacity were the most sensitive areas in which Catholic Church teaching sought to exercise control of public policy and morals. And yet, however strong the obedience of the Catholic laity to church teaching and clerical direction – and the legislators must be included here – the level of conformity and the social conservatism

38 See P. Devlin, *Yes, We Have No Bananas: Outdoor relief in Belfast 1920–1939* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1981).

39 For a measured southern Protestant critique, see W. B. Stanford's pamphlet, *Faith and Faction in Ireland Now* (Dublin and Belfast: APCK, 1946); Hubert Butler provided a humane, free-thinking witness – see J. McGuire and J. Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, volume 2 (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 121–3.

40 The standard is J. H. Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland 1923–1971* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1971); for a trenchant commentary, T. Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland* (2nd edn., Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1998).

of Irish society in the decades following the establishment of the Irish Free State is unimaginable in the absence of continuing emigration from the state in these decades. From the 1930s, Britain was the destination for the great majority of these emigrants. This ‘safety valve’ decanted, inter alia, surplus labour from an underperforming economy; potential political dissenters; social ‘problems’ (such as single mothers) who could not be discreetly locked away in charitable institutions at home; the sexually and socially frustrated; and writers and artists.⁴¹

This clericalist and, for many, claustrophobic climate faced sharp criticism, often framed in terms of betrayal of the liberation hopes and aspirations of the revolutionary generation. Not all dissident writers went into exile, nor all socialist republicans, activists for women’s rights or Protestant libertarians. The official leadership of the Protestant minority (the bishops, business and professional classes) offered their honest views to government when consulted. But mostly they followed a quietist route so far as the confessional character of the new state was concerned, probably relieved that their generally elevated socio-economic status was not threatened. In size and circumstance, the southern Protestant minority was very different to the Catholic minority in the north.⁴²

Perhaps the most notable casualty of this subordination of ‘freedoms’ to sovereignty was the manner in which women – vitally present in the revolutionary wave in a host of causes – were decisively constrained in exercising an active public role and relegated, in so far as state rules and practices could ensure, to the domestic sphere of childrearing and homemaking. There was spirited – but for the most part unavailing – opposition to this reduced role from a succession of women’s groups, and from the more radical elements of the trade union movement. But it would be the 1970s before the mapping of new contours of freedom and equality for women (as had been the revolutionary legacy) would be energetically renewed.⁴³

41 M. E. Daly, *The Slow Failure. Population Decline and Independent Ireland 1920–1973* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006); E. Delaney, *Demography, State and Society: Irish Migration to Britain 1921–1971* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000).

42 A. Ford, J. McGuire and K. Milne (eds.), *As by Law Established: The Church of Ireland since the Reformation* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1995); R. B. McDowell, *Crisis and Decline: The Fate of the Southern Unionists* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1997); J. White, *Minority Report: The Protestant Community in the Republic of Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1975).

43 R. C. Owens, *A Social History of Women in Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2005); M. O’Dowd and M. Valiulis (eds.), *Women and Irish History; Essays in Honour of Margaret McCurtain* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1997).

In 1918 Irish labour elected to 'wait' on the resolution of the national question. It would continue to wait. The trade union movement, for all its chronic splintering, retained an all-island structure. However, both unions and political labour had to accommodate to the communal politics dominant in both jurisdictions. Labour in the Dáil edged successive centrist governments a little to the left – in terms of social welfare and equality issues. Occasional bursts of social protest in the streets (for example, unemployment and tax marches) testified to continuing radical vitality, north and south, but never threatened to precipitate a decisive realignment of politics along class lines.⁴⁴

In terms of state-building, economic policy and the creation of social and cultural order, the exercise of sovereignty by the Irish national state was also markedly conservative. There was little innovation (apart from new nomenclature) in the structures of government and administration: the Whitehall model (including the primacy of the Department of Finance) was generally followed. As it was under the Union, so it would remain – a highly centralised apparatus of government and administration.⁴⁵ However, and revealingly, the new state abolished the 'Poor Law' system and decided to establish a preponderantly unarmed police force.

