

**Becoming Conspicuous: Irish Travellers,
Society and the State, 1922-70**

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Abstract

This thesis gives an historical account of the official and popular reaction to Travellers in independent Ireland. It describes the people who travelled Irish roads, outlining how and why Travellers were distinguishable from settled people. This study shows that one consequence of the developments in state and society from 1922 onwards was the alienation and isolation of Travellers.

The urban and rural working class experienced massive social change, often as a result of government policy. Travellers became socially and economically distinct from the general population because of changing attitudes to the family economy and self-employment determined by legislation such as the School Attendance Act 1926. When the introduction of planning redefined public space, campsites came to be viewed as eyesores. Planning legislation also introduced the concept of an amenity, a landscape designed for popular and tourist consumption. This had considerable implications for Travellers' use of marginal land.

Despite complaints from local representatives, successive governments refused to tackle the 'itinerant problem'. Occasionally efforts were made to target Travellers for public health reasons or on the basis of problems caused by vagrancy and homelessness. However, the government believed that the legal implications for the whole population of anti-Traveller measures were not worth enduring. While Travellers evaded repressive measures, they were largely ignored in welfare provision. Social welfare was extended in an ad hoc, piecemeal manner, with Travellers as a group among the last in society whose entitlement to assistance was recognised. The publication of the *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* in 1963 marked a shift in the relationship between Travellers and the state.

The report recommended settlement and assimilation as the solution to widespread poverty among Travellers and the hostility felt by the settled community. How the settlement programme was organised and directed, its successes and failures are also analysed. Many Travellers were politicised by their experience in the settlement programme of the 1960s. The thesis concludes when Traveller representatives were included in organisations established to minister to their community.

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Abbreviations

AMA	Association of Municipal Authorities
CAI	Cork Archives Institute
DCA	Dublin City Archives
DH	Department of Health
DJ	Department of Justice
DT	Department of Taoiseach
GCCC	General Council of County Councils
HA	Department of Home Affairs
ISC	Itinerant Settlement Committee
JGLS	Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society
NAI	National Archives Ireland
NFP	Northside Folklore Project
PRONI	Public Records Office Northern Ireland
RBÉ	Roinn Bhéaloideas Éireann/Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin
RCB	Representative Church Body Library
RDC	Rural District Council
SMGC	Scott Macfie Gypsy Collection
SJL	Sidney Jones Library, University of Liverpool
SSVP	Society of St Vincent de Paul
UDC	Urban District Council

Introduction

Irish Travellers are a distinctive indigenous nomadic minority living and working alongside the majority settled population. This study poses and answers the question: what was the historical relationship between Travellers and settled people? What forces shaped and influenced minority-majority relations from 1922 to 1970? This study demonstrates that broad social change, often initiated by government policy, adversely affected Traveller-settled relations by increasing the differences in social and economic organisation between the two communities. Much scholarship on nomadic minorities has insisted upon their traditional rural position but the historical evidence advanced here and elsewhere proves they were neither exclusively urban nor rural.¹ Nevertheless, Travellers become an urban public 'problem' in the post war period, suggesting that developments in the city environment play a significant role in mediating Travellers' position in Irish society.

After World War II, Travellers became conspicuous and increasingly unacceptable. Changes in official and popular definitions of land use, public and private space rendered Travellers alien to a society enshrining rigid social norms. In this study, the catalyst for change in modern Ireland is not the economic policy of Seán Lemass and T.K. Whittaker but mundane legislation on planning and welfare. Popular reaction to Travellers and government policy formulated to address these complaints are interlocking narratives in this thesis. Why government refused to tackle problems caused by Travellers for so long reveals much about the function of the state in twentieth-century Ireland. Of particular importance was the relationship between voluntary organisations dispensing charity and a state unwilling (and often unable) to tackle complex social issues. Attitudes to welfare, charity and land use were moulded by government policy, while social conventions were enshrined in legislation. As David Sibley has argued, the status of non-conforming minorities worsens considerably as the state extends its remit.² For this study, I chose not to look at change in the Traveller community, but to examine developments in Irish society which could affect attitudes to

¹ For a critique of the modernisation model see David Sibley, *Outsiders in Urban Societies* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 77-88.

² Sibley, *Outsiders in Urban Societies*, pp. 31-9.

Travellers. This approach was dictated by archival material that did not prominently feature Travellers.

A wide variety of sources, both primary and secondary, were used in this study. Scholarship on Travellers is small and dominated by contemporary debates such as appropriate site provision and access to health care.³ Work on Gypsies in Britain and other European countries was also consulted, though it had little direct relevance to the Irish historical situation.⁴ Romani studies as a sub-specialism on the fringes of academia is an inter-disciplinary affair dominated by anthropology and linguistics, with English speaking historians making little or no contribution.⁵ David Mayall's comprehensive study of English Gypsy Travellers in the nineteenth century remains the key historical work on Romanies in English.⁶ Studies on vagrancy and poor relief dismiss nomads as separate,⁷ while scholars working on Traveller populations are not concerned with the majority government and society. This work does not continue this division of interest, with chapter 1 simultaneously examining the relative status of vagrants and Travellers. It should not be presumed that legislation, government policy or social change were mutually exclusive in their effects on Travellers or settled people.

Secondary work on Ireland also proved inadequate for the questions asked in this thesis. This author found modern Irish social history to be profoundly underdeveloped in comparison with other countries and other times. The best works to date have been produced by historical geographers such as Jacinta Prunty or Ruth McManus.⁸ Scholarship on the development of the welfare state is sketchy while the existence of the urban working class was barely acknowledged.⁹ Ruth Barrington's

³ See for example, Sinéad Ní Nualláin, and Mary Forde, *Changing Needs of Irish Travellers: Health, Education and Social Issues* (Galway, 1992).

⁴ Judith Okely, *The Traveller-Gypsies* (Cambridge, 1983); Guenter Lewy, *The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies* (Oxford, 2000); Jean-Pierre Liegeois, *Gypsies and Travellers: Socio-Cultural Data* (Strasbourg, 1987).

⁵ *Romani Studies*, continuing the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* publishes articles on any aspect of the cultures of nomadic groups. Fields covered include anthropology, art, folklore, linguistics, literature, political science and sociology. Most of the historical works reviewed in the journal are not published in English.

⁶ David Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth-Century Society* (Cambridge, 1988).

⁷ Robert Humphreys, *No Fixed Abode: A History of Responses to the Roofless and the Rootless in Britain* (London and New York, 1999), p 2.

⁸ Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin Slums 1800-1925 A Study in Urban Geography* (Dublin, 1998); Ruth McManus, *Dublin, 1910-1940: Shaping the City and Suburbs* (Dublin, 2002).

⁹ Seamus Ó Cinnéide, *A Law for the Poor: A Study of Home Assistance in Ireland* (Dublin, 1970); Marilyn Silverman's recent work, *An Irish Working Class: Explorations in Political Economy and Hegemony 1800-1950* (Toronto, 2001) concentrates on a small town in Co. Kilkenny.

authoritative study of public health measures inspired no successors and Irish medical history remains an underdeveloped area.¹⁰ Works such as Ross McKibbin's sweeping *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951*¹¹ only serve to highlight the lack of a chronology for Irish social history. This study therefore depends upon primary material to describe Irish society in general as well as Travellers in particular.

Primary sources containing information on Irish society are abundant, the most obvious source being government records. Although the files of the Department of Local Government and Public Health are closed to researchers, the Department's voluminous annual reports offer considerable insights into Irish welfare policy, local government administration, sanitation services and public health measures. Files for the Departments of Justice and Health are open, though the catalogues are far from complete. The records of the St. Vincent de Paul Society provide an alternative perspective on the poverty experienced by many in twentieth-century Ireland and humanises those who appear only as numbers in government reports. This study uses Cork city as a case study for local authority administration and decision making. The minute books of Cork Corporation's County Borough Council and its various committees proved invaluable in chronicling the experience of the urban working class and the affect of policy upon their lives.

Like many Irish people without literacy or status, Travellers are difficult to locate in the archival record. They appear only when their actions affected the interests of the record keepers in government or when they impinged upon the public consciousness. In common with women and the working class, Travellers did not possess any control over the archival record. Therefore Travellers were described exclusively by outsiders concerned about 'problems' they caused. A public problem often arises when 'there is a significant but not illegal deviation from societal norms'.¹² Their appearance in the record as a 'problem' is also a consequence of record keeping which lends itself to charting problems, unwelcome or unanticipated developments, unsettling change or unforeseen expenditure. A civil servant, journalist or charitable

¹⁰ Ruth Barrington, *Health, Medicine and Politics in Ireland 1900-70* (Dublin, 1987); the most recent work is Elizabeth Malcolm and Greta Jones (eds), *Medicine, Disease and the State in Ireland 1650-1940* (Cork, 1999).

¹¹ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford, 2000).

¹² Christopher J. Smith, *Public Problems: the Management of Urban Distress* (New York and London, 1988), p 3.

individual will rarely write an extensive report on how all is well with the world. Neither will a politician raise an issue in parliament to comment on how satisfactorily the situation was handled. Therefore, the categorisation of Travellers in the archival record as a 'problem' should not surprise us.

Travellers as a distinct group were mentioned in the records of voluntary organisations and local and national government. Since the Department of Local Government and Public Health was concerned with housing, sanitation and the control of public space, it was responsible for legislation like the Local Government (Sanitary Services) Act 1948 which directly targeted camping Travellers. The uncatalogued records of the General Council of County Councils (GCCC) yielded valuable information on the reaction of all local authorities to Travellers. Dáil records revealed the political debate on Travellers, which was articulated only in the post-war period. Isolated references in the 1920s and 1930s were replaced with annual discussions of the nuisance caused by Traveller campsites in the 1950s. Despite constant references to Travellers as law breakers in Dáil debates, the files of the Department of Justice did not contain reference to their activities. Only through Dáil debates was the attitude of the Minister for Justice to unauthorised Traveller encampments discerned.

The first government report on Travellers, the *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, was published in 1963. This Commission had been appointed in June 1960 by the Taoiseach, Seán Lemass, to obtain accurate information on the numbers of Travellers in Ireland and to recommend solutions to the problem of unauthorised encampments. The records of the Commission did not survive, but the exhaustive report remains a valuable source. A comprehensive report, it contains valuable information on the relationship between Travellers and settled people, as it devotes much consideration of the attitude of the communities towards each other. It is particularly useful for analysing settled people's beliefs about Travellers, in official and popular terms.

Outside the political arena, popular attitudes to Travellers were analysed in newspapers and most importantly, folklore material. The archives of Roinn Béaloideas Éireann were a crucial source in understanding what settled people meant by collective nouns such as 'tinker', 'tramp' and 'gypsy'. My newspaper research was aided considerably by the Scott Macfie Gypsy Collection in the University of Liverpool. The

collection of newspaper clippings on Travellers and Gypsies in Britain and Ireland dating from 1900 to the late 1950s was invaluable.

Chapter 1 outlines who Travellers were and how they were different to settled society. The position of homeless men and women in urban and rural Ireland is also discussed. The confusion between Travellers and Anglo Romanies suggests a degree of flexibility in attitudes to nomads, who were not definitively labelled and pejoritized. Chapter 2 goes on to describe some of the most important developments in Irish society which affected the position and status of Travellers. Much of this chapter will not discuss Travellers directly, but will focus instead upon the increased state control over the lives of its citizens. A by-product of developments in state and society from 1922 to the 1950s is the alienation and isolation of Travellers. The planning process, public housing and compulsory education all served to widen the gap between Travellers and the working class. Niches occupied by Travellers were eroded not by increasing intolerance, or a wave of vast impersonal 'modernisation' but by persistent government regulation of various aspects of Irish social organisation. Such regulation also served to make Travellers increasingly distinctive and often, unacceptably different.

Chapter 3 describes how the St. Vincent de Paul Society and the Legion of Mary ministered to Travellers before they came to the attention of government in the mid 1960s. This chapter examines the problem-solving impetus of policy and explains why Travellers were not noticed by government as a social problem prior to the 1960s. Occasionally efforts were made to target Travellers for public health reasons or on the basis of problems caused by vagrancy and homelessness. These sporadic attempts to control Travellers will be outlined in detail. Chapter 4 summarises the political debate on Travellers in Dáil Éireann. This chapter also analyses the composition, methods and aims of the Commission on Itinerancy. How and where the Commission gathered information on Travellers is detailed. The extent of Traveller participation in drafting the report is addressed.

It is essential to discuss Northern Ireland in any study of Irish Travellers, since Travellers crossed the Border as easily as emigrants crossed the Irish sea, following regional circuits and a calendar of fairs and markets that had little to do with political boundaries. Also, the Northern Irish administration in Stormont faced the same complaints about unauthorised encampments and animal trespass as their Southern

counterparts. An analysis of Northern society using multi-archive research was impossible in the timeframe available so chapter 5 concentrates on how politicians and the state reacted to the presence of Travellers, who were defined as Catholic and nationalist. How and when Northern administrators drafted punitive legal measures illustrates the historical context of anti-Traveller feeling. For example, measures allowing the police to summarily arrest a person of no fixed abode were never implemented in the South. The treatment of Travellers by the Stormont administration provides an important contrast to the policy of the Irish state towards Travellers. It is also a useful counterpoint to the belief that anti-Traveller sentiment is somehow eternal and unrelated to specific historic context.

Chapter 6 returns to Southern Ireland and the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission on Itinerancy. Although the report was accepted by national and local government in principle, the provision of facilities for Travellers proved politically impossible. Local politicians called on the government to solve the 'national problem' that was Traveller accommodation while the Minister for Local Government firmly placed the onus for halting sites and housing on each local authority. Voluntary agencies stepped into the breach, working to convince settled people that Travellers deserved housing and campsites, while helping Travellers to access welfare and health services. Continuing a pattern established since the foundation of the state, the voluntary sector provided facilities for the most marginalised members of society. This chapter and the thesis concludes when Travellers began to participate in voluntary groups which sought to improve their lives. After 1969, the voluntary and public sector consulted Travellers themselves about measures designed to aid their community.

This thesis is not the last word on the position of Travellers in Irish society. Neither does it provide a template for contemporary or future relations between settled people and Travellers. It is rather an attempt to explain the historical foundations of that relationship and how it changed over time. Why the settlement policy, now fallen out of ideological favour, was proposed and implemented is discussed but the application of these lessons to contemporary politics is not within my remit. This study demonstrates that a small minority group previously considered 'invisible' offers considerable scope for historical research. The broad sweep of this study, spanning urban politics, the

welfare system and catholic charity, only proves that more in-depth work on Travellers is possible. Issues such as urban growth also deserve separate, detailed scrutiny by historians. This thesis describes the most significant social developments which affected the relative status and visibility of Irish Travellers.

Chapter 1

The People of the Roads

This chapter will describe the people who travelled Irish roads in order to describe how and why Travellers were distinguishable by settled people. Alongside Travellers, Anglo-Romany gypsies and an amorphous group of individual wanderers took to the roads for subsistence. Beggars, the wandering insane, pedlars (who were often Jewish¹), traders, ballad singers and entertainers went from place to place, earning their living from the communities they visited. Three sections outline the evidence for material and behavioural differences between Travellers, Gypsies, the homeless and the rest of Irish society. The rural situation of Travellers is most elaborated upon as the urban aspect to Traveller-settled relations is fully detailed in the following chapters. Source material ranges from newspaper accounts, Dáil debates, records of the St Vincent de Paul and folklore material.

This chapter is primarily concerned with what settled people observed and the terms they used to describe Travellers, Gypsies and others. Nomenclature was perhaps more important than individual experiences of nomads in shaping communal definitions. Historical sources are replete with collective nouns: 'tramps', 'vagrants', 'gypsies', 'travellers', 'tinkers', 'itinerants', 'beggars'. Often a newspaper account would group 'tinkers', 'gypsies' and 'vagrants' together, suggesting these labels were applied indiscriminately. However, urban and rural vagrancy were separate and distinct phenomena. Alms giving to regular known beggars was a feature of rural County Cork while street begging in Cork city was decried as a 'nuisance'. Homeless people in urban areas were accommodated in hostels by charitable organisations; in the countryside a bed by the fire was offered. In order to clearly distinguish the label 'vagrant' from 'tinker' we must understand the survival strategies of homeless men and women in twentieth-century Ireland. Similarly, the differences between Travellers and Anglo-Romanies were genuine although often imperfectly understood by outside observers. Traveller owners of colourful barrel topped caravans were seen as 'gypsies' but this significant confusion between romantic image and reality does not preclude the

¹ '...the overwhelming majority of Jews in Limerick in 1901 were pedlars with a small minority describing themselves as drapery dealers and grocers' Dermot Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Refugees, Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust* (Cork, 1998), p 14.

presence of Anglo-Romanies in Ireland, also recognised as 'gypsies' by settled people. While this author has no desire to legitimate the essentialist definition of a 'real' gypsy, Travellers are not, nor have they sought to be seen as, Romany.

Irish Travellers

Gypsies or Travellers?

The term 'gypsy' appeared often in newspaper accounts of nomadic visitors to an area. Initially, it seemed to this historian that observers were describing Travellers as Romany because of their superficial resemblance to bohemian wanderers, or simply because there was not yet universal agreement among settled people in labelling and categorising Travellers. While this remained a consideration in assessing the evidence, it became increasingly clear that Travellers were not the only nomadic group on the island. The Commission on Itinerancy was told by some authorities that Gypsies travelled Irish roads and six such families were recorded in the census. The Commission noted that these families came from Wales and travelled in the eastern counties.² Some Romany families came to Ireland to escape World War II³ but earlier evidence suggests that travel between Britain and Ireland was well established.

Though there undoubtedly were 'real' Gypsies on Irish roads, many references in sources suggest that Travellers were mistakenly called Gypsies. Travellers in caravans were seen as Gypsies because the colourful decoration and ornate styles were readily associated with popular images of the roving Gypsy.⁴ The 'National Romany Caravan Parade'⁵ staged as part of the Cahirmee Horse fair in Buttevant is the best example of this tendency. In 1953, 'gaily attired Romany youths' were part of the parade, yet the prizes were won by Sheridans from Cork, Rathkeale and Limerick respectively.⁶ For the *Kerryman* reporter and the carnival organisers, Traveller material culture dovetailed with literary allusions to exotic Gypsies. Whether there were Anglo-Romanies at Buttevant was irrelevant - their exotic presence was assured by perceptions of settled people of the appropriate appearance of Gypsies and Travellers. The arrival of

² *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, (Dublin, 1963), p 34.

³ Thomas Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change: the Development of Ethnic Ideology and Pressure Politics among British Gypsies from Victorian Reformism to Romany Nationalism* (London and Boston; 1974), p 206.

⁴ Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers*, pp. 79-93.

⁵ *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 9 July 1955.