Perhaps the most ambitious initiative undertaken by the southern government, in seeking to realise the national regeneration agenda of the revolutionary era, was the commitment to restore the Irish language as the main vernacular. Given the historical circumstances of its decline and its perilous state by the end of the nineteenth century, and given Ireland's geo-cultural location on the superhighway of the Atlantic Anglophone world of the twentieth-century mass media, this was a daunting ambition. Concentrating on teaching the language in the schools, modest progress was made over many decades in producing cohorts of competent secondary bilinguals and in generating a lively literature in modern Irish. But the lack of a coherent strategy for turning acquired competence into general use, and the relentless erosion of the base-communities of native speakers, sapped early enthusiasm and, for many, belief in the achievability of the aim. Relentless political

44 F. Lane and D. Ó Drisceoil (eds.), *Politics and the Irish Working Class 1830–1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); N. Puirséil, *The Irish Labour Party 1922–73* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2007); E. O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland, 1824–2000* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2nd edn., 2011).

45 R. Fanning, 'Britain's Legacy: Government and Administration', in P. J. Drudy (ed.), *Ireland and Britain since 1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 45–64.

exhortation bred cynicism and resentment that by the end of the 1950s was but an aspect of a wider disillusion with the fruits of sovereignty.⁴⁶

In neither of the Irish states did the economy perform impressively in the decades after Partition. For Northern Ireland the halcyon days of its nineteenth-century industrial staples were past by the 1920s, though the exceptional war-time demands (1939–1945) brought a temporary recovery. International trading conditions and the inexorable shrinking of Britain's imperial reach had serious consequences for the British economy and presented difficult economic challenges to Northern Ireland leaders through the 1950s and 1960s. Those tasked with attracting new industry had to contend not only with international competition but also with the particular political and religious imperatives operating in the north's divided society. Living standards in Northern Ireland, however, were not dependent on the state of the economy. From the late 1920s, following the alteration of the basis for Northern Ireland's contribution to the UK exchequer, maintaining living standards there at UK levels (in welfare, health, education, infrastructure, communications) required continuous subsidies from London. This became especially important after 1945 with the establishment of the 'Welfare State' across the UK.⁴⁷

The economic policy of the Irish Free State of the 1920s was largely one of free trade: minimally disruptive of the existing structure of the economy and trade, with agricultural exports for the British market the bedrock. Monetary and fiscal policy were tightly conservative. A notable exception to the general fiscal caution was the massive state-sponsored hydroelectric plant on the Shannon sanctioned in 1925. This interventionist tendency – on a case-by-case basis, where a recognised national strategic need had been identified – would be a feature of successive Irish governments in later decades, and would result in a varied portfolio of state and semi-state bodies.

The great obsession of the de Valera governments after 1932 was the Holy Grail of self-sufficiency. Import substitution would underpin the establishment of an Irish manufacturing base, under Irish ownership. The protectionist surge in economic policy from 1932 was at its most intense in the early years, when it was exacerbated by the tariff war with Britain resulting from de

46 For perspectives on the language question, B. Ó Cuív (ed.), *A View of the Irish Language* (Dublin: Government Stationery Office, 1969) and for revisionist views, C. Nic Pháidín and S. Ó Cearnaigh (eds.), *A New View of the Irish Language* (Dublin: Cois Life, 2008).

47 On the economy of both states in the twentieth century, see A. Bielenberg and R. Ryan, *An Economic History of Ireland since Independence* (London: Routledge, 2013); also useful is K. A. Kennedy, T. Giblin and D. McHugh, *The Economic Development of Ireland in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).

Valera's decision to unilaterally suspend payment of the land annuities debt due to Britain under the 1922 Treaty. This short tariff war was severely disruptive of the Irish economy. But already by 1935, the Coal-Cattle pact signalled a realisation that Ireland needed to import coal and that Britain wanted to buy Irish cattle. The annuities dispute was settled in 1938, but a protectionist regime was maintained throughout the de Valera era, and into the 1960s. Modest increases in industrial employment and the creation of a (mainly unambitious) native entrepreneurial cohort did not provide the basis for sustaining even modest economic growth.⁴⁸

The shortages and rationing during the war years revealed starkly the unattainability of the goal of self-sufficiency. Some reconsideration of economic strategy was urgently needed. But in the aftermath of 1945 – with major new initiatives launched for European recovery – what is remarkable is how tardy, protracted and piecemeal the reconsideration and redirection of Irish economic policy turned out to be. Political volatility was as much a consequence as a cause of the indifferent political response to the economic challenges of the post-war decade. There was no shortage of voices demanding a radical new direction in the affairs of the state, including calls for an Irish version of the economic planning approach being adopted for post-war reconstruction in several European states (France, Italy). Moreover, the immediate post-war decade or so was punctuated by a series of initiatives in Irish economic policy that clearly acknowledged the areas where more focused action was to be undertaken and new structures established: in promoting exports, industrial investment, tourism, the fishing industry, management and industrial standards.⁴⁹ But these significant initiatives, crucial for the future direction of the Irish economy from the late 1950s, were not part of a coherent economic strategy, and throughout the fifties the Irish economy lurched from one crisis to another: with overall stagnation, deflationary dips in output and employment, and a crisis of confidence that saw net emigration of more than 400,000 in the decade. The fruits of political sovereignty had turned badly sour.⁵⁰ The forces resisting a more coherent radical approach included not

48 For interpretative perspectives, see M. E. Daly, *Industrial Development and Irish National Identity 1922–1939* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1992), and J. K. Jacobsen, *Chasing Progress in the Irish Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Also Lee, *Ireland 1912–1985*, 175–328.

49 Key initiatives included, Institute for Industrial Research & Standards (1946), Industrial Development Authority (1949), Córás Tráchtála (1951), Bord Iascaigh Mhara [=Irish Fishery Board] (1952), Bord Fáilte [=Irish Tourism Board] (1952), Irish Management Institute (1952), and Ireland joining the IMF in 1957.

50 T. Garvin, *News from a New Republic: Ireland in the 1950s* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2010); D. Keogh, F. O'Shea and C. Quinlan (eds.), *The Lost Decade: Ireland in the 1950s* (Cork and Dublin: Mercier Press, 2004).

only such predictable vested interests as inefficient protected industries and hyper-cautious civil servants, but also those for whom the concept of ‘planning’ was freighted with Soviet collectivist meaning.⁵¹

Radical corrective action could not be delayed indefinitely. Already in 1948/9 the decision to accept reconstruction loans from the Marshall Aid programme demanded some measure of planning.⁵² The crisis of the 1950s finally forced a more expansive and ambitious economic new departure. The Lemass–Whitaker initiatives of 1958–1966 – with the launch of a series of economic plans – brought a degree of coherence to the articulation of a new direction in economic policy, whatever the shortcomings and inconsistencies of the actual plans themselves. Whether or not the initiative fully merits the description of a ‘new departure’ in economic strategy, it certainly reset the discourse of patriotism and national objectives, away from self-sufficiency and exhortations on Irish cultural identity and towards economic development and rising living standards.⁵³

Taken with other developments – the inauguration of a national television service, the reciprocal visits of Seán Lemass and Terence O’Neill, the opening of access to free secondary education – there is a sound case for seeing the period 1958–1966 as a critical hinge on which the modern Irish state turned: from ‘Ireland her own’ to a more open engagement with, and address to, external forces (for exports, investment and ideas). Impatient explorations of the scope for enhanced individual freedoms, choices, opportunities and life-chances emerged to challenge the valorisation of frugal comfort, the hallowed deference to seniority and the cloying embrace of stability that, to many, had come to mean simply stagnation.

New Directions: Post-1960s Ireland

By the later 1960s the future trajectory of Irish society – in ideology, economy, politics and cultural direction – was becoming more clearly discernible. The eclipse of the vision and the values of ‘de Valera’s Ireland’ was neither abrupt

51 M. E. Daly, *Sixties Ireland: Reshaping the Economy, State and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) discusses these forces in detail; a more favourable view of post-war thinking is G. Murphy, *In Search of the Promised Land: The Politics of Post-War Ireland* (Cork and Dublin: Mercier Press, 2009).

52 B. Whelan, *Ireland and the Marshall Plan 1947–1957* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).

53 The positive view of the Lemass era is in Lee, *Ireland 1912–1985*; and in B. Girvin and G. Murphy (eds.), *The Lemass Era: Politics and Society in the Ireland of Seán Lemass* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2005); For a trenchant revisionist view, see M. E. Daly, *Sixties Ireland*. Also, R. Savage, *A Loss of Innocence? Television and Irish Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

nor total. Yet, the underlying direction of the society and the economy had decisively shifted from protectionist self-sufficiency (however modified) to an aspiring small 'open' trading economy and a society avidly open to external cultural stimuli (still overwhelmingly from the Anglophone world). Not all sectors of Irish society embraced this new departure with equal ardour: but the new leadership cadre of 'modernisers' (in politics, the bureaucracy, business, the media and, fitfully, the universities) overwhelmingly espoused the aspiration for Ireland to join the European 'Common Market' (EEC).⁵⁴