⁶ *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 26 July 1953.

caravan and tent dwellers in Killorglan for the Puck fair was described thus: ‘the gypsies with their gaily coloured wagons and their friends in less polite beggary, the tinkers’.⁷ This hints at a hierarchy of nomadism, a hierarchy that was significant in Britain where the search for the ‘genuine’ Romany plagued Gypsiologists and administrators alike.⁸ In the Folklore Collection, the distinction was occasionally made between tinkers and gypsies on the basis of caravan ownership.⁹ Assumptions were made by settled people on the basis of the accommodation adopted by Travellers. In Ireland, the distinction between ‘gypsies’ and ‘tinkers’ was not absolute and suggests a degree of flexibility in attitudes to nomads, who were not definitively labelled and stigmatised. As significant as the presence of Gypsies was, equally important was the confusion among settled people as to the differences between nomadic groups. Nevertheless, the differences between Travellers and Gypsies enabled both groups and settled people to recognise each other. What were the distinguishing features of these groups? Some simple questions will be posed. Historically, how many Travellers were there? How were they recognised as Travellers? Where and how did they live?

Numbers of Travellers, 1922-70

What was the size of the Traveller population? Possessing neither a fixed abode nor permanent employment Travellers were excluded from the state’s conventional measurement techniques. There were sporadic and imperfect attempts to enumerate Travellers: these figures can only hint at the size of the Traveller population. In 1925, the Gardaí were asked by the Commission on the Poor Law to count homeless persons and their dependents ‘observed wandering on the public highways in a single night in November 1925’. The table below outlines the results of that census; the Metropolitan area refers to the County Borough of Dublin.

⁷ *Kerryman* (Tralee ed.), 17 August 1935.

⁸ See Jane Helleiner, *Irish Travellers: Racism and the Politics of Culture* (Toronto, 2000), pp. 35-40; Judith Okely, *The Traveller-Gypsies* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 15-8.

⁹ Schools Collection, MS 289, p 46, p 258, p 259, Roinn Béaloideas Éireann (RBÉ); Gypsies had ‘very well equipped caravans’, while tinkers slept under their carts, Tinker Questionnaire MS 1255, p 69, RBÉ.

Fig. 1: Number of Homeless Persons, November 1925

	Outside Metropolitan Area			Metropolitan Area		
	Men	Women	Children	Men	Women	Children
Travelling in search of Work	248	33	44	116	18	-
Willing to undertake casual labour but unfit/unwilling to work continuously	238	48	58	120	18	-
Habitual tramps	652	416	614	34	7	-
Old and Infirm Persons	150	63	14	34	7	-
Bona-fide pedlars, hawkers etc.	141	77	122	7	1	-
Total	1429	637	852	290	49	-

Source: Report of the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor, Including the Insane Poor (Dublin, 1927), p 17.

There are numerous definitional problems with this survey. What age group is defined as 'Children' – up to 14, 16 or 18 years old? Were there definitions for categories such as 'Habitual tramp'? Despite the limitations of this information, the presence of Travellers and Gypsies among the 'Homeless Persons' can be guessed at. Since family mobility distinguishes Travellers and Gypsies from lone vagrants and tramps, it can be assumed that the categories with high numbers of children, 'Habitual Tramps', and 'Bona fide pedlars and hawkers', contain nomadic family groups. Outside Dublin city, the proportions of men, women and children in each category varies significantly.

Fig. 2: Analysis of definitional categories of homeless persons

	In search of work	Casual labour	Habitual tramps	Old/Infirm	Pedlars
Men	76%	69%	39%	66%	41%
Women	10%	14%	25%	28%	23%
Children	14%	17%	17%	6%	36%

Casual labourers were overwhelmingly male. The more equitable distribution of the sexes and age groupings in the categories of 'Habitual Tramp' and 'Bona fide Pedlar or Hawker' suggest that Travellers and Gypsies were included under these headings. As this survey was not intended to count Travellers, their inclusion was haphazard. The figures for Dublin city imply that no nomadic families were present in the borough, or perhaps Dublin police did not view caravan and tent dwellers as 'homeless'.

Travellers were enumerated in 1938 by the Gardaí. In the 26 counties there were 950 families with 900 children aged between 6 and 14.¹⁰ On 6 September 1944, the Gardaí surveyed the Traveller population and counted 5,151 individuals, with 2,411 under 14 years of age. The survey did not include the County Boroughs of Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Waterford.¹¹ In the 1946 census of population, families were classified by type of residence and 'itinerant family' was included. In May 1946, 5,554 people were included under this heading. The category was retained for the 1956 Census but figures on itinerant families were not compiled.¹² Gardaí continued to count Travellers in the 1950s, though the purpose of these censuses is not known.

Fig. 3: Numbers of Travellers in the Republic of Ireland, 1952-61

Date	Number
30 April 1952*	6,275
10 September 1956	7,148
1 December 1960	6,591
1 June 1961	5,880

(*excludes County Boroughs)

Source: *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy 1963* (Dublin, 1963), Appendix II.

These figures pose a number of problems. Each census was taken on different days, at different times of the year. In 1952, Carlow and Kildare Gardaí performed their census on 2 May. The seasonal timetables determining Traveller life must have influenced any census. Furthermore, it is likely that those Travellers who crossed the Border were not included in a number of these counts. Some statistics prefer to count families rather than individuals. In 1974 the population was placed at 1,690 families which was a significant increase on 1960 figures of 1,198 families.¹³ The numbers of Travellers in twentieth-century Ireland will never be accurately known because a nomadic lifestyle and minimal contact with organised structures of state and society made them statistically marginal. Finally, only camping Travellers were counted in these surveys since housed Travellers were not considered problematic and therefore ignored.

¹⁰ Rúnáí Aire Department of Education to Rúnáí Príobháideach Department of Taoiseach, 28 October 1958, DT S12337, National Archives Ireland (NAI).

¹¹ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, Vol. 94, col. 1528 (19 September 1944).

¹² *Dáil Éireann Debates* Vol. 161, col. 765 (7 May 1957).

¹³ *Report of the Travelling People Review Body* (Dublin, 1983), p 7.

Dress and Appearance

A fundamental need for a collective noun arises when individuals and groups are different in behaviour, occupational habits, material culture and appearance. These differences are silently yet powerfully expressed in the noun itself, but this information relies upon context and cultural definitions. To understand the historical application of nomenclature such as Traveller, we must consider the distinctive appearance and habits of these individuals.

Although the evidence is fragmentary, there was a perception that Travellers looked different. Labels were often ascribed on the basis of dress and appearance, but since this information is inherent in the label itself, it was rarely detailed in sources. However, it is possible to speculate on the 'distinctive dress'¹⁴ worn by Travellers. Women wore shawls, aprons and long skirts, a common feature of twentieth century Irish dress in some areas until the 1960s. Large heavy shawls were worn by many Irish women in the country and cities.¹⁵ In Cork city, shawls were a marker of social status. A middle-class Cork man remembered the stigma attached to the 'shawlies': 'There was always the worry that we might marry beneath ourselves, to a shawlie girl or someone living in the lanes'.¹⁶ The conventions of twentieth-century Irish dress and the local, subtle gradations in fashion and social class still await comprehensive analysis. However, Traveller women retained the shawl even as mainstream fashion changed in the 1960s. The Commission on Itinerancy noted, 'The women dress in a manner that easily distinguishes them from the women in the settled population and usually wear a coloured rug across the shoulders, which apart from its warmth also acts as hold-all and infant-carrier.'¹⁷ The dress of Traveller men was rarely referred to but Houlihan asserts that they wore 'bright neckerchiefs or shirts' and rarely wore the felt cap favoured by

¹⁴ *Kerryman* (Cork ed), 17 July 1948.

¹⁵ The large shawl was 'either a large black woven shawl with a fringe along the outer edge, or a heavy multicoloured shawl reminiscent of a blanket or a rug. This latter was manufactured in the woollen mills and became particularly associated with Galway city.' Anne O'Dowd, *Common Clothes and Clothing 1860-1930* (Dublin, 1990), p 8.

¹⁶ Michael Verdon, *Shawlies, Echo Boys, the Marsh and the Lanes, Old Cork Remembered* (Dublin, 1993), p 69.

¹⁷ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* (Dublin, 1963), p 45; Women wore shawls to Puck Fair in 1960 - 'the many coloured shawls and the red heads of the tinkers', *Kerryman*, 13 August 1960; 'the women continued to wear shawls long after most women had ceased to wear them', Patrick Logan, *Fair Day: the Story of Irish Fairs and Markets* (Belfast, 1986), p 113; 'The women wore colourful plaid shawls', Michael Houlihan, *Puck Fair: History and Traditions* (Limerick, 1999), p 50; Photographic evidence of Traveller dress and appearance the 1970s can be found in Sharon Gmelch, *Tinkers and Travellers* (Dublin, 1975) and Janine Wiedel, *Irish Tinkers* (London, 1976).

rural men.¹⁸ Both men and women were often associated with red hair.¹⁹ In Irish folklore tradition, red haired women were bad luck and red hair was popularly associated with wild, ungovernable people. The proud bearing of Traveller men impressed one observer, who penned this elaborate description:

Straight backed and light as their own ashplants, quick stepping as the ponies they drove before them, as Irish as the canabhan, hot-tempered and kind hearted, hardy wayward clansmen and sloe-eyed pipe smoking women.²⁰

Logan described their 'swaggering, devil-may-care look' that distinguished them from settled people.²¹ Popular literature featuring Travellers also influenced perceptions of dress and appearance. A Traveller at Cahirmee fair was described as 'a character that might have stepped straight out of Maurice Walsh's *Road to Nowhere* or Bryan McMahon's *Children of the Rainbow*...Gay in multicoloured shirt and with a bright-hued neckerchief around his throat, he had the walk and the straight back of a tangler from Rathkeale'.²² Undoubtedly, the Traveller accent set them apart, untouched as it was by regional accents familiar to settled people. Their singing style was also distinctive and they often chose slow songs which suited the 'keening tone' of their voice.²³

Cant and Folklore

Cant or Gammon forms an important part of Traveller culture. The existence of cant, known as Shelta to settled people, drew the attention of some folklorists. Whether Shelta is a variant of Irish, English or both continues to tax scholars in the field. Traveller cant has an 'overwhelmingly English' grammar and syntactic structure, but contains vocabulary and idioms that have no relationship to the English language.²⁴ Many collectors found it difficult to capture the phonetics of vocabulary items due of

¹⁸ Houlihan, *Puck Fair*, p 50.

¹⁹ 'The sun flamed in her red, red hair' in Sigerson Clifford, 'The Ballad of the Tinker's Daughter', *Travelling Tinkers* (Dublin, 1951); 'With a red-haired wife and a piebald horse' in Sigerson Clifford, 'The Ballad of the Tinker's Son', *Travelling Tinkers*; 'red-haired, tartan shirted men', *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 23 July 1953; 'ginger headed travelling men', *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 9 July 1960; 'the red heads of the tinkers', *Kerryman*, 13 August 1960; 'the red women of the clans', *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 15 July 1961

²⁰ *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 8 July 1950. The 'canabhan' is an anglicisation of *Ceann bhán*, 'Bog Cotton', a common plant in bogland areas.

²¹ Logan, *Fair Day*, p 113.

²² *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 14 July 1956.

²³ Houlihan, *Puck Fair*, p 50.

²⁴ Dónall P. Ó Baoill, 'Travellers' Cant: Language or Register?' in May McCann, Séamus Ó Síocháin and Joseph Ruane (eds), *Irish Travellers: Culture and Ethnicity* (Belfast, 1996), p 157.

the Irish language origin of its vocabulary.²⁵ Traveller cant was 'discovered' by Charles Godfrey Leland in 1876.²⁶ Gypsiologists discussed its formation, vocabulary and grammar from the late nineteenth to the mid twentieth centuries.²⁷

The Irish language elements in Shelta and the indigenous origins of Traveller cant attracted some interest from folklore collectors working for the Irish Folklore Commission, a body which sought to record traditional lore (primarily from Irish speakers) before it vanished.²⁸ As English speakers, Travellers and the majority of the Irish population were excluded from the top rung of the folklore hierarchy which perceived rural Irish speakers as repositories of the richest folklore.²⁹ Nevertheless, the encyclopaedic *A Handbook of Irish Folklore* directed collectors to examine the lore of tinsmiths, including popular attitudes towards tinkers.³⁰ The scope of the handbook was so vast that individual collectors wisely concentrated on their personal interests or local fascinations. Four collectors, in particular Pádraig Mac Gréine, Mícheál Mac Éinrí, Seán Mac Craith and Nioclás Breatnach, were personally interested in the cant and folklore of Travellers. Mac Gréine and Mac Éinrí published some of their work in *Béaloides* in the 1930s but it was 1952 before the head of the Commission, Séamus Ó Duilearga, organised a nationwide survey on Travellers.³¹ The survey guidelines stressed that information was not sought on individuals who travelled alone, 'tramps, beggarmen', but on 'tinkers who move about in family or other groups and ply a trade or calling such as tin-smith work or horse dealing.'³² The survey was more a sample of settled attitudes and beliefs about Travellers than information gathered from Travellers themselves. As such, the responses ranged from sympathetic to hostile. The survey amply demonstrates the extent of social distance between both communities as few

²⁵ Ó Baoill, 'Travellers' Cant: Language or Register?' in McCann, Ó Síocháin and Ruane (eds), *Irish Travellers*, p 158.

²⁶ Helleiner, *Irish Travellers*, p 37.

²⁷ Published work on Shelta by Charles Leland, Kuno Meyer and John Sampson was compiled and published by R. A. Stewart Macalister, *The Secret Languages of Ireland: with Special Reference to the Origin and Nature of the Shelta Language Partly Based upon the Collections and Manuscripts of the late John Sampson*, (Cambridge, 1937).

²⁸ Heinrich Boll wryly commented, 'Folklore is something like innocence: when you know you have it, you no longer have it' *Irish Journal* (London, New York, Toronto, Sydney, 1967), p 100.

²⁹ This precise delineation of folklore status was outlined in the handbook circulated to all collectors working for the Commission. S. Ó Suilleabháin, *A Handbook of Irish Folklore* (Detroit, 1970), xi.

³⁰ Ó Suilleabháin, *A Handbook of Irish Folklore*, p 66.

³¹ Oddly, Nioclás Breatnach's response is dated 1942. Perhaps a similar form of questionnaire had been circulated before 1952. Nioclás himself had no memory of the questionnaire.

³² Survey guidelines, 1952 Questionnaire MS 1255, RBÉ.

collectors could bring themselves to approach Travellers, even in the cause of academic research. Cant was jealously guarded by Travellers who were reluctant to share its vocabulary with outsiders. This fact, coupled with the vast task of the Folklore Commission, explains the omission of Travellers as defined objects of study who represented a separate culture. Stories and songs were collected from Travellers but it was more sporadic than systematic.³³

Accommodation

When camping, Travellers were easily distinguished from the settled population. Carts, tents and later horse-drawn caravans clearly set them apart as different. The mode of conveyance used by most Travellers was a high-spring cart,³⁴ which served as a shelter at night, often in addition to a tent. Pádraig Mac Gréine described in detail the construction and materials of tents observed in County Longford. The tent framework was wood, covered with canvas 'some of the more affluent families having a tarpaulin or waterproof cart cover for the purpose'.³⁵ The cover was long enough 'to form a lap at each end and so make the tent draught proof. Along the sides of the tent there is generally a foot or two of the cover to spare, which is weighted down with stones or sods'.³⁶ The floor was covered with a deep bed of straw or hay and some Travellers owned mattresses or feather beds. The resulting accommodation was described as being 'snug and warm even in the coldest winter'.³⁷ To ensure separation of the sexes, male and female children slept in separate tents.³⁸ Horse drawn, barrel caravans were a later development adopted by more well off families.³⁹ In 1934, caravans were observed to be spreading amongst Travellers who were abandoning their 'characteristic light-sprunged carts'. McGill noted that the, 'caravan movement is spreading rapidly amongst our Irish nomads'.⁴⁰ Though McGill viewed caravans as a Gypsy innovation,

³³ See Bairbre Ní Fhloinn, 'Irish Travellers and the Oral Tradition' in *A Heritage Ahead: Cultural Action and Travellers* (Dublin, 1995), pp. 63-85, and George Gmelch and B. Kroup (eds), *To Shorten the Road: Essays and Biographies* (Dublin, 1978).

³⁴ 'The Tinker and the Caravan' Sherley McGill, 3 March 1934 *Irish Press* Scott Macfie Gypsy Collection K12 p28 no.1, Sidney Jones Library; 'Irish Tinkers: to the editor of T.P.'s Weekly' 15 October 1909 *T.P.'s Weekly* SMGC K3 p209 no.783, SJL, .

³⁵ Pádraig Mac Gréine, 'Irish Tinkers or "Travellers": some notes on their manners and customs, and their secret language or "cant"', *Béaloides* 3 (1931), p 171.

³⁶ Mac Gréine, 'Irish Tinkers or "Travellers": some notes', p 172.

³⁷ Mac Gréine, 'Irish Tinkers or "Travellers": some notes', p 172.

³⁸ Nan Joyce and Anna Farmer, *Traveller: An Autobiography* (Dublin, 1986), p 12.

³⁹ Interview, Nioclás Breatnach, 29 December 2001.

⁴⁰ 'The Tinker and the Caravan' Sherley McGill, 3 March 1934 *Irish Press* SMGC K12 p28 no.1, SJL.

Patrick Logan refuted this, claiming that the Irish caravan was a traditional round topped, barrel shaped tent built on a flat cart. He claimed that the English Gypsy caravans were square, built of timber and heavier.⁴¹ When two separate sleeping quarters were required, a caravan was often augmented with a tent.⁴² In December 1960, 64 surveyed families possessed both horse-drawn caravans and tents.⁴³ Until the 1960s tents were the second most common form of accommodation for roadside Travellers: 674 families owned horse caravans in December 1960, while 335 families lived under canvas.⁴⁴ But considerable variation in accommodation existed; Cork Travellers were relatively well off, with only one-seventh depending on tent shelter alone.⁴⁵ For many Travellers however, harsh winter weather made tents unpleasant.

Families commonly stayed in one place over the winter, often in heavy wagons or vans at the edge of urban areas. Nan Joyce's family returned to Belfast for the winter,⁴⁶ while families interviewed by Mícheál Mac Éinrí in 1937 settled around County Mayo's market towns, Ballina and Castlebar.⁴⁷ Travellers camped in suburban areas of Cork for up to six months at a time.⁴⁸ Some rented accommodation in towns⁴⁹ while others turned to lodging houses or the county home.⁵⁰ It seems likely that empty or semi-derelict properties also afforded shelter for Travellers.⁵¹ A respondent in Beara remembered when Travellers were close to settled people:

⁴¹ Logan, *Fair Day*, p 117.

⁴² Older boys slept in a tent when a second caravan was unavailable. *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 41.