The fact that the Irish economy was inextricably linked to the British economy meant that Ireland's ambition to join the EEC was conditional on British entry. In the event it would be 1973 before Ireland and Britain gained membership of the EEC. In the Irish plebiscite on entry, a large majority (83 per cent) voted in favour of entry. Clearly, the new horizons of Irish ambition (articulated principally in terms of economic prosperity) enjoyed popular endorsement. Sovereignty would henceforth be shared. The new European setting in which both Ireland and Britain were now lodged would place both states, at least formally, on an equal footing.

There would be no dramatic repudiation of traditional national objectives: the reunification of the country and the restoration of the Irish language. But the first was quietly folded into the thawing of North–South relations signalled by the Lemass–O'Neill talks. De Valera's departure from political leadership had also opened the way for the official retreat from the aim of restoring Irish as the principal national language. From the early 1960s the declared objective of state policy was a conveniently imprecise commitment to bilingualism. The relegation of the 'language question' to the margins of real political debate would be a relentless process in the decades that followed, even as the actual communities of Irish-speakers showed continuing vigour in establishing new (largely urban) networks of Irish-language schools and a lively presence in popular mass media.⁵⁵

From the outset Irish enthusiasm for the European project was principally powered by concrete expectations, namely the prospect of economic support for achieving higher living standards. Moreover, it was further claimed that the European setting would encourage wider comparative cultural perspectives. In the early years, Irish confidence seemed justified by the price supports delivered through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and, more

54 D. J. Maher, *The Tortuous Path: The Course of Ireland's Entry into the EEC, 1948–1973* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1986).

55 Nic Pháidín and Ó Cearnaigh, *New View of the Irish Language*, 27–42.

modestly, by structural and regional funds. In a tight club of nine states dedicated to ‘convergence’, Ireland had obvious entitlements. However, the optimism that informed the strong Irish vote of 1972 was not without a lining of anxiety.

The opening up of the Irish market – in successive phases up to the completion of the Single Market – accelerated the demise of the more inefficient manufacturing firms established under the protectionist regime from the 1930s. More significantly, the relentless enlargement of the EEC (later EU), by the accession of generally poorer countries, put pressure on the CAP and European budgets and reduced Ireland’s influence and entitlements. Enlargement altered the geo-political balance of the EU, and from the 1990s a reunited Germany inexorably began to exercise its natural weight. Changes in governance and voting systems – responding to the strains and complexity of continuous and rapid enlargement – further diminished Ireland’s influence.

Anxiety at this shifting balance – and at the intrusions of a bureaucratic behemoth – led over time to a cooling of Irish enthusiasm for the European project. And yet, despite rejection by Irish voters of the Lisbon and Nice Treaties at the first time of asking, Ireland, having bought into the European idea, would not succumb to buyer’s remorse. Ireland marched in step with each move to the creation of the Single Market and, crucially, the adoption of the single currency. In electing to adopt the Euro in 2002, the Irish government surrendered control of exchange rates and monetary policy, two of the principal competences historically vested in a sovereign national state. To this relentless voluntary surrender of sovereignty, only a minority of republican-socialist groups made regular protest.⁵⁶

Perhaps the most vital economic advantage conferred by Ireland’s steadfast commitment to the ‘open’ economy from the 1960s, was its attractiveness to the inward flow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), particularly from the USA. Indeed, with the tightening of the European Single Market framework in the late twentieth century, Ireland became a singularly attractive portal to the EU for US firms with a global or transnational reach, with favourable Irish corporate tax rates enhancing language and labour skill advantages. The Irish government minister who mused that, in terms of business culture and values, Ireland was ‘closer to Boston than to Berlin’ (‘can-do’ individualism versus collectivist social democracy), drew attention to the essential point, that from the 1970s Ireland had sought to face simultaneously east to

⁵⁶ The social scientist, A. Coughlan, and the publications of the Irish Sovereignty Movement, provided consistent opposition to ever-deepening European union.

continental Europe and west to the US, in seeking to maximise its opportunities and secure its future prosperity.⁵⁷ The successes of the Irish diaspora – spectacularly so in the case of Irish America – provided invaluable leverage (and global prominence) for Ireland, the benefits of which extended beyond gains in tourism or an ‘edge’ in attracting inward investment.