⁴³ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 40 and Appendix XXXII, p 145. In June 1961, 65 families owned a caravan and a tent, Appendix XXXIII, p 146.

⁴⁴ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, Appendix XXXII, p 145.

⁴⁵ Justice Brian Walsh's address as Chairman of the Itinerant Advisory Committee to General Council of County Councils, 5 August 1965, General Council of County Councils file.

⁴⁶ Joyce and Farmer, *Traveller*, p 12.

⁴⁷ Mícheál Mac Éinrí, "'Ceant" agus Saoghal na dTincéirí", *Béaloides* 9, 2 (1939), p 229.

⁴⁸ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 167, col. 158 (15 April 1958).

⁴⁹ Sharon Gmelch, *Nan: The Life of an Irish Travelling Woman* (London, 1986), pp. 31-2; Nan Joyce's grandparents lived in a house for six months of the year, Joyce and Farmer, *Traveller*, p 22. Two families interviewed by the Commission on Itinerancy were local authority tenants who paid their rent in advance in order to travel. *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 58.

⁵⁰ Sean Maher, *The Road to God Knows Where: A Memoir of a Travelling Boyhood* (Dublin, 1998) p 10; Nan O'Donoghue stayed overnight in the County Home on her way to see her family Sharon Gmelch, *Nan* p 77; An account of a lodging house in Lurgan, County Tyrone in Sharon Gmelch, *Nan*, p 86; Logan, *Fair Day*, p 114.

⁵¹ 'Irish Tinkers: to the editor of *T.P.'s Weekly*' 15 October 1909, *T.P.'s Weekly* SMGC K3 p209 no.783, SJL; a respondent to the 1952 Tinkers Questionnaire claimed that 'fifty years ago these roving tinkers camped in some disused or idle house which they happened to find in some out-of-the-way place. They had no vans or lorries or portable house of any kind at this time.' Tinker Questionnaire MS 1255, p 139, RBÉ.

Long ago there were certain houses in each district where the tinkers used to stay – sometimes they used share their gatherings of the day with the people of the house – other times they wouldn't have enough for themselves.⁵²

In 1952, the women of Kilbrittan's Irish Countrywomen's Association compiled a detailed list of Traveller families and their winter quarters: O'Driscolls wintered in Skibbereen, Foleys and O'Callaghans in Bandon, and Ryans and Sheridans in Limerick. Specific streets were associated with Travellers: 'Pound Lane in Bantry, Cat Lane in Dunmanway and Cork Road in Bandon were until recently the strongholds of the tinkers in these towns'.⁵³ The Briens, Coffeys and Driscolls known in Newmarket were said to have houses in Kanturk.⁵⁴ Rathkeale was already associated with Travellers in the late 1930s when a respondent in the Schools Collection called it 'Tinkertown'.⁵⁵ The historical connection with Rathkeale for the Sheridans, Gammels, Quilligans and O'Briens is documented by Patrick O'Connor in *All Ireland is in and about Rathkeale*. O'Connor used census records, town plans, baptismal and marriage registers, allied with an intimate knowledge of the town, to write about an unusually distinctive Traveller population. His research revealed that the home base was as central to Travellers as nomadism itself. Regular return visits, burials and weddings in the town and the considerable investment in property testify to the importance of a traditional home base for these families.⁵⁶ Nan Joyce mused on the curious situation of Travellers without a fixed abode who nevertheless returned to the same place every winter: 'we always ended up there no matter where we came from because Belfast was like our home to us. Wherever you're reared you're always longing to go back there'.⁵⁷ Nan's winter headquarters were not restful as they were 'hunted out' of camps in the city during the winter.⁵⁸ Winter traditionally ended on 17 March: 'The people used to believe that on Patrick's Day the stones turned over in the water and then the cold went out of the winter'.⁵⁹ Settled people also recognised the turning point that 17 March marked for Travellers. In 1964, the Department of Local Government asked Dublin Corporation not

⁵² Tinker Questionnaire MS 1255 p 108, RBÉ.

⁵³ Tinker Questionnaire MS 1255, p 69, RBÉ.

⁵⁴ Tinker Questionnaire MS 1255, p 87 RBÉ.

⁵⁵ Schools Collection MS 351 pp. 77-8, RBÉ.

⁵⁶ See Patrick J. O'Connor, *All Ireland is in and about Rathkeale* (Newcastlewest, 1996), Chapter 5 'A Travellers' World' pp. 128-76.

⁵⁷ Joyce and Farmer, *Traveller*, p 27.

⁵⁸ Joyce and Farmer, *Traveller*, p 39.

⁵⁹ Gmelch, *Nan*, p 31.

to evict a Traveller encampment until after St Patrick's Day, hoping that 'the itinerants will move of their own accord'.⁶⁰

Elderly Travellers often left the roads for housing or the County Home, the publicly run institutions for the care of the elderly. In 1952, Mary Sheridan of Limerick moved into a house purchased by her sons.

... at the age of 78 one does not mind settling down. All my life I have lived in a caravan, going from place to place, leading a respectable life. ... For the rest of my days I will live in a small house but my heart will be in the caravan. My sons and daughters who have their own caravans will carry on the family tradition.⁶¹

In common with many poor Irish people, a final sickness was treated in the County Home.⁶² Thus not all Travellers were on the road at any one time; seasonal factors, age and personal choice determined accommodation patterns. The flexibility of accommodation patterns during this period further complicated governmental attempts to enumerate them. Travellers were not averse to houses in principle and many maintained winter headquarters in towns. Clearly, Travellers found it difficult to live 12 months in a house, when traditionally March 17 marked the beginning of the travelling season. The difficulties Sean Maher's family faced in mixing with settled people and adjusting to a house are vividly described in his autobiography.⁶³ Housed Travellers faced isolation from friends and relations because travelling facilitated contact between widely scattered family groups. Despite Maher's confessed hatred of the road, he could not remain in a house.⁶⁴

Camp sites: an alternative geography

Camp sites scattered across the country formed an alternative geography for Travellers, who interpreted the landscape according to their needs. Camp sites provided grazing for horses on the 'long acre' or a nearby meadow, wood for a cooking fire, shelter from strong winds and convenience to running water or to houses where water could be obtained. What settled people perceived as waste or marginal land was a valuable resource for Travellers. Camps were usually set up on bye roads close, but not

⁶⁰ Ó Nualláin to Taoiseach, 1 January 1964, DT S 17506 A/63, NAI.

⁶¹ *Sunday Press*, 18 May 1952. Clipping found in Tinker Questionnaire MS 1255, p 155, RBÉ.

⁶² 'the County home in Clonakilty (where many of the tinker clan die)' Tinker Questionnaire MS 1255 p 67; When John Ward was taken ill, he was brought to the County Home where he died, *Connacht Tribune* (1st edition), 26 May 1945.

⁶³ Maher, *Road to God Knows Where*, pp. 17-9, 137-40.

⁶⁴ Maher, *Road to God Knows Where*, p 140.

immediately next to houses and villages. 'They take some by-place which is not far from houses, but not exactly close by'.⁶⁵ The same places were frequented regularly – three crossroads near Mallow County Cork were known to the settled community as Traveller camp sites.⁶⁶ In Navan, County Westmeath Travellers remembered the names of camps that have since been closed.⁶⁷ Camp sites had 'colourful nicknames that bring them to life, and perhaps serve to keep their locations fixed in the Traveller's memory'. Jody Joyce remembered camps in County Offaly called "Saps Conderans", 'Saps Bridge', 'Hill of Clara', 'Bogtown', 'Gillan Bridge', 'Sandy Road of Ferbane', 'River Road of Birr'.⁶⁸ Patsy Joyce recalled a camp in Longford which Travellers called 'Ballrange' though the official name was Stonepark.⁶⁹ The availability of camp sites was also heavily determined by the tolerance or otherwise of local Gardaí, who could break up camps with impunity. Dinah Duke recalled

It was hard at that time, because you might only have moved in, when the guard would come and tell you, you have to move on. When the guard came you would have get the children out of their beds and go looking for another camp.⁷⁰

Camp sites near main roads made Travellers more visible and exposed to the dangers of motor traffic, an increasingly common feature of Irish roads in the post war period. From 1941 to 1945, there was a hiatus in the number of licensed cars on Irish roads but once wartime restrictions ended, car numbers rose steadily.⁷¹ In 1945, James Dillon TD asked the Minister for Justice to ensure that Travellers camped on by-roads rather than trunk roads. Minister Gerry Boland replied that the Garda Commissioner had been instructed 'to take all possible steps to prevent obstruction of the roads by itinerants' encampments'. Dillon was careful to clarify that Travellers should not be hounded from all roads, merely main roads: 'The poor itinerants have to live like the rest of us but the dangers attendant on their camping beside a road, involving danger to their children who run about the encampment and involving danger to the drivers of

⁶⁵ Tinker Questionnaire MS 1255 p 88 RBÉ.

⁶⁶ Tinker Questionnaire MS 1255, pp. 115-6 RBÉ; Nioclás Breatnach sketched a map of the camp sites used in the townlands outside Newcastlewest, County Limerick. Only one camp was on the main road to Abbeyfeale, the others were on backroads. Tinker Questionnaire MS 1255 p 151, RBÉ.

⁶⁷ Navan Travellers Heritage Teamwork, *Travellers ... their life and times* (Navan, July 1992), p 3.

⁶⁸ Navan Travellers Heritage Teamwork, *Now and Then* (Navan, 1996), p 19.

⁶⁹ Navan Travellers Heritage Teamwork, *Now and Then*, p 20.

⁷⁰ Navan Travellers Heritage Teamwork, *Now and Then*, p 9.

⁷¹ In 1939 there were over 52,000 cars registered; by 1945 only 7,845 cars were on the road. *Statistical Abstract of Ireland 1943* (Dublin, 1943), p 168; *Statistical Abstract of Ireland 1949* (Dublin, 1949), p 180.

motor vehicles as a result of their wandering live stock, are far greater on the trunk road than on the by-road'.⁷² By 1951, Dillon was concerned that Travellers were once again camping at the side of main roads - 'Would the Minister remind the Guards to insist that they should not make encampments on main roads for the protection of their own children?' The Minister for Justice assured the House that he would bring the matter to the attention of the Gardaí as, 'the protection of the children' from road accidents was necessary.⁷³ The danger to children from passing traffic remained in 1957, when Dillon once again raised the matter.

For two or three years, by a process of tactful persuasion, and perhaps something stronger, the tinkers were persuaded to abstain from setting-up camp at the side of trunk roads. In the last two or three years the practice of camping by the side of trunk roads has manifested itself very strongly again to the grave danger of the tinker's own children and to the great anxiety of passing traffic. I would ask the Minister to direct the attention of the Commissioner to that fact and to suggest to him that the Guards be asked once more to persuade these people, when they camp, not to camp at the side of main roads.⁷⁴

Wandering animals and children on the roadside were not a significant danger until motor traffic increased. In 1946 there were 44,489 licensed cars⁷⁵; by 1957, 135,013 cars used Irish roads.⁷⁶ When horses and bicycles were replaced by the motor car, camp sites on the verges of busy roads became a problem, obstructing and delaying traffic.

Spectacle: fairs, fights and funerals

Fairs and markets were central to Irish social and economic life. From weekly or monthly markets in towns and villages to the great annual fairs, it was by these gatherings rather than the calendar that the rural community measured time.⁷⁷ Patterns also hosted great fairs until they were suppressed by Church authorities.⁷⁸ Markets in city centres could also draw country people and Travellers seeking a bargain or a chance to trade. Traveller caravans and wagons were often seen parked in the Coal Quay

⁷² *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 97, col. 1035 (29 May 1945).

⁷³ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 126, col. 1831 (18 July 1951).

⁷⁴ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 161, col. 419 (25 April 1957).

⁷⁵ *Statistical Abstract of Ireland 1949* (Dublin, 1949), p 180.

⁷⁶ *Statistical Abstract of Ireland 1958* (Dublin, 1958), p 280.

⁷⁷ E. Estyn Evans, *Irish Folk Ways* (London, 1989), p 260.

⁷⁸ Diarmuid Ó Golláin, 'The Pattern' in J.S. Donnelly and Kerby A. Miller (eds.), *Irish Popular Culture 1650-1850* (Dublin, 1999), pp. 201-221.

market in Cork city's Cornmarket Street.⁷⁹ At such gatherings, people of all classes and origins met and mingled, among them Travellers and Gypsies. Wealthy farmers and dealers rubbed shoulders with beggars, ballad singers, fiddlers, pedlars, and gamesters. Markets in large county towns also attracted the urban working class: Macroom, Fermoy,⁸⁰ Mitchelstown⁸¹ and Mallow⁸² in County Cork drew Cork city street traders anxious to do business. Even into the nineteenth century, cock-fighting and bull-baiting were part of the sport of great fairs; games and horse racing survived into the twentieth.⁸³ Historically, fairs such as the infamous Donnybrook fair were occasions for lawlessness and bloodshed.⁸⁴ Fairs in Munster and South Leinster gave faction fighters occasions to renew their ritualistic violent antagonism.⁸⁵ A great seasonal gathering of people from near and far was license for a 'moral holiday' which was cathartic and often linked to fertility magic.⁸⁶ By the twentieth century, the excesses of faction fighting had ended but ritualistic elements survived. Arensberg and Kimball observed the 'elaborately conventional'⁸⁷ economic aspects of fairs in County Clare, detailing the relationship between the small farmer and the cattle dealer rather than the social significance of the gathering for the local community. 'Luck money' was exchanged between buyer and seller after the conclusion of the deal while the 'tangler', often a Traveller man, acted as intermediary to secure a sale. Historians seeking information on class and communal relationships cannot ignore these great social and economic occasions which were not exclusively rural. Cork city hosted horse fairs within its boundaries at least until 1921⁸⁸ and the Munster Agricultural Show was a significant social event for town and county. Fairs were particularly important for Travellers, who

⁷⁹ Country women also visited the market to buy shoes and clothes. Interview with Kitty O'Driscoll, Northside Folklore Project (NFP) 98 – 023, Sound Recording (SR) 242.

⁸⁰ Women took a bus or lorry to the market towns to sell their goods. Interview with shopkeeper in Peg Twomey's, NFP 98 – 023, SR 241.

⁸¹ Cork traders went to Mitchelstown on a Tuesday to sell clothes. Interview with Kitty O'Driscoll, NFP 98 – 023, SR 242.

⁸² An urban councillor objected to 'the people of Cork – 15 or 16 people – who come to Mallow daily, bringing for sale all sorts of commodities, which could be sold as cheaply by any ratepayer in Mallow to the public', *Cork Examiner*, 6 July 1926.

⁸³ Evans, *Irish Folk Ways*, p 262.

⁸⁴ Evans, *Irish Folk Ways*, p 263.

⁸⁵ See Patrick O'Donnell, *The Irish Faction Fighters of the Nineteenth Century* (Dublin, 1975).

⁸⁶ Evans, *Irish Folk Ways*, p 256.

⁸⁷ Conrad M. Arensberg and Solon T. Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland* (Cambridge, Mass., 1948), pp. 297-8.

⁸⁸ Minutes of the Tolls and Markets Committee, CP/C/CM/TM 9 p 280, Cork Archives Institute (CAI). The fairs were held in May and September.

renewed friendships and allegiances with families seen only once or twice a year while trading and begging among the large crowds. The patterns that had survived – Clonmacnoise, Knock, Lough Derg, Croagh Patrick - also attracted large numbers of Travellers. Similarly, race meetings at Galway, Mallow and Fairyhouse were highlights of the Traveller calendar.⁸⁹

Travellers congregated in large numbers at the edge of the town hosting the fair. One Cork man commented that Travellers ‘never fail to make the days more interesting for their presence’.⁹⁰ For a number of days, Travellers and settled people traded and drank together in a confined space. Fair gatherings of Travellers demonstrated the enduring success of their lifestyle as well as the coherence of their material culture. They were a routine part of every local fair, though they gathered in larger numbers at the great fairs of Spancil Hill, Ballinasloe, Puck and Cahirmee. Their presence in such large numbers was viewed with ambivalence by settled observers who betrayed their unease by describing an ‘invading army’⁹¹ and ‘the great nomad army’.⁹² In the run up to Cahirmee Horse Fair in Buttevant County Cork, the countryside was described as ‘infested with roving bands of humble horse dealers, gipsy vans and encampments’.⁹³ However, their presence also provoked poetic description and nostalgia for times past, which Travellers were seen to embody. Cahirmee had ‘lost none of its ancient and ‘old world’ glamour for the ‘travelling people’ of Munster’ whose ‘gaily bedecked caravans’ and piebald ponies converged on the town.⁹⁴ The colour and spectacle of Travellers’ camps hinted at the gay abandon of an approaching holiday. The centrepiece of Cahirmee fair from 1949 to 1958 was the Caravan Parade. This competition for best caravan was organised by the fair committee and eagerly contested by Travellers. The ‘gay garlanded magnificence, the beribboned horses, the decorated caravans’⁹⁵ offered an irresistible opportunity to newspaper correspondents to romanticise Travellers. In 1954, the parade was described as bringing ‘a breath of the romance of bohemian life’ to the town.⁹⁶ The caravan parade in 1955 attracted 21 caravans and more than 7,000

⁸⁹ Maher, *Road to God Knows Where*, p 16.

⁹⁰ Tinker Questionnaire MS 1255, p 89, RBÉ.

⁹¹ *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 17 August 1935.

⁹² *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 16 August 1930.

⁹³ *Cork Examiner*, 14 July 1930.

⁹⁴ *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 9 July 1955.

⁹⁵ *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 8 July 1950.

⁹⁶ *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 10 July 1954.

spectators. It was an event 'unique and strikingly impressive in all its richness of gay, brilliant, carefree nomadic life'. The *Kerryman* correspondent lauded the parade as 'a presence of the way of life that has kept Cahirmee of the Horses as, perhaps, the last surviving institute of times that are gone but can never be forgotten'. Remarkably, the task of maintaining tradition was laid firmly on the shoulders of 'the travelling folk and the horse dealing people of Munster'.⁹⁷ While Travellers were exoticised in descriptions of Cahirmee, it must be acknowledged that the fair itself was praised in terms that blended romanticism and hyperbole in equal measure. The *Kerryman* wrote of Cahirmee 'It was a word that brought a breath of romance to the workaday world in which we lived. Entwined in every letter of it was an atmosphere that gave forth the exotic scents of the Orient, and the clink of Russian spurs and the rattle of French sabres'.⁹⁸ The glorious past when Cahirmee drew buyers from across Europe was constantly invoked in newspaper reports.