Whatever the cost-benefit verdict might be, in strictly economic terms, on Ireland’s EU experience, a combination of external shocks (including oil crises and accelerating global trade liberalisation) and poor management of the economy at home, generated a series of economic crises in the 1970s and 1980s, triggering a depressingly familiar reflex in the 1980s with a net emigrant outflow of about 500,000.⁵⁸ Severe corrective action and a series of neo-corporatist ‘national agreements’ between all the economic and social partners prepared the economy to take advantage of favourable international conditions and to achieve impressive economic growth in the 1990s and into the early years of the new century.

It might have been expected that British–Irish relations, in good shape in the mid-1960s, would have found much common ground for cooperation within the EEC. This optimistic prospect was seriously threatened, during the three decades after 1968, by violent civil strife in Northern Ireland, which extended sporadically into the Republic and into English cities, and beyond.⁵⁹ The ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland from the late 1960s did not originate in the fundamental terms of an internecine or inter-state conflict over sovereignty. A civil rights and equality campaign for the Catholic minority – deploying the repertoire of demonstrations, marches, sit-ins and meetings then characteristic of radical civil rights movements on both sides of the Atlantic – provoked resistance from die-hards within the Unionist government and, more crucially, from popular loyalism supported by ‘their’ police. The reformers in Stormont, under pressure from London, moved to implement reforms, but the centre could not hold and violence increased.

The escalating confrontation on the ground congealed before long into a recognisably elemental shape: with the re-emergence within Catholic/nationalist areas of a hitherto moribund IRA, initially as poorly armed defenders of

57 Address of Tánaiste, Mary Harney T. D. to the American Bar Association (meeting in Dublin) on 21 July 2000 – text in R. Aldous (ed.), *Great Irish Speeches* (London: 2007), 184–5.

58 For 1970s, D. Ferriter, *Ambiguous Republic. Ireland in the 1970s* (London: Profile Books, 2012); R. F. Foster, *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change 1970–2000* (London: Allen Lane, 2007).

59 M. Mulholland, *The Longest War* (Oxford University Press, 2002); T. Hennessey, *Northern Ireland: The Origins of the Troubles* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2005).

their communities and later, as they became militarily more formidable and more ruthless, as a force dedicated to subverting the northern state and forcing a British ‘withdrawal’. The British government, when finally moved to exert its ultimate authority, suspended the local administration (Stormont), sent in the army to restore public order, and undertook direct rule in Northern Ireland, while seeking to devise a new viable local administration that would enjoy cross-community support and ensure peace and an acceptable measure of political stability. As for the Irish government, a general sympathy in the south for the predicament of the nationalist/Catholic minority – and eruptions of popular outrage at particularly emotive episodes (Bloody Sunday, hunger strikes) – did not ultimately dislodge the steady pursuit by Dublin of essentially the same objective as London – an acceptable, inclusive cross-community administration in Northern Ireland, but – a crucial proviso – with Dublin’s role as guarantor of such a settlement formally recognised. In the event, the search for such a new dispensation would be protracted.

The strategy of the British military and security chiefs predictably reverted to the fundamental role of defeating the terrorist threat to the state by all available means – including the dark arts of counter-insurgency. The republican and loyalist paramilitaries continually crossed new limits of ruthlessness. What resulted was almost three decades of violence, punctuated by a litany of atrocities and a noxious polarisation of the two communities that affected all aspects of life: bombings, abductions, assassinations, shootings, population displacement, torture, hunger strikes, internment without trial, intimidation and arson; together with contamination of the criminal justice system and serious trespass on civil liberties in all jurisdictions of the archipelago.

The oscillation between an emphasis on security priorities and the search for a political solution raised recurring difficulties in British–Irish relations, in which the personalities of political actors and their attention to the exigencies of domestic politics regularly queered the diplomatic pitch. Then, after many false starts, and the intervention of an assortment of intermediaries, the groundwork was completed for the Belfast Agreement of 1998. The careful choreography of the final elaborate accommodations required direct American mediation: but the political and diplomatic will, determination and capacity of key echelons of the establishment in Dublin and London, and the readiness of the main political leaders in Northern Ireland to commit to compromise, were crucial. Clearly evident in the accommodations were the lessons that had been painfully learned during the conflict. Acceptance of the principle of consent was the foundation stone of the settlement, symbolised by the simultaneous endorsement of the Agreement north and south.