The proud display of material culture in Cahirmee's caravan parade was unique to Buttevant, although Puck Fair's organising committee attempted to copy the successful tourist attraction in 1955.⁹⁹ At most fairs Travellers were well known for fighting. This was seen as integral to the spectacle of fair day and since Travellers fought each other, settled people found it entertaining rather than threatening - 'It was a blood sport you watched in fascination and fear and when the ash plants came out the spectators retreated to a safe distance'.¹⁰⁰ The intervention of the Gardaí was inevitable even expected: 'A fair day was no fair day without work for Guard Jordan and Jim Kennedy but a night in the cells cooled off everyone...There was an even predictable tenor to life'.¹⁰¹ Grudges were rarely held and the combatants were often reconciled immediately. Thus people who quarrelled frequently but remained friends were said to be 'like the tinkers'.¹⁰² In the context of a fair day, both street fighting and colourful caravans formed settled people's reactions to Travellers. The spectacle provided by exotic, wild and carefree nomads was a vital part of the fair. Spectacle permitted

⁹⁷ *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 23 July 1955.

⁹⁸ *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 11 July 1953.

⁹⁹ *Kerryman*, (Kerry ed.), 6 August 1955.

¹⁰⁰ John Healy, *The Death of an Irish Town* (Cork, 1968), p 19; 'The tinkers free fights was a particular feature of the fair and one of the most spectacular', Tinkers Questionnaire MS 1255, p 141, RBÉ.

¹⁰¹ Healy, *Death of an Irish Town*, pp. 19-20.

¹⁰² Schools Collection, MS 351 p 208, RBÉ. Maher describes how fights were quickly forgotten, *Road to God Knows Where*, p 17.

admiration but maintained distance; it acknowledged difference while containing it as harmless entertainment.

A spectacular Traveller funeral also grabbed the headlines and popularised the idea of the 'King of the Tinkers'. John Ward was buried in May 1945 in Ballinasloe and 10,000 people were estimated to have attended his funeral.¹⁰³ Travellers came from Counties Leitrim, Offaly, Roscommon, Tipperary, Clare and Galway to attend the funeral. Members of the general public also attended as the Wards were 'associated with the life of Ballinasloe for generations'.¹⁰⁴

The final tribute of his tribe was a moving spectacle, with women in many coloured shawls and dress and the traditional red petticoats and men of wiry fibre and physique set up a keening around the grave.¹⁰⁵

John Ward had apparently earned his crown by a combination of descent and pugilistic abilities. In the Ward family, male fighting prowess earned the title of 'King of the Tinkers' a role that fascinated settled observers. Lawrence Ward succeeded his father John as King and his crowning drew media attention across the British Isles.¹⁰⁶ Lawrence was reportedly proclaimed King by 400 members of the Ward family, who offered £100 as the prize in a challenge fight. No one accepted the challenge and Ward, who had already won thirteen free fights defending his title, was acclaimed King. The ceremony was watched by several hundred people visiting Ballinasloe for the sheep fair who 'gushed and jostled each other...in a frantic effort to get a front line view of the crowning of the 'Tinker's King''.¹⁰⁷ The ceremony concluded when Ward was presented with six white horses and a new caravan.¹⁰⁸ Cultural rituals conducted in public at large fair gatherings demonstrated Travellers' distinctive appearance and behaviour. Funerals, wakes, fairs and fights played an important role in determining perceptions of Travellers.

¹⁰³ '10,000 Trek to Funeral of King of Gipsies' 28 May 1945, *Reynolds Newspaper* SMGC K15 p74 no.2, SJL.

¹⁰⁴ *Connacht Tribune* (1st ed.), 26 May 1945.

¹⁰⁵ *Connacht Tribune* (1st ed.), 26 May 1945.

¹⁰⁶ Although the photo of the crowning of Martin and Bridget Ward in *Illustrated* 29 September 1945, suggests any Traveller would do. SMGC K15 p70 no.3 and p71 no.1, SJL.

¹⁰⁷ *Connacht Tribune*, 6 October 1945.

¹⁰⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 6 October 1945.

For Travellers, the true importance of fair day was the opportunity it afforded to meet friends and relations and celebrate weddings and baptisms.¹⁰⁹ This social function was of little relevance to settled observers, who saw primarily a pageant of colour and carefree abandon. Fighting among Travellers settled disputes without recourse to the police or a justice system that disadvantaged illiterate, nomadic people. Outside interference in these fights was not appreciated: 'The travellers have a strict code with regard to these fights. They see it as their own business to be settled by themselves'.¹¹⁰ Keening, which remains an important part of Traveller burial rituals, was for the outside observer merely a 'Moving Spectacle'.¹¹¹ Within specific contexts, Travellers were rendered picturesque by settled people. Perceptions of Travellers as colourful and exotic may have played a significant role in mediating relations between the two communities. Romanticisation can be disparaged but it could counter pejorative stereotypes. Since close contact between Travellers and settled people was confined to certain limited contexts, settled people could hardly avoid romantic constructs of a culture they saw but did not understand. Spectacular occasions such as fairs, fights and funerals gave ample opportunity for observation but little for participation. The conclusions drawn by these observations were determined by settled values which were not static; attitudes towards street violence appear to have altered dramatically. Houlihan said of Traveller fights at Puck, 'Before opinions changed it was something of a sideshow at the fair, which drew, rather than scattered crowds'.¹¹² After World War II, contact between the two communities at fairs declined as tractors replaced horses and cattle marts on the edge of towns made traditional street fairs redundant. These developments took place suddenly 'without anybody realising what a difference it would make'.¹¹³ Possibly Travellers continued to adhere to an obsolete calendar of fairs, visiting certain towns because of old associations. Nioclás Breatnach recalled Travellers from Tipperary visiting Dungarvan County Waterford after the horse fair that had originally drawn them had

¹⁰⁹ Rathkeale Travellers celebrated a cluster of marriages in Buttevant, probably at Cahirmee Fair. O'Connor, *Rathkeale*, p 138.

¹¹⁰ Maher, *Road to God Knows Where*, p 20.

¹¹¹ *Connacht Tribune* (1st ed.), 26 May 1945. For a Traveller perspective on death and mourning see Ann O'Brien, 'Journey's end: customs around death' in Frank Murphy and Kathleen MacDonagh (eds) *Travellers Citizens of Ireland: Our Challenge to an Intercultural Irish Society in the 21st century* (Dublin, 2000), pp. 80-6.

¹¹² Houlihan, *Puck Fair*, p 52. When this happened is not stated.

¹¹³ Logan, *Fair Day*, p 101.

ended.¹¹⁴ The decline in these regular, formulaic often ritualistic gatherings, ended a vital social outlet for Travellers as well as another niche economy. For settled people, Traveller visits may have seemed an intrusive nuisance without the structural justification of a fair.

Occupation

A nomadic lifestyle was well suited to the occupations preferred by Traveller men and women. Travellers were self employed, selling skills, items and their labour in accordance with the demands of the market. They exploited niche economies, and tailored their work to local circumstances. Once the chances for work in one area had been exhausted, families could move on to pastures new. Contemporary Travellers believe that 'what you actually work at is of very little importance, you look for opportunities and make the best of them'.¹¹⁵ Therefore, travel patterns depended on the potential for trading and begging in an area. An interviewee for the Folklore Commission in County Waterford in the 1930s said of 'na tuincéirf', 'Fhaid agus go gheibhdís aon phoic oibre ar aon chor thimpeall an pharóiste do dh'fhainidís thimpeall'.¹¹⁶ ('As long as they could get any bit of work at all around the parish, they would stay on'.) In an economy founded on home production there were ample opportunities for exploiting different trades and local demands. E. Estyn Evans' *Irish Folk Ways* brilliantly evokes the rhythm of a society where itinerant craftsmen supplied specialist trades to scattered settlements.¹¹⁷ Settled populations needed the skills of Travellers and accorded them a certain amount of respect for their craftsmanship. Travellers were popularly associated with tinsmithing,¹¹⁸ and the decline in this trade is cited as the reason for their increased urbanisation in the post war period.¹¹⁹

But the decline of the 'real tinker' had long been forecast: in 1913 it was noted that 'ere long their existence will only live in tradition'.¹²⁰ The end of 'tinkering' was

¹¹⁴ Interview, Nioclás Breatnach, 29 December 2001.

¹¹⁵ Navan Travellers Heritage Teamwork, *Travellers ... their life and times*, p 6.

¹¹⁶ Nioclás Breatnach, *Ar Bóthar Dom* (Rinn Ó gCuanach, 1998), p 95. Micil de Paor was the interviewee.

¹¹⁷ Chapter 15 'Home Made Things' in E. Estyn Evans, *Irish Folk Ways* (London, 1989).

¹¹⁸ See John C. O'Sullivan, 'The tools and trade of a tinker' in Caomhín Ó Danachair (ed.), *Folk and Farm: Essays in Honour of A.T. Lucas* (Dublin, 1976), pp. 208-17. We cannot, however, assume that tinsmithing was an exclusively Traveller occupation.

¹¹⁹ See especially George Gmelch, *The Irish Tinkers: The Urbanization of an Itinerant People* (California, 1977).

¹²⁰ *Ireland's Own*, 27 August 1913.

lamented in 1937 with *Ireland's Own* citing enamelware as the reason for its demise.¹²¹ Some Travellers blamed aluminium for ending the trade,¹²² but plastic finally usurped tinware in the 1950s. The market for a tinsmith's skill had been undermined earlier, when milk production was centralised in the co-operative and large creamery. In farm creameries, 'farmers "set" their milk in wooden coolers about a quarter of an inch high, but principally in pans made of earthenware and of tin'.¹²³ A tinsmith could splice broken earthenware pans together; his skill played an important role in pre-mechanised milk production. Travellers filled changing needs in rural communities: 'tinkers used to make moulds for the people round here when they used to make candles in the homes'.¹²⁴ A ring could be fashioned from an old half crown or coin, but according to John Quilligan, 'its pointless making a ring now because you can buy the same ring fairly cheap'.¹²⁵ The tin trade was only one aspect of the Traveller economy, and families and individuals should not be characterised on the basis of one skill. Making a living on the roads depended upon the ability to turn a hand to anything. When certain sources of income vanished, Travellers adapted accordingly.

Among the Travellers interviewed by Mac Gréine, there was considerable pride in the tinsmithing trade as a 'family trade, handed down from one generation to another'.¹²⁶ However, a tinsmith would also deal in donkeys, or sweep chimneys when the opportunity arose.¹²⁷ According to the Commission's report, 30 tinsmiths also claimed to be sweeps. Among the other trades and crafts claimed were carpenter, flower-maker, shoemaker, basketmaker, waitress, tailor, dressmaker, mechanic, umbrella repairer, brushmaker, blacksmith and welder.¹²⁸ Before the introduction of myxomatosis, men caught and sold rabbits to earn extra money.¹²⁹ Labouring work was also undertaken, and the family income was supplemented with seasonal work such as

¹²¹ *Ireland's Own*, 17 April 1937.

¹²² Interview, Nioclás Breatnach, 29 December 2001; 'I talk with a tinker' Sherley McEgill, 1 February 1936, *Irish Press* SMGC K13 p168 no.1, SJL.

¹²³ A fascinating description of skilled craftsman at work is in Tinker Questionnaire, MS 1255, p 139, RBÉ.

¹²⁴ Schools Collection, MS 289, p 259 RBÉ; Another niche market that vanished was the poteen trade. 'Down to recent times their services were in demand for making and repairing the stills in which home-made whiskey (poteen) was manufactured'. Evans, *Irish Folk Ways*, p 200.

¹²⁵ Interview with John and Mary Quilligan, NFP 96 - 004, SR 8.

¹²⁶ Mac Gréine, 'Irish Tinkers or "Travellers": some notes', p 171.

¹²⁷ Mac Gréine, 'Irish Tinkers or "Travellers": some notes', p 171.

¹²⁸ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, Appendix XXIV, p 137.

¹²⁹ Navan Travellers Heritage Teamwork, *Now and Then*, p 7. See also Sharon Gmelch, *Nan* p 101.

potato or beet picking.¹³⁰ Farmers employed Travellers on a 'contract basis for an agreed sum per acre, or for the job'. This arrangement suited Travellers since the whole family could be employed on a task and the hours could be flexible: 'The itinerants apparently prefer this type of arrangement to working regular hours for wages'.¹³¹ By the 1960s, most Travellers were dealers and collectors of scrap or any waste material with resale value.¹³² Seasonal migration for temporary agricultural work in Britain continued among Travellers from the eastern counties.¹³³

Horses

Travellers' skill with horses was well known though not always trusted. One County Limerick farmer never bought a horse from Travellers because he knew they were 'doped' or 'dosed', so that 'the horse would do anything he'd be asked for two weeks after'.¹³⁴ Donkeys were traded by Travellers, because 'many Irish farmers were much too proud to breed or deal in donkeys, so the trade was left to travellers'.¹³⁵ Horse dealing was the primary trade of certain families who were differentiated from the 'tinkers' by this occupation. On the Beara peninsula, the Harringtons were not considered 'tinkers in the same sense as the Coffeys – they were horsedealers'.¹³⁶ The horse dealing Sheridans from Limerick only visited parts of County Cork for the Cahirmee Horse Fair.¹³⁷ When tractors replaced farm horses, Travellers bought up old horses for slaughter.¹³⁸ Horses and donkeys were essential for travelling and trading, but caused the greatest tension with the settled community. On 28 August 1965, in Johnstown County Killkenny a Traveller man was shot dead by two farmer's sons in a dispute over grazing horses.¹³⁹ The Commission hoped that the adoption of cars and vans would improve relations between Travellers and settled people as the 'trouble and injury' caused by wandering donkeys and horses would vanish.¹⁴⁰ However, the horse

¹³⁰ Navan Travellers Heritage Teamwork, *Now and Then*, p 5.

¹³¹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 72.

¹³² *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 73.

¹³³ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 36.

¹³⁴ Interview, Mary Breatnach, 29 December 2001.

¹³⁵ Logan, *Fair Day*, p 115.

¹³⁶ Tinkers Questionnaire MS 1255, p 113, RBÉ.

¹³⁷ Tinkers Questionnaire MS 1255, p 115, RBÉ.

¹³⁸ "Poor old horse' – Goodbye to Dobbin!' Roddy the Rover 12 March 1935, *Irish Press* SMGC K13 p63, SJL.

¹³⁹ Tim Leahy, *Memoirs of a Garda Superintendent* (County Clare, 1996), p 110. See also, *Report of the Garda Commissioner on Crime for the year 1965*, Appendix D.

¹⁴⁰ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 71.

has remained an important part of Traveller culture, and central to the identity of many Traveller men. Dealing in horses remains a serious business for Traveller men and the present day Ballinasloe horse fair is testament to their commitment.¹⁴¹

Hawking and Begging

The mainstays of the Traveller economy were hawking and begging, activities performed largely by women and children. Opinions of the settled people on begging vary in the sources from hostile to sympathetic, with many expressing no opinion on the practice. Mac Gréine wrote ‘they are very persistent, and present such a doleful appearance that the country people usually give them something to get rid of them’.¹⁴² If the proceeds of begging did not suit their requirements, they discarded these immediately ‘generally a short distance from the house at which they received them’.¹⁴³ This practice would not have endeared them to alms givers, but beggars on foot could not carry large loads. A beggar cannot refuse the charity offered, even if it does not match his/her needs. The relationship between beggar and alms giver is a complex one and shaped popular opinion of Travellers. Begging and selling could ‘torment the housekeepers’¹⁴⁴ and assertive behaviour by Travellers may have challenged perceptions of ‘charity cases’.

The country people never regarded tinkers as objects of charity as they did the poor old beggar-men and women of the old workhouse days. These poor creatures begged. The tinkers just demand and God help anyone who left one of them leave the door empty handed. This obtains in the case of the tinkers up to the present day. They wish all kinds of ill-luck to the house and to the crops and to the cattle if they are refused their demands and people are sometimes afraid of their curses.¹⁴⁵ (emphasis in original)

On the other hand, another respondent to the 1952 questionnaire noted that ‘in the very act of begging they set up a feeling of superiority in the minds of those they beg from’.¹⁴⁶ These two excerpts demonstrate contrasting views of the relationship between beggar and alms giver. For Travellers seeking food, clothing or money in order to survive, resorting to curses and petitions was essential and, in the context of their

¹⁴¹ See Chapters 5 and 6 in Mark Holdstock, *The Great Fair: Horse Dealing in Ballinasloe* (London, 1999).

¹⁴² Mac Gréine, ‘Irish Tinkers or “Travellers”’: some notes’, p 172.

¹⁴³ Mac Gréine, ‘Irish Tinkers or “Travellers”’: some notes’, p 172.

¹⁴⁴ Tinker Questionnaire, MS 1255, p 85, RBÉ.

¹⁴⁵ Tinker Questionnaire, MS 1255, p 108, RBÉ.

¹⁴⁶ Tinker Questionnaire, MS 1255, p 173, RBÉ.

relatively powerless position, understandable. Moreover, that their curses were not taken too seriously is suggested by the saying 'its not worth a tinker's curse'. Prayers and blessings were companions to curses. Nan O'Donoghue knocked on the door of a house with the words "God save everybody in", saying "I'll say three Hail Mary's for you ma'am if you make us a cup of tea".¹⁴⁷ Nan felt that householders in the West of Ireland wouldn't give to Travellers unless God was mentioned.¹⁴⁸ In Nan Joyce's and Nan O'Donoghue's autobiographies, their dislike of begging is clear. Nan Joyce commented that 'Travellers begging had to make themselves all miserable-looking before they'd be given anything but when you were selling something it was different, you felt better'.¹⁴⁹ But begging was essential in the struggle for survival.

Then we would start begging off the houses, a grain of flour and anything the woman would give us. A bit of meat, spuds or cabbage, lock of onions, tea or sugar or a bit of butter; we would get a bit in every house. We had to do it, we all begged with the black shawls, the children in our arms, breast-feeding them ... The times were too hard; it was all begging.¹⁵⁰

Many Travellers hawked handicrafts such as artificial flowers.¹⁵¹ Nan Joyce hawked *Old Moore's Almanacs* in Belfast city.¹⁵² Small items were peddled in rural Cork, 'brooches, hair-grips, tie-pins, beads, laces and pictures'. There was a ready market for these goods among remote rural households. A basket of 'swag' would contain many small items, 'little pictures, hair combs, strainers, scissors, needles, thread, nearly everything you could mention ... shoe laces, polish'.¹⁵³ These small articles would be sold, and food begged from the householder in the process.

Before the spread of the cash economy in the 1940s, potatoes, vegetables, eggs and meat were all available in rural households. As farmers and smallholders grew their own vegetables, reared chickens, cured bacon, kept milk cows and made butter, food rather than cash was available as alms. When every household produced a small food surplus, there was ample available for Travellers who called to the door. The growth of the rural bus service and motorisation has been blamed for ending the market for

¹⁴⁷ Gmelch, *Nan*, p 87.

¹⁴⁸ Gmelch, *Nan*, p 130.

¹⁴⁹ Joyce and Farmar, *Traveller*, p 33.

¹⁵⁰ Navan Travellers Heritage Teamwork, *Now and Then*, p 7.