The Belfast Agreement (with later refinements that brought the more irreconcilable elements of Paisleyite loyalism within the consensual arc) left the constitutional position of Northern Ireland under London authority fundamentally unchanged. The deletion (supported by 94 per cent of southern voters) from the 1937 constitution of Articles two and three – claiming sovereignty over the entire island – and their substitution by an aspiration for unification by consent of the people, was a crucial concession to unionist demands. However, the structures of power-sharing, joint citizenship and cross-border institutions signalled the end of simple majoritarianism; and the formal recognition of the Irish government as co-guarantor of the Agreement was elevated by the lodging of the Agreement as an international treaty at the UN.⁶⁰ The impact of the ‘Troubles’ had generated an intense, difficult and often bitter reassessment of traditional nationalist assumptions on re-unification and the Ulster problem, at the end of which parsing the dogma of sovereignty had yielded to guaranteeing equality and exploring new modalities of peaceful cohabitation within Northern Ireland and throughout the archipelago.⁶¹

Social Change

While the northern conflict absorbed huge energies and resources from all parties in Ireland, the wheels of the world did not stop turning. In fact, in the closing decades of the twentieth century the social climate and character of Irish society turned decisively in a liberal direction, with secularisation and urbanisation as key drivers. External influences – ideological and cultural – contributed to the shift: Western feminism, medical and media advances, the magnetic pull of cities worldwide. The impact of various European institutions (directives and court rulings) in such areas as women’s rights and wider employment rights, was frequently the source or the catalyst of change in domestic law in Ireland in the decades from the 1970s.

But domestic agents of change were also central to setting the agenda and forcing the pace. These included a cohort of feminist activists, well embedded

60 A sharply critical commentary on the road to the 1998 Agreement is provided in P. Bew, *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity 1789–2006* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 486–555.

61 For assessments of the Belfast Agreement based on theoretical work on power-sharing by A. Lijphart, see J. McGarry and B. O’Leary, *The Northern Ireland Conflict: Consociational Engagements* (Oxford University Press, 2004), and *Understanding Northern Ireland: Colonialism, Control and Consociation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

in media and effective in finding key arteries of political advocacy. More conventional organisational channels were also vital. The Commission on the Status of Women (1970) was a harbinger of the kind of vital groundwork (facts, figures and recommendations, experts and energetic lobbyists) on which the incremental progress of the following decades would depend. More dramatic episodes symbolised and accelerated the shift in status and in the public role of women. Mary Robinson's election as president in 1990 (liberal, human rights lawyer and prominent advocate of women's rights) made a powerful statement – domestically and internationally – on the direction of social change in Ireland.⁶²

The political debate on sensitive issues of social change in these decades was regularly bruising. But for all the divisive rancour that marked the demand for legislative change during several of these campaigns, the tide of public opinion running in a liberal direction was not for turning: legalisation of contraception (1979) – initially on a restrictive basis, later relaxed; criminalisation of marital rape (1990); decriminalisation of homosexual acts (1993); divorce (1995); same-sex marriage (2015).

The dramatic weakening of the influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland was, of course, crucial to the direction and pace of change in these areas of individual choice and social values and behaviour, given the church's established 'moral monopoly' in these areas. The cumulative effect of declining vocations, widening employment opportunities through improved access to education, the changing realities 'on the ground', as it were, with regard to the behaviour of young people, the effect of cultural waves from the USA and the UK, mediated through mass media – all combined in shifting the ground. The enormous damage to the authority and standing of the Catholic Church, internationally but with particular ferocity in Catholic Ireland (with its far-flung spiritual empire among the Irish diaspora and in its missionary network), inflicted by the tsunami of sexual scandals and revelations of institutional abuse and cover-up, unquestionably hastened the pace of liberal change and unnerved the party of resistance from the 1990s.⁶³

62 L. Connolly and T. O'Toole, *Documenting Irish Feminisms: The Second Wave* (Dublin: Woodfield Press, 2005).

63 L. Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2004); For a lively personal perspective, see M. Kenny, *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1997); on the obsessive issue, see D. Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (London: Profile Books, 2012).

Significantly, the enduring strength of religious convictions was much in evidence in Northern Ireland, where traditional Catholic teaching on sexual matters found common cause with a robustly conservative Protestant evangelical constituency, in opposition to key elements of the liberal agenda: for example, on homosexuality ('save Ulster from sodomy') and same-sex marriage. But, in truth, the central preoccupation in Northern Ireland over three decades with finding a solution to violent conflict and the constitutional question seriously retarded considered public discussion of economic modernisation and wider issues of social and cultural change. Moreover, giving substance in general social intercourse to the ideas of parity of esteem and shared responsibility embodied in the formal structures of government – in effect, normalising everyday life – would inevitably prove challenging, notwithstanding the reasonable expectation of a peace dividend for the economy. Ingrained attitudes rarely change suddenly. Legacy issues of the years of violence left dark shadows and rituals of assertion of local territorial control (and defence) continued to retain their potential to inflame.

There has been a severe assessment of the 'performance' of the independent Irish state in its first six decades – in terms of economic growth, living standards and population retention – compared to other small western and northern European nation states.⁶⁴ Among the more challenging cultural explanations suggested for this failure has been the persistence of a post-colonial intellectual dependency syndrome (specifically, a dependence on British models and ideas unsuited to dynamic state-building).⁶⁵ Yet, given the historical experience of many European states, large and small, in these decades, one may ask whether an Irish state that maintained peace, parliamentary democracy and the rule of law, and that, while ideologically secure within the Western camp, earned a reputation in international bodies as an honest broker and a dedicated contributor to peace-keeping, might not also merit a column of credit.⁶⁶ Emigration, Catholic conservatism and a dispersed property-owning middle class ensured the long dominance of cautious

64 Lee, *Ireland 1912–1985*, is the principal critic, 511–687; but B. Girvin's assessment of Ireland's 'performance' employs different comparators, *Between Two Worlds* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1989); see also Jacobsen, *op.cit.*

65 Lee, *op.cit.*; Girvin, *op.cit.* identifies Ireland as a semi-peripheral state, between the First and Third World; for the case against a colonialist reading of the Irish historical experience, see S. Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

66 Acknowledgement of the achievement of stable democracy comes in J. Prager, *Building Democracy in Ireland. Political Order and Cultural Integration in a Newly Independent Nation* (Cambridge University Press, 1986).

centrist politics, in which the valorisation of its insurrectionary moment of origin was reserved for comforting state rhetoric and ritual.

The combined impact of trade liberalisation and Ireland's European odyssey in search of prosperity, together with the severe self-examination forced by the northern conflict, created the need, the cultural climate and the policy framework for the 'reinvention of the republic'.

Conclusion

By the start of the new millennium relations between Ireland and Britain, at all levels, had reached extravagant cordiality, with reciprocal official gestures of respect (the official visits of Queen Elizabeth II to Ireland – the first reigning monarch since independence to do so – and of the Irish President to the UK); full Irish government involvement in World War I ceremonies – a recognition of shared sites of memory and mourning.⁶⁷ A note of nostalgia for the Redmondite legacy was evident in the centenary commemorations of the revolutionary events of 1913–1916 in Ireland.⁶⁸ The world of popular culture – mass media, sport, music, fashion – was utterly permeable within the archipelago. The 'Troubles' – notably the bombing of targets in Britain – made life difficult for sections of working-class Irish in British cities, with sharp hostility at times of particular danger: but with the ending of violence, relations quickly improved.

However, what became strikingly clear, once the Agreements had established stability in Northern Ireland and restored Anglo-Irish relations to a state of amity, was the extent to which globalisation in the early twenty-first century had transformed not only the economic prospects but, more profoundly, the deeper relevance of small national states to the lives of their citizens. The accelerating trade globalisation from the 1980s, combined with the revolution in communications technology, and the ever-increasing speed and sophistication of international financial transactions, resulted in the emergence of global conglomerates with resources effectively beyond the regulatory capacity of even the most powerful democratic 'open' states, not to speak of such relative minnows as Ireland.

67 J. Horne (ed.), *Our War: Ireland and the Great War* (Dublin: RIA, 2008); J. Horne and E. Madigan (eds.), *Towards Commemoration: Ireland in War and Revolution, 1913–1923* (Dublin: RIA, 2013).