¹⁵¹ Joyce and Farmar, *Traveller*, p 31.

¹⁵² Joyce and Farmar, *Traveller*, p 43.

¹⁵³ Gmelch, *Nan*, p 100.

Traveller hawkers¹⁵⁴ but the increased monetarisation of the rural economy had other effects also. As farmers specialised and concentrated on commercial production, they ceased to produce their own food.¹⁵⁵ Farming households bought food in market towns, replacing farm produce with food from the grocery shop. There was no longer a potato pit in the back garden, or a side of bacon hanging from the rafters to share with Travellers. Government regulations on food also discouraged home consumption. Rules on pig slaughter made it illegal to kill a pig on an unlicensed premises and James Dillon once again sprang to the defence of the marginal rural economy. He asked the Minister for Agriculture to 'bear in mind that in certain parts of the country there are thatchers, weavers and itinerant persons who earn their living sometimes - not exclusively, but largely - by going around doing services for their neighbours'. He hoped that this practice would not be outlawed by new legislation; 'If you make it quite clear that the person who comes to my house, kills a pig, cures it, takes a cup of tea and gets a present, is not committing an offence, it would do'.¹⁵⁶ These developments in the rural economy did not affect all areas of the country equally¹⁵⁷ and Travellers may not have been immediately and dramatically worse off. However, improvements in the welfare system were nationwide and probably affected settled people's opinion on begging and alms giving. Universal unemployment benefit was codified in the Public Assistance Act 1933, but it was 1939 before benefits were sufficiently generous to improve the lot of the Irish poor (see glossary). As state subsistence was seen to improve, tax and rate payers may have felt that individual alms giving was no longer needed. Under these circumstances, tolerance for begging may have declined. Such apparently minor changes had a cumulative effect on the position of Travellers.

Although the above description has drawn heavily on sources referring to change in rural Ireland, Travellers cannot be easily categorised as rural. Fairs were held

¹⁵⁴ Kevin C. Kearns, 'Irish Tinkers: an itinerant population in transition', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 67, 4 (1977), p 540.

¹⁵⁵ George Gmelch also cited the end of subsistence farming as an important change in the lives of Travellers, Gmelch, *Irish Tinkers*, p 45. Tim Leahy recalled 'no farmer to my knowledge in the dairying parts of County Kerry now cultivates any crop, not even vegetables or potatoes for his own domestic use, all farms being now set out in grass land', *Memoirs*, p 46.

¹⁵⁶ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 78, col. 727 (30 November 1939).

¹⁵⁷ In considering change in rural Ireland, regional disparities must not be forgotten. For example, 'By 1975 almost every farmer over 5 acres in Wexford had a tractor while at the other end of the scale less than 25% of farms in Mayo had made the transition', Tim O'Neill, 'Tools and Things: Machinery on Irish Farms', in Alan Gailey and Daithí Ó hÓgáin (eds), *Gold under the Furze: Studies in Folk Tradition Presented to Caoimhín Danachair* (Dublin, 1982), p 101.

in market towns, which were not 'urban' in the sense of a city, but nevertheless maintained a considerable difference between townspeople and those residing on scattered homesteads. Arensberg and Kimball noted the complex spatial identifications in rural Ireland, where the "rural community" was 'no simply defined geographical area.'¹⁵⁸ A small farmer gave varying and different degrees of allegiance to his county, to where he shopped weekly, to the market town he attended, to his parish and to his voting district.¹⁵⁹ Travellers had similar patterns of identification, dependent upon birthplace, winter headquarters, summer travel circuits and fairs attended. Travellers were neither town nor country people, but nomads who secured a living in urban and rural areas. This strategy was shared by another nomadic community in Ireland, Anglo-Romany Gypsies.

Gypsies in Ireland

The presence of Gypsies in Ireland is a historical fact apparently lost to contemporary Traveller and settled society.¹⁶⁰ Yet evidence demonstrates that the confusion in applying labels such as 'traveller' or 'gipsy' was more than communal indecision. Although Anglo-Romanies no longer cross the Irish sea, in the past Ireland provided a living for both Gypsies and Travellers.

In April 1907, the *Skibbereen Eagle* reported on the Bandon petty sessions, at which two Gypsies were convicted of larceny. That the two men were unlikely to be Travellers is suggested by their names, Samuel and Hester Smith.¹⁶¹ In 1909 in County Waterford, William Pillery and John Wilson were identified as Gypsies.¹⁶² In the *Irish Daily Independent* of July 1910, Maurice V. Reidy discussed Gypsies in Ireland, differentiating them from 'the Irish tinkers, who lead a somewhat similar wandering life'. He also carefully separates Gypsies from 'the ordinary tramp who infests the Irish country districts ... sponging on the poor or country folk'.¹⁶³ Patrick Colum in the *Irish*

¹⁵⁸ Arensberg and Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland*, p 282.

¹⁵⁹ Arensberg and Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland*, p 283.

¹⁶⁰ 'Gypsies never established themselves in any great numbers in Ireland because their lifestyle and especially their work habits were already found in larger numbers among Irish Travellers and Ireland is only a small country', Michael MacDonagh, 'Origins of the Travelling People' in Murphy and MacDonagh (eds) *Travellers Citizens of Ireland*, p 23.

¹⁶¹ 'Bandon Petty Sessions: Two Gypsies Convicted of Larceny' *Skibbereen Eagle* 29 April 1907, SMGC K1 p36, SJL.

¹⁶² 'Gypsies in Waterford' *Waterford News* 26 March 1909, SMGC K3 221 p56 SJL.

¹⁶³ 'Gypsies in Ireland Racial Peculiarities' Maurice V. Reidy, 1 July 1910, *Irish Daily Independent* SMGC K4 542-543 p153 SJL.

Times asked in 1911, 'why have the far travelling Gypsy-folk established no communities in Ireland? Perhaps the Romany wanderers like Roman soldiers, feel that this ultimate island is too remote for the march ... The few Gypsies who cross the Irish Sea keep within the Pale I think'.¹⁶⁴ Pádraig Mac Gréine noted that Gypsies were 'rare' in Ireland. He divided itinerant families into

two classes, tinkers and gypsies. Between tinkers and gypsies there is little or no resemblance, save in the fact that they are itinerants; but there the resemblance ceases. They do not intermingle or intermarry, they speak different languages, or 'cant' as it is sometimes styled; and their religions are different.¹⁶⁵

The extent of Anglo-Romany travel in Ireland is difficult to gauge. Their circuits may have concentrated on Leinster though they did venture beyond eastern seaboard. In 1933 *The Irish Independent* discussed the position of the Gypsy community in Ireland, North and South, noting the difficulties the economic war had brought to cross border travel.

At present, if a gipsy desired to enter Northern Ireland from the Free State, he must pay duty on his horses, ponies and dogs. There would be considerable difficulty with regard to the caravan and its furniture. In order to avoid these tariff troubles, the gipsies in both areas must remain where they are until the tariff problems are settled.¹⁶⁶

The principal Romany families in Ireland at this time were the Prices, Boswells, Lees, Lovells and Smiths who met annually at Ballinasloe horse fair.¹⁶⁷ In 1934, the Oliver family camped outside Abbeyfeale, County Limerick before travelling to Cork to seek a better climate for a sick family member.¹⁶⁸ The Gentle family were photographed near Kinsale County Cork in 1955, suggesting that Romanies travelled far beyond Leinster.¹⁶⁹ Gypsies appeared to be concentrated in Dublin city and its environs during the winter months. In 1936, the *Irish Press* ran an article on Gypsies living in the heart of Dublin city, in a court in Gardiner Street. Since the author, Sherley McEgill clearly

¹⁶⁴ 'Gypsies Camp by the Dodder' Patrick Colum 20 May 1911, *Irish Times*, SMGC K5 p103 SJL.

¹⁶⁵ Mac Gréine, 'Irish Tinkers or "Travellers": some notes', p 170.

¹⁶⁶ 'Economic War Affects the Gypsies Border Tariff Troubles' Sherley McEgill, 29 December 1933, *Irish Independent* SMGC K12 p26 no. 1, SJL

¹⁶⁷ 'Economic War Affects the Gypsies Border Tariff Troubles' Sherley McEgill, 29 December 1933, *Irish Independent* SMGC K12 p26 no. 1, SJL.

¹⁶⁸ Interview, Nioclás Breatnach, 29 December 2001.

¹⁶⁹ Gypsy Photos Ireland F-I. Ireland 1-8, SMGC, SJL.

distinguished between Travellers and Gypsies in his various articles,¹⁷⁰ his identification of this group as Gypsies is significant. Nine caravans were parked in the court 'which was spotlessly clean. All the caravans were brightly painted and the brassware shone in the winter sunshine'. Gypsy children attended the local National Schools while the adults earned their living by 'hawking linoleum to customers in the suburbs and the outlying villages in Dublin, Wicklow, Kildare and Meath'. Some also formed dance bands and performed on the streets: 'with their tiny stream-lined moustaches and Spanish apparel they bring a touch of romance and gaiety to the drab city streets in winter'.¹⁷¹ Not all Gypsies parked in the city centre; a few 'preferred to spend the winter in sheltered lanes on the outskirts of the city'.¹⁷² About 30 Gypsy caravans were noted in Terenure County Dublin: 'it is convenient to the city and has all the amenities of rural life'. Close proximity to the new suburbs of Crumlin and Kimmage gave the women access to 'a ready market for the lengths of lino they sell at bargain prices'.¹⁷³

These reports portraying an idyllic, carefree life contrast with the experience of caravan dwellers in Dublin city and county. In early 1934, Dublin Corporation evicted many Gypsies and Travellers from the city centre¹⁷⁴ (see chapter 3). Many families were forced from stable accommodation in the city to camps in the suburbs from which they were constantly moved.¹⁷⁵ Those who could afford to pay rent for vacant yards remained in Dublin after the evictions, while the poorer families were forced to live outside the city or leave Dublin altogether.¹⁷⁶ Dublin Corporation minutes for these years do not contain complaints about either Gypsies or Travellers, but the expulsion of families despite pleas from members of the St Vincent de Paul¹⁷⁷ suggests that the municipal authority perceived caravan dwellers to be unacceptable.

¹⁷⁰ See also 'Irish Tinkers: to the editor of *T.P.'s Weekly*' 15 October 1909 *T.P.'s Weekly* SMGC K3 p209 no.783, SJL; 'The Tinker and the Caravan' Sherley McEgill 3 March 1934 *Irish Press* SMGC K12 p28 no.1, SJL.

¹⁷¹ 'The Gypsies Come to Town' Sherley McEgill 20 January 1936, *Irish Press* SMGC K13 p 167, SJL.

¹⁷² 'Gypsies answer the call of spring' Sherley McEgill 20 March 1935, *Irish Independent* SMGC K13 p75, SJL.

¹⁷³ Quidnunc II 10 January 1936, *Irish Times* SMGC K13 p170, SJL.

¹⁷⁴ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1934*, pp. 147-8, Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP).

¹⁷⁵ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1935*, p 168, SSVP.

¹⁷⁶ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1936*, p 171, SSVP.

¹⁷⁷ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1934*, p 147-8, SSVP.

Occupation

The occupations pursued by Gypsies distinguished them from Travellers and may have helped settled people to identify them. While Travellers were popularly associated with tinsmithing and horse dealing, Gypsies made baskets and wickerwork furniture.¹⁷⁸ The Oliver family made and sold three legged tables.¹⁷⁹ Similarly in County Cork, 'their principle [sic] work is making baskets, tables, chairs etc of twigs. They pitch their camps near places where they can get the twigs, the articles are sold from door to door. They also sell such stuff as floor covering, mats and brushes'.¹⁸⁰ Like Travellers, their craft skills came under pressure from changing markets and tastes.

In former years, the gipsies who toured Ireland specialised in the sale of basketware. They still sell wickerwork but this trade is no longer lucrative. They now tour the country with rolls of linoleum. There is always a brisk demand for this article in rural areas and very few cottagers can resist the appeal of the eloquent Romany saleswoman when they display their goods.¹⁸¹

However, Gypsies followed a similar pattern of self employment to Travellers and presumably varied their trades to match local circumstance and commercial expediency. Men unable to prosper in basket making turned to collecting 'wastepaper, rags and scraps'.¹⁸² In common with Travellers, it was women who sold door-to-door making extra money by fortune telling if possible.¹⁸³

Religion

The presence of Gypsies in Dublin city attracted the attention of the St Vincent de Paul. St John Francis Reggis, a committee for gypsy visitation based in Rathgar, was established in 1932. In 1931-2 brothers visited 27 families totalling 135 people. In contrast to other home visitation, no material aid was ever offered or asked for, as the work was 'purely spiritual'. This missionary activity was aided by the 'untiring zeal' of

¹⁷⁸ Letter to the editor from 'Smaragdus', 20 November 1953, *Church of Ireland Gazette* (Thanks to Daithí Ó Corráin for this reference); 'Economic War Affects the Gypsies Border Tariff Troubles' Sherley McGill 29 December 1933, *Irish Independent* SMGC K12 p26 no. 1, SJL; 'Gypsies collect junk' 4 April 1934, *Irish Times* SMGC K12 p28 no.2, SJL; 'Gypsies in Ireland Racial Peculiarities' Maurice V. Reidy, 1 July 1910, *Irish Daily Independent* SMGC K4 542-543 p153, SJL; 'they go about selling tables and carpets' according to a Bantry informant in the Schools Collection, MS 289, p 259, RBÉ.

¹⁷⁹ Interview, Nioclás Breatnach, 29 December 2001.

¹⁸⁰ Schools Collection, MS 320, 191.

¹⁸¹ 'Gypsies answer the call of spring' Sherley McGill 20 March 1935, *Irish Independent* SMGC K13 p75, SJL.

¹⁸² Letter to the editor from 'Smaragdus', 20 November 1953, *Church of Ireland Gazette*.

¹⁸³ 'Gypsies answer the call of spring' Sherley McGill 20 March 1935, *Irish Independent* SMGC K13 p75, SJL; 'Some gypsy women pretend to be fortune tellers' Schools Collection, MS 289 p 259 RBÉ.

a number of Jesuit friars.¹⁸⁴ St John Francis Reggis members were initially concerned exclusively with the relationship of Gypsies to the Church and ensuring baptism of their children. The children were placed in local convent schools, while adults received religious instruction in their caravans. When families left Dublin, members wrote to other conferences to ensure continuity. However, families often changed routes, causing difficulties for Society members concerned for their religious education. Members across the country were asked to 'stop and talk to these people'.¹⁸⁵ Many of the families visited in Dublin were from Wales, and the use of the term 'gypsy' is significant. Later discussion refers to 'tinkers and gypsies' though the descriptions are used interchangeably. However, the 'Romany children' in Gardiner Street in 1936 were attending local schools and making their first Holy Communion¹⁸⁶ implying that in Dublin at least, the St Vincent de Paul worked closely with Gypsies. A Church of Ireland clergyman informed his co-religious that not all 'Gipsies' were Roman Catholics.

I was formerly acquainted with a number of such families who parked their caravans on the outskirts of Dublin or even in half derelict lanes in the old parts of the city, in winter time ... I have taken a Gipsy funeral ... I have prepared a Gipsy girl for Confirmation. I know that several of my brethren in the vicinity of Dublin have had much experience of these people and of ministering to them.¹⁸⁷

He acknowledged that it was 'difficult to distinguish the Gipsy at first from the other itinerants (the Tinkers of whom none are Protestant as far as I know)'. As most Gypsies had been in Ireland a long time, 'it is only the older ones who speak with that kind of North Wales accent which is an invariable sign of their origin'. He urged the Church of Ireland to take Gypsies 'who nominally or definitely belong to our Church under its wing'. He feared Catholic proselytisers would compromise the Protestant faith of Gypsies:

... these people are being visited by Roman Catholics and Anglicans among them are encouraged to join the majority. In one encampment an energetic Roman Catholic curate was found organising a kind of 'mass confirmation' of most of the children in the caravans. An Anglican Gipsy stood out and declared that all her children would be 'done' in their own Church, no matter what happened ... The situation was complicated by the fact that all caravans were

¹⁸⁴ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1932*, p 115, SSVP.

¹⁸⁵ *Report of the Annual Meeting of Presidents with the Council of Ireland 1933*, p 26-7, SSVP.

¹⁸⁶ 'The Gypsies Come to Town' Sherley McGill 20 January 1936, *Irish Press* SMGC K13 p167, SJL.

¹⁸⁷ Letter to the editor from 'Smaragdus', 20 November 1953, *Church of Ireland Gazette*.

under immediate notice from the police to leave the place; but the action was delayed until the confirmations were safely over.¹⁸⁸

Energetic lay Catholics organised in the Society of St Vincent de Paul and the Legion of Mary may have been converting Gypsies in addition to encouraging formal Catholic observance among Irish Travellers (see chapter 3). This evidence indicates that Travellers and Gypsies camped together. Yet in the 1930s, some Travellers disclaimed all contact with Gypsies:

They are very definite on this point. They will tell you that gypsies are 'neither right nor lucky,' and will stress the chief difference by adding: 'They aren't Catholics, sir and we never mix with them!'. Tinkers refer to them as gypsies, Romanies, gillies, and gillie-goolies.¹⁸⁹

This may have been true of the families that Mac Gréine met, but Anglo-Romanies occasionally mixed with Travellers. Nan O'Donoghue's brother Joe married a Romany Gypsy, Olivine Price.¹⁹⁰ In Britain, Anglo-Romanies married Irish Travellers.¹⁹¹

The nature of contact between nomadic groups was important in the structures of their communities but for settled observers unable to clearly distinguish between Irish Travellers and Anglo-Romanies, appearance was all that mattered. Family nomadism and temporary accommodation distinguished Travellers and Gypsies from the settled people who were not interested in subtle cultural observation. If settled people found nomads difficult to categorise, the same could not be said for the wandering vagrant who was also officially invisible but emerged strongly in folklore sources.

Vagrancy: the Homeless in Twentieth-Century Ireland

Vagrancy in Ireland has received little scholarly attention, apart from Caitríona Clear's brief outline of the situation pertaining in Galway in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Clear is careful to point out that the 'tramps and vagrants' featuring in police reports and workhouse registers were unlikely to be Travellers.

¹⁸⁸ Letter to the editor from 'Smaragdus', 20 November 1953, *Church of Ireland Gazette*.

¹⁸⁹ Mac Gréine, 'Irish Tinkers or "Travellers": some notes', p 175. See also, 'I talk with a tinker' Sherley McGill 1 February 1936, *Irish Press* SMGC K13 p168 no.1, SJL, 'But some of our Irish nomads are very conservative in their habits. They express wholehearted contempt for the gypsies and their 'yokes'' (caravans).

¹⁹⁰ Gmelch, *Nan*, p 119. Nan Joyce describes her Romany aunt as 'great sport'. Joyce and Farmar, *Traveller*, p 61.

¹⁹¹ Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, p 207.

Complete families of travelling traders and craftsmen were never identified as a public order problem by the police or poor law authorities in this period ... In the first place, these people, while they certainly begged to supplement their income, were not wandering abroad without visible means of support – they had transport, tools of a trade or the wherewithal to trade, and most importantly of all, the travelling man was seen to be supporting his wife and family ... people on the move who were subject to police attention and considered a problem by the Poor Law in the years 1850-1914 were, increasingly, unaccompanied men in their 20s.¹⁹²

Vagrant men were often seeking labouring work and with no skills or trade they struggled to subsist in a society with limited employment prospects. Women were a minority among convicted vagrants, as destitute females were more likely to be offered aid by voluntary and statutory agencies, and also more likely to be placed ‘in a workhouse, hostel or asylum’.¹⁹³ How deserving an individual was for relief was heavily influenced by gender, a bias that continued in the poor relief policies of the Irish Free State. The profile of twentieth-century vagrants remained overwhelmingly male, as able-bodied men were, despite the economic reality, often viewed as voluntarily unemployed.

The homeless were ignored by government, a neglect that began with the foundation of the state. The Commission on Poor Relief commented, ‘although this class are not recognised we know that they exist’.¹⁹⁴ The 1927 Commission report briefly alluded to homelessness even though it was outside its terms of reference. A Garda survey revealed that 3,257 people were without accommodation on a single night in November 1925.¹⁹⁵ Men represented 53% of those homeless, women 21% and children 26%. Since the number of homeless people was small, the Commission merely recommended that ‘it may be necessary in Cork, Dublin, Waterford and Limerick to set aside special accommodation for this class’.¹⁹⁶ The Department of Local Government and Public Health explained that hatred of the workhouse sprang from its association with vagrants and ‘the physical wreckage of the population’.¹⁹⁷ Vagrants were unwelcome in the newly respectable County Home where people availing of indoor

¹⁹² Caitríona Clear, ‘Homelessness, Crime, Punishment and Poor Relief in Galway 1850-1914: An Introduction’, *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society* 50 (1998), p 126.

¹⁹³ Clear, ‘Homelessness, Crime, Punishment and Poor Relief in Galway’, *JGAHS* 50 (1998), p 123.

¹⁹⁴ *Report of the Commission on the Sick and Destitute Poor, Including the Insane Poor* (Dublin, 1927), p 17.

¹⁹⁵ *Report of the Commission on the Sick and Destitute Poor*, p 17.

¹⁹⁶ *Report of the Commission on the Sick and Destitute Poor*, p 61.

¹⁹⁷ *Report Department of Local Government and Public Health 1922-25*, p 52.

relief could not be expected to associate with 'the undesirable elements of humanity'.¹⁹⁸ If the respectable poor were accommodated in the County Home, the homeless were excluded. The Commission on Poor Relief heard that 'these people complained of the great loss they suffered by the closing of the workhouses. In the old days they always got a few nights lodging in such institutions'.¹⁹⁹ The policy of the independent state was to exclude homeless men and women from public institutions, expecting voluntary organisations to provide for them.²⁰⁰

Rural homelessness

The paucity of knowledge about the lowest levels of Irish society has led writers on Travellers to ignore other individuals living on the roads. From the Schools Collection gathered by the Folklore Commission in 1937-38, it is clear that Travellers were not alone in using nomadism to maximise subsistence living opportunities. Children's accounts from County Cork under the heading 'Travelling Folk' are peopled with colourful, often tragicomic local characters 'Paddy Wheel About'²⁰¹, 'Dan the fiddler'²⁰² and 'Jerry the Quality'.²⁰³ As information was sought under the heading 'an lucht siúil' (literally, the walking people), this source should not be taken as a comprehensive survey of Travellers alone, who would have been more readily identified as 'na tincéirí' (the tinkers). The interpretation of 'an lucht siúil' as beggars or Travellers varied from school to school though the majority of teachers and pupils chose to discuss the vagrant homeless. From the information contained in the Schools Collection, we can roughly identify three different categories of traveller: those who sought lodgings; those who sought alms and those who sold items or a skill. These wanderers were separate from and in addition to Travellers and Gypsies.

Lodgings

Male tramps seeking lodgings travelled a regular circuit, staying with the same families for a night at a time, before moving on to the next household on their route. Many were

¹⁹⁸ *Report Department of Local Government and Public Health 1922-25*, p 52.

¹⁹⁹ *Cork Examiner*, 10 February 1926.

²⁰⁰ Department of Health, *Reconstruction and Improvement of County Homes* (Dublin, 1951), p 14.

²⁰¹ 'Paddy Wheel About' lived in the neighbourhood of Kinsale for 30 years. After his death, it was discovered that he was Colonel John Hawkes, an ex-soldier who, in the course of his military career, had led the desecration of a Roman Catholic Church, Schools Collection, MS 320, pp. 76-78, RBÉ.

²⁰² Schools Collection, MS 288, p 325, RBÉ.

²⁰³ Schools Collection, MS 289, p 261, RBÉ.

not wholly sane, some were ex-soldiers²⁰⁴ or former inmates of Industrial Schools.²⁰⁵ What is striking about these individuals is that although sometimes unconventional and occasionally a little mad, they were written of with considerable affection and sympathy by the school children. They were a part of the local population; their dress, habits and family history were well known. This mostly male vagrant population was integrated into the local community and though they lived on charity, one child described them as 'respectable travellers'.

These men do not ask for alms. They usually call at dinner time or at tea time. We invite them to join us and they regale us with stories of their adventures while the meal is in progress. They give us news of our friends in Kilkenny, Waterford or Limerick.²⁰⁶

Though they did not ask for assistance, these men were offered shelter and food. In exchange they told stories, brought news, sang songs or played an instrument.

The tramps that travel singly look for lodging. They bring news from other places. They generally sleep in an out house or fix a bed for themselves in the kitchen. The people of the house give them their meals.²⁰⁷

They often bring news from distant parts. The old people used to gather around them as there was hardly any newspaper at that time.²⁰⁸

They used come round at certain times and bring all the news with them, they were known by 'nicknames' such as 'Straight Road', 'Black Bess', 'Mary from Cork' etc. Some of the men could fiddle beautifully and sing 'come-all-ye' songs.²⁰⁹

This was a legitimate currency in a society where entertainment was largely self-made and any diversion from routine gossip welcomed. Women were increasingly rare visitors and one woman said 'Travelling women often came around but [now] no women come except gypsy and tinker women'.²¹⁰ Some informants believed that the numbers of beggars had declined within living memory.²¹¹

Beggars may have seemed less numerous, but they remained part of the community, where they were 'generally welcome in the houses because they are like old

²⁰⁴ For instance, Johnny Walker, who lost a hand in battle Schools Collection, MS 279, p 65; John Collins, Schools Collection, MS 279, p 230, RBÉ.

²⁰⁵ Schools Collection, MS 288, p 327, RBÉ.

²⁰⁶ Schools Collection, MS 337, p 92, RBÉ.

²⁰⁷ Schools Collection, MS 343, p 33, RBÉ.

²⁰⁸ Schools Collection, MS 343, p 388, RBÉ.

²⁰⁹ Schools Collection, MS 304, p 18, RBÉ.

²¹⁰ Schools Collection, MS 289, p 259, RBÉ.

²¹¹ Schools Collection, MS 276, p 101, RBÉ; Schools Collection, MS 276, p 102, RBÉ; Schools Collection, MS 289, p 259, RBÉ.

friends of the family'.²¹² The term 'travelling people' was considered by one informant to apply 'to a fast diminishing number of old and infirm people'. Their passing was regretted by 'some of the older people [who] were actually glad to welcome them and offer them food and shelter'.²¹³ The state pension was cited as a reason for the decline in the numbers of elderly people on the roads.²¹⁴

Alms

Popular religious culture praised unquestioning generosity offered to a nameless, unknown wanderer, who was later revealed to be the Mother of God or Christ himself.²¹⁵ Men and women seeking alms worked within this popular Christian tradition, returning charity with prayers and blessings for the giver and his/her family: 'He began his prayers and petitions before reaching the house and continued them for some time after entering the kitchen, in a continuous stream of words'.²¹⁶ A beggar would receive alms with blessings such as 'May God spare your health', or 'May God increase your store'.²¹⁷ The ending of a petition used by a Mrs O'Donoghue from Macroom was recalled by one informant:

Ná fhaghad-sa bás go deo go mbéarfaidh mé solas na Nodlag liom! Go saoraidh Dia ó bás i ndorchacht na h-oíche sinn! Go dtugaidh Dia grásta na foidhne daoibh-se is domhsa chun trioblóidí an tsaoghail seo imochar go fulangach foidhneac, agus beannacht Dé le h-anmann na marbh agus le nbhúr n-anam féin ar uair bhúr mbáis!²¹⁸

May you not die at all until I return with the light of Christmas! May God save us from death in the darkness of the night! May God give the grace of patience to you all and to me to carry patiently and passively the troubles of life and God's blessings be with the souls of the dead and your own souls on the hour of your death!

Hospitality was extended generously, a practice upheld by a secular folklore tradition that told of hospitality rewarded and meanness punished.²¹⁹ One child recounted a local story in which a beggar woman refused lodgings brought a plague of rats upon a family

²¹² Schools Collection, MS 353, p 182, RBÉ.

²¹³ Schools Collection, MS 347, p 443, RBÉ.

²¹⁴ Schools Collection, MS 347, p 441, RBÉ; Schools Collection, MS 276, p 101, RBÉ.

²¹⁵ See S. Ó Suilleabháin and R. T. H Christiansen, *The Types of the Irish Folktale* (Helsinki, 1967), number 750 'Hospitality Blessed', p 147.

²¹⁶ Schools Collection, MS 326, p 90, RBÉ.

²¹⁷ Schools Collection, MS 337, p 93, RBÉ.

²¹⁸ Schools Collection, MS 326, p 31, RBÉ.

²¹⁹ Ó Suilleabháin and Christiansen, *The Types of the Irish Folktale*, number 751 'The Greedy Peasant Woman', p 147.

that ended only when she was granted £10 and lodgings for the rest of her life.²²⁰ Despite the overwhelmingly positive depiction of tramps in this source, not everyone was welcoming; 'some people like to see them coming but others have no welcome for them'.²²¹ The authorities were not necessarily sympathetic to the plight of these vagrants; in 1925, the persistent begging of a 'deaf, dumb imbecile' in Clonakilty County Cork was suppressed by Gardaí.²²²

Selling items or a skill

Individuals with a trade also travelled the countryside to find a market for their skills and goods. For example, a clockmender visited rural parts of County Cork, staying in one house for a couple of weeks until the neighbourhood had exhausted the need for his services.²²³ Ireland's sparse population and scattered settlements were unsuited to permanent retailers. Pedlars were able to earn a living from travelling the roads, selling to every house they passed. Dermot Keogh has documented the life of the Jewish pedlar in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but we know little about the state of the trade when these Jews established shops and ceased peddling.²²⁴

Legal changes were blamed by a Baile Mhuirne (Ballyvourney) informant for a decline in travelling people.

Bhí alán lucht siúbhail ann fadó ach níl puinn aca ag gabháil mór thimcheall anois mar tá an dlíge taréis cosg a chur ar lucht siúbhail ná beadh ag díol rudaí.²²⁵

There were a lot of travelling people long ago, but there are none of them going around now because the law has banned travelling people who were not selling things.

Selling goods door to door was licensed under the Hawkers and Pedlars Acts (see legal glossary). In March 1924, 186 hawkers licences were issued.²²⁶ It was unlikely that all travelling sellers were licensed and for some hawkers, trading was a pretence to cover the solicitation of alms.

²²⁰ Schools Collection, MS 343, p 407, RBÉ.

²²¹ Schools Collection, MS 343, p 33, RBÉ.

²²² Superintendent M. Troy to Chief Superintendent, 28 August 1925, DJ H207/4, NAI.

²²³ Schools Collection, MS 304, p 17, RBÉ.

²²⁴ Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, p 14.

²²⁵ Schools Collection, MS 327, p 318, RBÉ.

²²⁶ Office of the revenue commissioners to Secretary Department of Justice, 5 January 1925, DJ H207/1, NAI.

James Dillon was anxious to protect the hawker's meagre income and status from criminalisation under the Shops (Hours of Trading) Act 1938, which gave the Minister for Industry and Commerce the power to decide trading hours for shop owners across the country (see glossary). Dillon questioned many aspects of the legislation, worried that practices such as half holidays to accommodate local fairs would end.²²⁷ Urban hawkers who sold fruit, vegetables fish and flowers were excluded from the Bill's provisions. Dillon worried that the 'ordinary wares' traded by the rural hawker, 'tin pannikins, caps for pipes' were not also exempt.²²⁸ Beggars who hawked as a legal fiction to solicit charity was vigorously defended by Dillon.

If the Minister lived in a country town, as most Deputies do, he would know that he had three or four very good friends amongst that class - familiar friends who have come in collecting twopence or threepence on one day per week. They come most religiously on that day and would be ashamed to come on any other day. They have a regular route. They are old friends and they circumnavigate the regulations prohibiting their activities by selling studs or bootlaces or something of that kind, so that if a Civic Guard came on the scene you can grab a pair of bootlaces and protest that you were engaged in a commercial transaction; that there was no eleemosynary element in operation at all. I know that it sounds absurd to be talking about these things, but these people will be guilty of a statutory offence if they offer these commodities, and they will be caught.²²⁹

He attacked the bureaucratic mindset that considered it 'administratively impossible to draw the line; that you cannot have omelettes without breaking eggs ... but when the eggs happen to be personal friends of long standing, then you take a more personal interest in their fate'.²³⁰ Dillon's passionate advocacy defence of the unstandardised rhythms of rural life was not supported by other Dáil deputies. Whether the Shops (Hours of Trading) Act 1938 was enforced against beggars posing as hawkers, or Travellers selling tinware is impossible to judge, but legislation criminalising unregulated trading was on the statute book.

Urban Homelessness

The urban homeless were featured in even fewer sources than the rural wanderer, despite their higher concentrations in large towns and cities.²³¹ Consequently, their

²²⁷ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 70, cols. 123-4 (2 February 1938).

²²⁸ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 70, col. 131 (2 February 1938).

²²⁹ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 70, col. 135 (2 February 1938).

²³⁰ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 70, cols. 135-6 (2 February 1938).

²³¹ '...casual inmates of County Homes do not constitute a problem outside of cities and large towns' Department of Health, *Reconstruction and Improvement of County Homes*, p 14.

place and function in society is less easy to determine, though the existence of people with no fixed abode in Irish cities cannot be denied.

The Society of St Vincent de Paul became concerned for homeless men following the closure of the workhouses after independence. The workhouse casual ward and the accommodation it provided for men travelling to find work or those too poor to afford lodgings vanished. The local Public Assistance Officer was compelled by law to make provision for poor travellers and Society members were urged to bring cases to the attention of the authorities or to find lodgings for the poor. The Society's President, Sir Joseph Glynn, stressed that 'most of these men are looking for work and should not be allowed to sink into the mendicant classes'.²³² The South Cork County home was the only home to officially provide for casuals, although their numbers were small.²³³

'Casuals' in county homes constituted a tiny fraction of the population receiving indoor relief, so small in numbers that they were not annually categorised in the figures for indoor and outdoor relief.²³⁴ In March 1950, they represented just 139 people out of a total population in County Homes of 8,585.²³⁵ However occasional their appearance, the 'casuals' were problematic for some institutions. The Health Bill 1952 contained a clause²³⁶ specifically written in response to the perceived problems caused by casual admittances. Despite the official redefinition of the workhouse as an institution for the respectable poor, homeless individuals remained entitled to overnight lodgings. The Minister for Health, Dr Ryan, cited the rowdy and disruptive behaviour of tramps and casuals, which necessitated legislation that branded a patient a criminal if he/she did not obey institutional rules. The Minister claimed that county homes which admitted drunk casuals the night before a local race meeting required additional powers to cope with them.²³⁷ Indeed, Dr Ryan could not see 'how a county home could be run without the powers laid down in the sub-section'.²³⁸ Deputies argued that a power designed to counter exceptional troublemakers should not be applied to all patients in the county

²³² *Report of the Annual Meeting of Presidents with the Council of Ireland 1925*, p 11, SSVP.

²³³ *Report of the Commission on the Sick and Destitute Poor*, p 17.

²³⁴ See the annual *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health* up to 1949 for figures on indoor and outdoor relief.

²³⁵ Department of Health, *Reconstruction and Improvement of County Homes*, p 9.

²³⁶ Sub-section (6) Section 49, *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 140, col. 1184 (15 July 1953).

²³⁷ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 140, col. 1189 (15 July 1953).

²³⁸ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 140, col. 1190 (15 July 1953).

home.²³⁹ One deputy even termed the section 'the Belsen Camp section of the Health Bill'.²⁴⁰ Dr Ryan was unmoved.

I do not see why Deputies should go absolutely berserk on the idea of the liberty of the individual and allow our old people to be disturbed in their night's rest in the interests of this sort of theoretical liberty.²⁴¹

Dr Noel Browne TD stated that vagrancy was the fault of society, not the individual tramp: 'Anybody would think that the vagrants wanted to be on the road or went to the county home because they preferred it to the Gresham Hotel'.²⁴² Following a lengthy debate, the Minister modified his position and offered to redraft the section,²⁴³ perhaps conceding that legislation based on the drunken antics of a few 'blackguards' represented poor law.

In addition to county homes, common lodging houses provided accommodation for homeless men in urban Ireland. Liam O'Flaherty's description of a lodging house in *The Informer* (1925)²⁴⁴ and Orwell's painful account (1933) of 'doss houses' in England²⁴⁵ reveal the importance of casual lodging houses where rooms were rented by the night. Lodging houses in Cork city accommodated between 3 and 45 men, with a Salvation Army hostel offering 79 beds in 1919.²⁴⁶ The accommodation available changed annually as lodging houses were demolished, sold, closed for public health reasons or returned to domestic use. By 1943, only 5 common lodging houses remained in the city.²⁴⁷ The St Vincent de Paul maintained night shelters in Dublin city for men 'travelling from place to place'²⁴⁸ and the Society's shelter for 'Catholic men' lodged between 80 and 90 men a night.²⁴⁹ Society brothers also visited public lodging houses on Sunday mornings to provide breakfast and encourage prayer.²⁵⁰ In Dublin, applications by casuals to the County Home were discouraged as officials expected

²³⁹ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 140, col. 1196 (15 July 1953).

²⁴⁰ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 140, col. 1196 (15 July 1953).

²⁴¹ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 140, col. 1200 (15 July 1953).

²⁴² *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 140, col. 1220 (15 July 1953).

²⁴³ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 140, col. 1226 (15 July 1953).

²⁴⁴ Liam O'Flaherty, *The Informer* (UK, 1980), pp. 5-21.