68 The principal defender of Redmond's legacy was the former Taoiseach, John Bruton: see the article by S. Collins in the *Irish Times*, 16 August 2014, and also the *Irish Independent*, 17 January 2016.

More particularly, the healthy expansion of the Irish economy in the later 1990s lurched in the early years of the new century into a property-based bubble, with a ballooning of state and personal debt. The 2008 global banking and credit crisis shattered the Irish banking system and plunged the Irish economy into crisis. The corrective medicine prescribed for Ireland by the International Monetary Fund, the European Commission and the European Central Bank – enforced as a ‘programme’ by a team or ‘troika’ from these institutions – drove the Irish economy into severe contraction and left a massive debt burden for later generations. The crisis – and the remedy prescribed – was a cruel demonstration of how vulnerable the small ‘open’ economy of Ireland was to seismic global shocks, and how very limited was the influence of Ireland, or its claims for special consideration, when the interests of larger states within the EU (notably Germany) and of powerful financial institutions were involved.

Taking the corrective medicine of sharp austerity enabled Ireland to exit the ‘troika’ programme just in time for the centenary anniversary of the 1916 Rising, enabling the Taoiseach to claim that Ireland had recovered its ‘economic sovereignty’.⁶⁹ But, in truth, the crisis merely highlighted what, at least from the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, had become an invincible fact of life: that the notion of national sovereignty in the context of ever-deepening European (EU) integration and global trade liberalisation bore little resemblance to what nationalists had understood it to mean (and to promise) a century earlier.

This chastening experience, in the context of global trade liberalisation and the flexing of muscles by large states, was not, of course, unique to Ireland. Indeed, the cooling of Ireland’s ardour for the European project was some way short of the full tide of Euroscepticism surging through several EU states by the second decade of the new century. The UK – where, for historical reasons, Euroscepticism was particularly deeply embedded – finally saw these anxieties and disillusionment come to a head in a plebiscite in the summer of 2016, in which the slogan ‘take back control of our country’ proved a powerful call. By a 52 per cent to 48 per cent vote, Britain decided to leave the EU, the first state ever to so decide since the launch of the European project.

It was ironic that the British (more correctly English) longing for the restoration of national sovereignty was accompanied by Irish pleas to the UK voters to reject the sirens of national sovereignty (‘little Englandism’) and to stay with the project and structures of shared sovereignty and a common

⁶⁹ Ireland exited the bailout programme (supervised by the ‘troika’) in December 2013.

destiny within the European (EU) family. In short, in 2016 Irish leaders were warning their English neighbours against a too narrow version of national 'Home Rule' and against the danger of jeopardising the clear benefits of membership of a larger [European] 'union'.⁷⁰

As the new century advanced, Ireland's changing social complexion served to further highlight the receding world of protectionism, cultural no less than economic. By the second decade of the twenty-first century, Ireland's population growth over the previous two decades had introduced new immigrants from the EU states of eastern Europe, in addition to a migrant minority from Africa and Asia; making it increasingly less likely that future explorations of Irish identity would be conducted on essentialist ethno-cultural terms. Indeed, this had already become apparent in the work of Irish creative artists – in literature, theatre, cinema and the fine arts. Freedom to explore no longer required exile; there were no incarcerating nets (nationality, language or religion) from which Irish artists might feel – as Joyce had felt in 1912 – impelled to flee.

In 1885 Parnell declared that 'no man has the right to fix the boundary of the march of a nation'.⁷¹ The quest for an independent Irish state was fuelled by a deep sense of historical injustice and by an optimistic belief in the creative possibilities of national sovereignty. On the other hand, Ulster unionist resolve in resisting this proposition was based on the claim that this shared historical memory was not theirs, and by a conviction that their well-being, prosperity and particular ethno-religious identity were best protected by continuing membership of the British state and empire.

The story of both Irish states after 1922 demonstrated that concepts of national sovereignty and boundaries (in the abstract or embodied in structures and institutions) are neither fixed nor permanent, but subject to revision, accommodation and renegotiation, in response to the ever-changing contours of power in the world and to the basic unheroic needs of people everywhere to live in a tolerable state of peace and comfort.

70 See, for example, report of the Taoiseach's speech, *Irish Examiner*, 21 June 2016. Other prominent Irish public figures likewise urged the UK voters to vote to remain in the EU.

71 Speech at Cork, 21 January 1885.