²⁴⁵ George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (Penguin Classics, 2001), pp. 130-133 recounts Orwell's first night in a lodging house.

²⁴⁶ Register of Common Lodging Houses 1910-48, 6 September 1919, p 30 CPLH/1, CAI.

²⁴⁷ Register of Common Lodging Houses 1910-48, Enclosures, 28 June 1943, CPLH/1, CAI.

²⁴⁸ Council of Ireland, *St Vincent's Glasnevin Centenary Record 1856-1956* (Dublin, 1956), p 16, SSVP.

²⁴⁹ *The Origins and Objects of the St Vincent de Paul Society and its Workings in Ireland* (1923 ed., Dublin), p 16, SSVP.

²⁵⁰ Council of Ireland, *St Vincent's Glasnevin*, p 16, SSVP.

voluntary organisations to provide accommodation and services for homeless men.²⁵¹ Many homeless individuals invariably resorted to begging to earn enough money to survive.

When the poor resorted to begging, the law was not always kindly disposed towards them. In Dublin, a man described by police as 'a regular nuisance' was sentenced to one month's imprisonment for street begging.²⁵² In 1924, police attention focused on homeless men begging in Dublin city. Their physical deformities did not inspire much pity in the *Irish Times*.

We hold that these poor cripples have a moral right to assistance in their unequal battle with life. Their place, however, is not upon the streets and their deformities ought not to be a tax upon the city's impatient and promiscuous charity. There are hospitals and homes which they are entitled to enter, and we are sure that the police and municipal authorities will not invite the aid of such institutions in vain.²⁵³

Dublin policemen had instructions to move 'deformed mendicants' from the streets although they were present only in limited areas of the city.²⁵⁴ The extent to which these beggars actually were a nuisance is questionable. Sergeant. R. O'Connell informed his Superintendent: 'It is however difficult to get rid of this class of people as invariably they do not beg or importune passers-by and are most careful not to cause obstruction'.²⁵⁵ Their very existence and the tactless exposition of their deformities in Dublin's public streets was the only nuisance they appeared to pose.

Cork city in 1926 was described as 'The Beggar's Mecca'. A *Cork Examiner* columnist maintained that begging was now 'open and undisguised, without the least cover or excuse' whereas in the past, beggars had been 'so closely watched by the Constable that he or she always covered the begging trade with a pretence of selling boot-laces, shirt-buttons or some other thing'.²⁵⁶ The writer felt that no 'deserving person' would need to beg in Cork as 'such splendid provision for the relief of the poor

²⁵¹ A report of the Dublin Union Commissioners noted a reduction in the number of 'casuals' seeking relief due to pressure at the Admissions Board, a more general knowledge of the Morning Star Hostel run by the Legion of Mary and the absence of army demobilisation. *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1929-30* Appendix XLV, p 253.

²⁵² *Irish Times*, 4 August 1922.

²⁵³ *Irish Times*, 5 February 1924.

²⁵⁴ W.R.E. Murphy to Minister for Home Affairs, 31 December 1924, DJ H207/4, NAI.

²⁵⁵ Sgt. R. O'Connell (Station Sgt. College Street) to Superintendent B Division, 21 January 1921, DJ H207/4, NAI.

²⁵⁶ *Cork Examiner*, 22 January 1926.

is made by the citizens of this most charitable city through the organisations chartered to fight the want and misery that will always be with us'.²⁵⁷ But St Vincent de Paul members in Cork found 1925 particularly difficult because of the 'unprecedented amount of local distress'.²⁵⁸ In 1926, the Society 'sought to protect its members from the danger of regarding their Society as a philanthropic society, [and] the public from the risk of looking upon it as a municipal or public relief organisation'.²⁵⁹ In February 1926, Superintendent Mansfield described begging in the city as 'a through scandal'; 'Mendicants were coming to the city from all parts of the Free State and were doing a thriving business in Cork'.²⁶⁰ Begging in Cork had grown 'to abnormal proportions since the RIC had ceased to operate'. Conditions in Dublin were better, since the DMP had never stopped functioning 'even during the most troublesome times'.²⁶¹ The presence of beggars was unsurprising given the distress and poverty present in the city and county. There was 'exceptional distress' in the city and surrounding districts²⁶² in 1926, where conditions were so bad that the authorities abandoned the gospel of fiscal rectitude and sought to borrow to cover the cost of increased relief.²⁶³ Conditions only began to ameliorate in 1941 'mainly owing to increased public assistance, and to the employment of a large number of men at high wages in England'.²⁶⁴ Begging remained a feature of the Cork streetscape until at least 1945.²⁶⁵ In times of persistent poverty, homelessness and begging must have been the fate for many.

Homelessness in urban areas was ignored by government relief agencies who left accommodation for 'casuals' with private charity. Rate and tax-funded relief agencies perceived their task as offering assistance for securing the essentials of life, rather than reform or rehabilitation. The Commission on Poor Relief believed that government relief agencies were not suited to the task of rescue work among the vulnerable in society. Voluntary schemes were successful precisely because they were

²⁵⁷ *Cork Examiner*, 22 January 1926.

²⁵⁸ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1925*, pp. 36-7, SSVP.

²⁵⁹ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1926*, p 24, SSVP.

²⁶⁰ *Cork Examiner*, 19 February 1926.

²⁶¹ *Cork Examiner*, 20 January 1926.

²⁶² The South County Board administered the Poor Law unions of Bandon, Kinsale, Cork, Macroom, Midleton and Youghal. A Sitting held by the Commissioner of the County Borough of Cork, 4 February 1927, p 408 CP/C/A 15, CAI

²⁶³ A Sitting held by the Commissioner of the County Borough of Cork, 24 September 1926, p 379, CP/C/A 15, CAI.

²⁶⁴ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1941*, p 33, SSVP.

²⁶⁵ Minutes of the meeting of the County Borough Council, 25 September 1945 p 568, CP/C/A 17, CAI.

‘voluntary and actuated by higher motives than the provision of material necessities’.²⁶⁶ Better results could be achieved by voluntary charity and this division of responsibility has been accepted by the private and public sector since the foundation of the state. This division of responsibility would have implications for public and private attitudes to the ‘itinerant problem’ in the 1960s.

Conclusion

Most of this study analyses why government and administrators noticed Travellers only as families and individuals of no fixed abode who impeded traffic. This chapter demonstrates that this aspect of Traveller-settled relations was not the only contact between the two communities. Travellers lived and worked alongside settled people, earning their living by satisfying the economic needs of the settled population. There was conflict over grazing animals but largely Travellers and settled people coexisted peacefully, if separately.

In rural areas Travellers were part of a vagrant population who called to houses seeking food or money, but unlike the lone tramp, a Traveller family did not stay on the kitchen floor. Possessing tents and later caravans, Travellers remained outside the intimate family circle that admitted tramps seeking shelter. In the Schools Collection, Travellers were always described as selling small goods, rather than calling solely for alms. From the children’s accounts, it is clear that there were different wanderers but in many accounts the distinctions were difficult to make. The nomenclature varies from ‘travelling folk’, ‘travelling people’, ‘tinkers’, ‘tinsmiths’, ‘gypsies’ and all terms were used fairly loosely. The population on Ireland’s roads was amorphous and most individuals did not differentiate between deserving tramps and idle tinkers. This 1937-38 survey reveals a rural Ireland relatively unconcerned with Travellers as a threat. A sense of fear is absent. With so little differentiation between vagrants, changes affecting the status of local tramps could have had a knock-on effect on Travellers. Radio, increasing literacy and newspaper reading, bus transport to larger towns, increasing welfare provision – many factors that undermined the unique niche and status of the wanderer must also have affected perceptions of Travellers. When welfare provision for

²⁶⁶ *Report of the Commission on the Sick and Destitute Poor*, p 87.

the elderly and vulnerable increased, these wandering beggars vanished, leaving Travellers and Gypsies alone on the roads.

After this outline definition of what made a Traveller, a Gypsy and a tramp distinguishable from each other, it seems appropriate to ask how nomads functioned on the physical margins of Irish society. How Irish society accommodated Travellers will be discussed in the next chapter.

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Chapter 2

Irish Society: Communal Identities and Definitions

To understand the position occupied by Travellers in Irish society, we must devote some consideration to the nature of that society. Irish social history remains embryonic, with historians preferring to relate the struggle for independence and the political significance of state building during and after the civil war.¹ In concentrating on the personalities, motivations and power struggles of Irish politicians, the profession has not acknowledged many significant social developments in twentieth century Ireland.

In this chapter I will address an aspect of Irish identity that has been posited as the root of anti-Traveller feeling. Irish nationalism, with its emphasis on blood and soil, has been blamed by Jim MacLaughlin for marginalising Travellers.² Given the centrality of nationalism to Irish politics and identity, the role of this ideology in defining community will be considered. Origin myths and definitions of Irishness must be examined in order to understand the unique position of Travellers, who were always recognised as Irish, yet increasingly stigmatised as outside the community. The unifying and divisive potential of nationalism as detailed by other authors will be connected to relations between Travellers and settled people.

However, ideology and political rhetoric did not define Traveller-settled relations in the twentieth century. Much of this chapter will not discuss Travellers directly, but will focus instead upon the increased state control over the lives of its citizens. A by-product of developments in state and society from 1922 to the 1950s was the alienation and isolation of Travellers. This social change differs from the specific anti-Traveller legislation outlined in chapter 3. By describing the creation of civic society, this chapter will provide the context to the increasing marginalisation of Travellers. I will outline the importance of public space to communal definitions in Irish society. The use of public land for camp sites was (and continues to be) the focus for conflict between Travellers and settled people. This tension results from legal strictures on land usage, which began to impinge upon social conventions from the 1930s

¹ For an overview of urban studies in Ireland see Mary E. Daly, 'Irish Urban History: a Survey', *Urban History Yearbook*, (1986), pp. 61-72.

² Jim MacLaughlin, 'Nation Building, Social Closure and Anti-Traveller Racism in Ireland', *Sociology*, 33, 1 (1999), pp. 417-435.

onwards. The introduction of planning redefined public space as well as transforming the character of urban and rural areas. Planning legislation also introduced the concept of an amenity, a landscape designed and maintained for popular and tourist consumption. That tourists were often Irish rather than foreign was also important. In addition to evolving attitudes to space, Irish society was undergoing considerable change in a number of areas, for example family work practices and provision of public housing. The urban and rural working class experienced massive social change, often as a result of government intervention. For, to an extent that has not been recognised, it was government intervention that moulded Irish society and its social norms. Laws, regulations and government actions often had unforeseen consequences. Niches occupied by Travellers were eroded not through increasing intolerance, or a wave of vast impersonal 'modernisation' but by persistent government regulation of various aspects of Irish social organisation. Such regulation also served to make Travellers increasingly distinctive and often, unacceptably different.

Nationalism

The Irish state is founded on nationalism, an ideology that unifies and strengthens the identity of its citizens. The role of nationalist ideology in determining Traveller-settled relations has been examined by Jim MacLaughlin, whose accessible *Travellers and Ireland: Whose Country? Whose History?* (Cork, 1995) has become a standard text. (His journal articles have more comprehensively outlined his reasoning.)³ MacLaughlin points to the rise of bourgeois nationalism as well as the inherent opposition between sedentary and nomadic cultures to explain anti-Traveller racism in Ireland but there are a number of problems with his thesis. He asserts that settled society has been implacably hostile towards Travellers since the late nineteenth century without producing historical evidence to prove this. His analysis leads one to conclude that contemporary anti-Traveller feeling is the inevitable result of a state founded on nationalism. However, there were other ideologies available to Irish society, one of the most important being the Christian traditions of charity. State-centric, ideological elite hostility as detailed by MacLaughlin may not necessarily represent popular opinion and

³ See MacLaughlin, 'Nation Building', *Sociology* 33, 1 (1999) pp. 417-435 and 'The political geography of anti-Traveller racism in Ireland: the politics of exclusion and the geography of closure', *Political Geography*, 17, 4 (1998), pp. 417-435.

daily interaction between Travellers and settled people. His argument about the ideological basis for anti-nomad prejudice is certainly persuasive, almost polemical. Yet, it does not allow for changing definitions of nationalism and differing interpretations of the ideology. Nor are transformative events in the nationalist canon – the 1916 Rising, the War of Independence, the Civil War - alluded to. Tellingly, no Irish nationalists are quoted directly; his argument is founded upon the theoretical works of Anthony Smith and others. If nationalism is to blame for anti-Traveller feeling, MacLaughlin should produce nineteenth-century evidence of 'the racialisation and defamation of Travellers'.⁴ Also attitudes towards 'hygiene and respectability'⁵ have a historical chronology and are not totalising statements in their own right.

On the importance of the land to nationalist and sedentary societies, MacLaughlin is on sure ground. But unlike the land hungry labourer class, Travellers were not a direct threat to land owners. They did not want land, whereas cottiers and labourers were involved in agrarian unrest that protested at the inequalities in rural society.⁶ Just as settled people were not involved in Traveller society, nomads did not seek to participate in the social organisation and administrative structures of the sedentary community. The nomad's refusal to participate in sedentary society could be accommodated by ignoring his or her existence. This was practised successfully until, for a variety of reasons, settled people could no longer ignore Travellers. The question of social and political change is not addressed in MacLaughlin's totalising interpretation of nationalism as the dominant ideology in modern Ireland.

In contrast, change and violent redefinitions of community are at the heart of Peter Hart's work on the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in County Cork from 1916-23. His powerful account of the victims of IRA violence and how they were perceived as irredeemably different by IRA brigades was an instant classic of Irish historiography. He asserts that Travellers were defined as outsiders by the Cork IRA and bore the wrath of their vigilante activities. Hart's study posits that the violent nationalism unleashed in County Cork targeted the marginal and 'unrespectable' with the tacit compliance of the

⁴ Jim MacLaughlin 'Nation Building, Social Closure and Anti-Traveller Racism in Ireland', *Sociology* 33, 1 (1999), p 129.

⁵ MacLaughlin 'Nation Building', *Sociology* 33, 1 (1999), p 129.

⁶ See for example Dan Bradley, *Farm Labourers: Irish Struggle 1900-76* (Belfast, 1988) and J.S. Donnelly, *The Land and the People of Nineteenth-Century Cork: the Rural Economy and the Land Question* (London and Boston, 1975).

wider community. The IRA's role as policeman apparently made them temporarily popular with unionists who liked 'the polite young men in their Sunday best who kept order at fairs and races, protected property, and kept tinkers and beggars away.'⁷ The 'first and most obvious targets' for the IRA were, according to Hart, the 'tramps' and the 'tinkers'.⁸ However, he was forced to acknowledge the positive portrayals of wandering men in the Schools Collection. Thus 'familiar tramps' were welcomed in farmhouses and 'itinerant strangers' or "tribes' of tinkers' were resented⁹ but the deaths of lone tramps suggests that the IRA may not have respected this subtle social distinction. Oddly, Hart's table of victims has one category - 'tinker/tramp' - for two groups he has earlier asserted were received very differently by 'respectable' society.¹⁰ Despite acknowledging the differences between tinkers and tramps, Hart seems anxious to equate the labels. It is not hard to believe that guerrilla justice replaced the RIC in moving on the 'tramp nuisance' and the 'tinker pest',¹¹ though we will never know whether it was appreciably different for those at the receiving end. After the establishment of the Gardaí, localised extra-legal action against Travellers continued. Many Travellers were led to believe that there was a 24 hour limit on a camp site. No such law existed but local authorities and Gardaí did not dissuade them from this belief.¹² Some victims of the Cork IRA were tinkers or tramps - a minimum of 8% of those shot could be categorised thus. This is a small figure compared with 29% and 36% for ex-servicemen and Protestants respectively.¹³ Hart's statement that 'as the IRA often killed tinkers, tramps, and other loners and outsiders who might never be missed, some of the killings will surely never come to light'¹⁴ must be challenged. Travellers may have been outside settled society but they were not necessarily 'loners'. A Traveller shot by the IRA would have had family members who would have sought a body for burial. He also asserts that participation by the marginalised in active service was resented by deeply respectable and class-conscious IRA activists. However, one

⁷ Peter Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies: Violence and Community in Cork 1916-23* (Oxford, 1998), p 141.

⁸ Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies*, p 150.

⁹ Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies*, p 150.

¹⁰ Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies*, p 304.

¹¹ How a Kilkenny brigade dealt with 'scamps from distant places' is recalled by James J. Comerford, *My Kilkenny IRA Days 1916-22* (Kilkenny, 1978), p 150.

¹² Interview, Fr Fehily, 8 May 2001.

¹³ Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies*, p 304.

¹⁴ Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies*, p 321.

Dáil deputy claimed that 'tinkers' helped him while he was on active service.¹⁵ Nan Joyce related a story about one Traveller's close escape from the Black and Tans when he was smuggling guns for the IRA.¹⁶ Participation in the 'national struggle' was not confined to gunmen ambushing British forces.

Both Hart and MacLaughlin describe nationalism as an ideology available to landowners and the powerful to exclude and demonise the poor and marginal. Yet Travellers also make use of dominant nationalist myths. To the fore of the origin myth in one Traveller autobiography is the nationalist canon of dispossession by the perfidious English. Nan Joyce asserted that 'some of my ancestors went on the road in the Famine but more of them have been travelling for hundreds of years – we're not drop-outs like some people think'. According to the Nan Joyce, native Travellers mixed with Spanish immigrants and acquired Norman names such as Power by marrying English travellers. Some settled people 'burned out during the Cromwell evictions' or made homeless by the Famine married Travellers already on the road.¹⁷ Rathkeale families justify their attachment to the town with an oral tradition locating them firmly in the local history of religious and ethnic dispossession - the Palatine plantation.¹⁸ Claiming a place in this history of eviction gives the 'local bona fides' of Rathkeale Travellers 'immemorial depth'.¹⁹ In addition to integrating their history into the nationalist saga of invasion and conquest, Travellers posit their origins as pre-colonial.²⁰ These stories 'reveal simultaneous acceptance of the dominant themes of Irish nationalism and Catholicism, [and] an active rejection of stigmatization of the Traveller way of life'.²¹ Helleiner considers Traveller nationalist origin myths to be 'part of larger post-colonial nationalist discourses in which Irish citizenship, identity and culture are opposed to the colonial past'.²² Helleiner asserts that these myths divert attention from 'the economic and political processes and relations of power' that produced and

¹⁵ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 159, col. 723 (11 July 1956). Deputy J.J. Collins was the speaker.

¹⁶ Joyce and Farmar *Traveller*, p 26.

¹⁷ Joyce and Farmar, *Traveller*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁸ O'Connor, *All Ireland is in and about Rathkeale*, pp. 134-5. For a full history of the Palatine plantation see Patrick J. O'Connor, *People make Places: The Story of the Irish Palatines* (Newcastlewest, 1989).

¹⁹ O'Connor, *All Ireland is in and about Rathkeale*, p 134.

²⁰ Joyce and Farmar, *Traveller* p 1; Maher *The Road to God Knows Where*, p 63.

²¹ Helleiner, *Irish Travellers*, p 50.

²² Helleiner, *Irish Travellers*, p 30.

sustained Travellers.²³ If this is the case, Travellers are complicit in this denial. The origins question is one of the most controversial issues relating to Irish Travellers.

Serious historical research on Traveller origins has not been attempted; writers confine themselves to citations of acts from the thirteenth century aimed at 'wandering Irish' or the emergence of 'tynkler' as a surname.²⁴ Ní Shúinéir claims Travellers are 'supremely indifferent'²⁵ to historic origins but this is not necessarily true. For some Traveller activists the origins question is vitally important. Michael MacDonagh writes:

I feel it is very important when people talk of Travellers to look at their origins, because this will not only condition the way people think about Travellers but will also dictate what kind of services they will provide and the way these services will be delivered. It is important to show the origins of Travellers so that people's mind-sets and way of thinking changes. No longer is it acceptable to say that Travellers were settled people and therefore it's perfectly alright to resettle or reassimilate them.²⁶

The political significance of the origins question proves the centrality of nationalism to Irish society. MacDonagh is anxious to convince settled people of the antiquity of Traveller origins. He refutes popular myths held by settled people about the emergence of the Travelling community from amorphous wandering poor, preferring Eoin MacNeill's explanation that Travellers were descended from industrial communities that lived in Ireland in Celtic and pre-Celtic times.²⁷ Clearly, MacDonagh believes that historically proven origins can combat prejudice and justify the provision of culturally sensitive services for Travellers. In appealing to a halcyon Celtic past, he uses conventional nationalist tactics by asserting an 'Irish' identity for a separate ethnic group living parallel to, but separate from the majority population. Curiously, Traveller's ethnicity both supports and challenges 'Irishness'. By describing themselves as 'Irish' they validate popular assumptions about identity, while simultaneously demonstrating the reality of cultural difference in Irish society. By locating their history within a recognisable nationalist canon, Travellers claim ownership to the concept of 'Irishness' engendered in popular culture by tales of Irish oppression. MacLaughlin's

²³ Helleiner, *Irish Travellers*, p 30.

²⁴ Sinéad Ní Shúinéir, 'Irish Travellers, ethnicity and the origins question' in McCann, Ó Síocháin and Ruane (eds), *Irish Travellers*, p 62.

²⁵ Ní Shúinéir, 'Irish Travellers' in McCann, Ó Síocháin and Ruane (eds), *Irish Travellers*, p 60.

²⁶ Michael MacDonagh, 'Origins of the Travelling People' in Murphy and MacDonagh (eds), *Travellers: citizens of Ireland*, pp. 21-5.

²⁷ MacDonagh, 'Origins of the Travelling People' in Murphy and MacDonagh (eds), *Travellers: citizens of Ireland*, p 24. Eoin MacNeill made this assertion in *Phases of Irish History* (Dublin, 1937), p 82.

account of a 'blood and soil' nationalism demonising nomadism should be qualified by an Irish context that gives pride of place in the pantheon of victimhood to the dispossessed and exiled. It is this Irish nationalist tradition that Travellers have used to explain their place on the margins of society. However, the significant gap between the origins claimed by Rathkeale Travellers and the Celtic beginnings alleged by MacDonagh suggests that collectively, Travellers have yet to agree on their history. Therefore, for contemporary Travellers constructing a political and cultural agenda, nationalism and origin myths are significant. Claims by Hart and MacLaughlin that historically, nationalism has legitimated the murder and exclusion of Travellers are less than satisfactory. Their expositions on the divisive nature of nationalism are countered by the work of Richard English on the pan-class appeal of the ideology. The failure of radical left-wing politics to gain support from the Irish poor has been explained by the unifying potential of nationalism.

With nationalism as the dominant political and social creed in independent Ireland, socialism struggled to make an impact. Irish socialists were republican in bent and attempted to compete with the celebratory nationalist rhetoric of the mainstream political parties. Richard English has noted the futility of this competition 'the fact that both physical force and national spirituality had a pan-class appeal and a class integrating effect further clarifies the inappropriateness of inter-war republican socialists celebration of the war of independence'.²⁸ After the foundation of Fianna Fáil in 1926, republican socialists were further marginalised as de Valera's party proceeded to occupy the centre and significant portions of the left wing in Irish politics.²⁹ With Fianna Fáil as the 'only realistically "national" party' radical left-wing politics became politically insignificant. Though too radical for voters, left-wing radicals were not so extreme as to champion the cause of Travellers. On 30 July 1934, *Republican Congress* carried a tragic story headlined, 'Mother awakens to find her child dead: Tipperary roadside tragedy'. The three-month-old child of a Traveller family died of suffocation in a tent by the roadside. The tone and structure of the article contrast starkly with many other contributions on slum conditions and urban overcrowding.³⁰ This article merely

²⁸ Richard English, *Radicals and the Republic: Socialist Republicanism in the Irish Free State 1925-37* (Oxford, 1994) p. 45.

²⁹ English, *Radicals and the Republic*, pp. 102-4.

³⁰ A sample of racier headlines would include 'Alfie Byrne's Quakery', 'Dublin Rat Pits', 'Bloodlust of O'Duffy', *Republican Congress*, 30 July 1934.

reproduces the letter from the Coroner to Commissioner Meighen (the head of South Tipperary's Board of Health) recommending that women and children of no fixed abode should be accommodated in the County Home. There is no commentary provided by the editor of the paper; it is a plain factual article in comparison to the indignant tone adopted when discussing urban slums. It is presumably included because of the paper's concern with poor accommodation and the housing shortage, rather than to highlight the plight of Travellers living in overcrowded tents.

Seeing the popularity of Fianna Fáil's nationalist rhetoric, Irish socialists attempted to compete on the same terms, without realising that the attraction of such rhetoric was its broad, classless appeal. To assess the status of Travellers in Irish society in terms of nationalism is to choose a relatively unimportant aspect of Traveller-settled relations. To critically assess the response to Travelling people, it is essential to understand how the independent state created civic society. The evolution of this civic society effectively excluded Travellers as changes in housing conditions and work patterns widened the gap between the two communities, making Travellers progressively visible and noticeably different.

Public Space

Since the foundation of the state, efforts to improve society have been made through the criminal justice system. Certain behaviour has been codified as criminal in an ever expanding body of legislation and regulation. Non-attendance at school was an offence under the School Attendance Act 1926. Parents were fined if their children avoided school and the final sanction was committal of the offending child to an industrial school.³¹ Byelaws on parking, street trading and littering were enforced through the courts. Anyone selling goods on the public thoroughfare had to apply for a license under the Street Trading Act 1926. The consequence of such regulation was, as Rottman has noted, 'a constant expansion in the range of behaviour that can be classified, at least formally as criminal. But are people who break such laws criminals?'³² If we accept that the criminal law embodies 'a particular concept of crime and criminals'³³ the prospects

³¹ In 1957, 2,170 convictions were secured under the act and 27 children were sent to industrial schools, *Report of the Commissioner of the Garda Síochána on Crime for the year 1957*, p 23.

³² David Rottman, *Crime in the Republic of Ireland: Statistical Trends and their Interpretation* (Dublin, 1980). p 11.

³³ Rottman, *Crime in the Republic of Ireland*, p 33.

for the marginal and unconventional members of society deteriorate when definitions of unacceptable, abnormal behaviour are enshrined in criminal law. This section will discuss how greater policing of streetscapes as well as regulation of the family economy of the poor affected Irish society after independence. Changing social norms - often dictated by police and administrators - curtailed the ability of the urban and rural poor to make a living. The evolution of attitudes to, and legislation on the division between public and private space also affected Traveller-settled relations by narrowing the definition of acceptable uses of public areas.

Urban working families lived in overcrowded unsanitary slum conditions in the decayed heart of Ireland's cities.³⁴ 'Huckster shops' selling small quantities supplied cash strapped families with a penny's worth of tea, a halfpenny worth of sugar and a half pound of butter.³⁵ In pawn shops, 'the poor man's bank', good clothing was pawned until Sunday when it was redeemed for Mass.³⁶ Unemployment among unskilled labourers was endemic and there were few opportunities in the trades. Since poor relief was only available for short periods, men and women sought part time work or became self employed. In Cork city, families worked hard to make a little extra. Vegetable gardens, fowl and pigs were essential to the economy of the poor. Any surplus could be sold on the streets for cash. Street trading was women's work; customers and stall holders were female.

All up Shandon Street would be full of stalls. Apples, fish vegetables. Sunday mornings there'd be a woman sitting on a stool down at Shandon. She'd be selling sheep's feet, trotters. Then during the week that same woman would sell the crubeens, pig's feet and the cabbage.³⁷

Small producers from the rural hinterland of Cork city sold their produce on the city's streets.³⁸ The market towns of Cork county provided a similar facility for small holders to sell surplus produce. Children were an integral part of the subsistence family economy. For the poorest families on the edge of hunger, the potential labour of children could not be overlooked. Upon reaching 10 or 12 years, an eldest daughter was

³⁴ Verdon, *Shawlies*, p 64.

³⁵ Verdon, *Shawlies*, p 65. See also P.H. Gulliver and M. Silverman, 'Hucksters and petty retailers in Thomastown 1880-1945', *Old Kilkenny Review*, 4 (1993), pp. 1094-1100.

³⁶ For more on pawnshops see Philip Doherty, 'The last pawnshops of Dublin City', *Dublin Historical Record*, xlvii, 1 (1994), pp. 87-94 and Jim Fitzpatrick, *Three Brass Balls: The Story of the Irish Pawnshop* (Cork, 2001).

³⁷ Verdon, *Shawlies*, p 87.

³⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 25 September 1924.

an effective baby sitter for working parents. Children as young as 12 left school in order to work.³⁹ In rural areas, children's work on the land was equally important for the family income. The marginal economies of the rural and urban poor were dependent upon and characterised by family labour and vibrant street markets. In 1926, the government passed two acts which had a considerable impact upon the poor. The School Attendance Act compelled all children of 6 to 14 years to attend school, while the Street Trading Act empowered local authorities to suppress and regulate traders.

Street Trading

When slum conditions were rampant and welfare provision meagre, the local authorities intervened to regulate street trading in Dublin city. Restrictions and regulations imposed on stall trading in Dublin city centre controlled the economic lives of the poorest, and overwhelmingly female, citizens of the city. In Cork city the use of streets as a marketplace for sellers of food, clothes, and chandlery was curtailed by the application of the Street Trading Act 1926 to Cork County Borough in 1929.⁴⁰

The idea for the act originated from the Dublin Metropolitan Police commissioner who sent drafts of possible legislation to the Minister for Home Affairs, Kevin O'Higgins. Commissioner W.R.E. Murphy was frustrated with the legislation in place⁴¹ and he suggested regulating the activities of any 'pedlar, hawker, tinker, vendor of any class or description of goods or wares'. 'Going from house to house' was also to be controlled by the new legislation.⁴² The government did not legislate until 1926, despite complaints from Murphy in 1924 that 'during the past few years the number of traders have increased very considerably and numerous and repeated complaints have been received from traders, the Citizen's Association and other public bodies in Dublin'.⁴³ Casual trading was legal and licensed⁴⁴ but the legislation was intended for migrant salespeople, and was inadequate for dealing with established street traders in an

³⁹ Verdon, *Shawlies*, pp. 88-91.

⁴⁰ See Daniel M. Bluestone, 'The Pushcart Evil' Pedlars, Merchants and New York's City Streets 1890-1940', *Journal of Urban History* 18, 1 (1991), pp. 68-92 and Andrew Brown-May, 'A charitable indulgence: street stalls and the transformation of public space in Melbourne c. 1850-1920', *Urban History* 23, 1 (1996) pp. 48-71 for useful case studies on the evolution of street space.

⁴¹ The legislation in question was the Dublin Police Act 1842 and the Summary Jurisdiction (Ireland) Act 1851. See glossary.

⁴² Draft Street Trading Bill, first schedule, undated, DJ H207/1, NAI.

⁴³ W.R.E. Murphy to Minister for Home Affairs, 6 February 1924 DJ H207/1 NAI.

⁴⁴ Pedlars Acts 1871 and 1881, and the Hawkers Act 1888 – see glossary.

urban area. The Street Trading Bill was a response to the situation in Dublin County Borough, though it could be adopted by other local authorities. The Minister described the Bill as legislation which 'while permitting street trading and thus preserving the means of livelihood for the persons engaged therein, would regulate and control traders, so that there would be no undue interference with traffic on the highway or with those engaged in carrying on business in shops and in premises throughout the city'.⁴⁵ The Bill licensed two types of trader: individuals moving from street to street and those trading from a stall. Dáil deputies disagreed with restricting the legislation to towns of 5,000 people or more and were eager for to all urban areas to be allowed adopt the measure. It was hoped the bill would solve fair day problems in small towns, but O'Higgins reiterated that it was designed with Dublin in mind, and said the Department 'have no great evidence that such a Bill is required outside the City'.⁴⁶ However by the third stage of the bill, O'Higgins had himself received letters from local authorities asking him to remove the population restriction.⁴⁷ The Minister agreed with the change but remarked

Of course, one feels cynical about the enthusiasm to adopt this Act, because the local authorities through the country...have a great many powers, by the judicious use of which they could improve the amenities of their areas of charge, and they do not use them. This power, which is simply to banish...competition in the open to the local traders is enthusiastically taken up as something that is a mighty measure that will bring calm to Kerry and balm to Ballydehob.⁴⁸

Dáil deputies supported the Bill for a reason that O'Higgins had highlighted – the protection of ratepayers from 'the unfair competition of street traders'.⁴⁹ O'Higgins himself scrupulously outlined the intended uses of the Bill, rejecting a general interpretation that its powers were to be used to suppress competition.⁵⁰ If elimination of competition was the aim of the Bill, the Minister would not have exempted sellers at markets or fairs from the regulations. O'Higgins felt that existing powers were sufficient to deal with congestion on market days.⁵¹ He was determined that the local interests responsible for unconfined fairs on the main street should endure the

⁴⁵ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 14, col. 33 (19 January 1926).

⁴⁶ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 14, col. 44 (19 January 1926).

⁴⁷ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 14, col. 147 (27 January 1926).

⁴⁸ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 14, col. 147 (27 January 1926).

⁴⁹ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 14, col. 142 (19 January 1926).

⁵⁰ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 14, col. 413 (6 February 1926).

⁵¹ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 14, col. 418-9 (6 February 1926).

accompanying casual trading.⁵² Clearly, TDs were representing the interests of shopkeepers rather than small farmers or craftsmen who traded small surpluses to supplement subsistence incomes.

Interestingly, the Act when passed differed significantly from the draft version suggested by Commissioner Murphy before 1924. The categories 'pedlar, hawker, tinker, vendor' and traders going from door to door, were not included in the regulations. Specifically excluded from police control were those who carried goods for sale 'only to persons in, at or immediately outside the house or other place in which they reside'.⁵³ Therefore legislation that disadvantaged self-employed urban residents spared Travellers who called from house to house selling goods and trinkets. Arguably however, strict controls on city streets limited the entrepreneurial opportunities for Travellers as much as the urban poor. Though regulation may have been O'Higgins' intention, when the Dublin Commissioners prohibited stall trading in over 250 streets, the byelaws seemed to be a determined effort at elimination. The Minister for Local Government and Public Health, Mr Burke refused to hold an inquiry to address the 'widespread dissatisfaction' amongst street traders, as appeals were only permitted before Ministerial approval was granted.⁵⁴ Dublin's street traders went unheard and some 'honest women'⁵⁵ were deprived of their livelihoods. As the first major statute since independence regulating the use of urban space, its impact upon the poorer and more marginalised citizens deserves some consideration. The Act made a significant contribution to constructing definitions of public space in an urban environment.

Street trading was also common in Cork city, particularly along one of its oldest thoroughfares, North Main Street. Some women had been trading for as long as 30 years.⁵⁶ Stalls, barrows and boxes were used to display goods, or produce was simply spread on the ground. The money earned may not have been substantial, but for families in poverty small contributions were essential. Rural producers also sold on the city streets, avoiding the chain of purchasers and shopkeepers unfavourable to small holders.

⁵² *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 14, col. 421 (6 February 1926).

⁵³ Street Trading Act 1926, Section 2 (5) (b). See glossary.

⁵⁴ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 18, col. 520-1, (16 February 1927). Further appeals for an inquiry were put in *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 19 col. 610-11 (31 March 1927); *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 29 col. 186-7 (30 June 1927); *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 23 (30 May 1928).

⁵⁵ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 55 col. 2471-2 (11 April 1935).

⁵⁶ Chief Superintendent to Philip Monahan, 3 December 1928, CP/Files/41, CAI.

Oral history evidence also suggests that Travellers traded in Cork city centre markets.⁵⁷ Despite the depressed economic conditions and poor employment prospects for most of Cork's working class, Philip Monahan introduced the Street Trading Act to Cork County Borough in January 1929.

Complaints from ratepayers and commercial interests about street trading were long standing and in 1924 the Hackney Carriages Committee of the Corporation considered the 'question of providing alternative methods of allowing Street Traders to carry on without unduly interfering with the business of shop keepers'.⁵⁸ The Council, however, found it impossible to reconcile the interests of ratepayers with the established tradition of stall trading. Some members were aware of the economic necessity for street trading. Mr M.J. O'Riordan, chair of the committee, commended Mr Gamble, the solicitor representing stall traders; 'You are an able advocate of the poor and may God leave you here long to fight their cause'.⁵⁹ The reluctance of the Corporation to intervene despite the complaints of large ratepayers should be noted. Shopkeepers were not the only Cork citizens discomfited by street trading. Motor cars were becoming increasingly common in the city centre, creating logistical problems in relation to parking, pedestrian crossings and traffic flow that remain today. In 1923 there were 9,246 private motor cars licensed in Ireland. This grew to 13,380 in 1924 and 19,848 in 1926. While Dublin county borough had the largest number of car owners with over 5,000 vehicles in 1930, Cork county borough was next with 1,670, while in Limerick, only 594 cars were registered in the borough.⁶⁰ A letter writer signing himself/herself 'Motor Owner' painted a vivid picture of bustling city streets that obstructed private cars.

The most congested centre in Cork is Daunt's Square, being a passage to the markets, garages, SS Peter and Paul's Church and Presbytery and Schools and we find at times impossible to pass owing to the dumping of onion boxes, stands, itinerants (cheap jacks) [sic] and singers. The footpaths are obstructed by boxes, women and children, and sometimes a perambulator is dumped across the

⁵⁷ Interview with Kitty O'Driscoll, NFP 98 - 023, SR 242.

⁵⁸ Minutes of Hackney Carriages Committee meeting, 25 September 1924, in Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 10 October 1924, p 169 CP/C/A 15, CAI. The meeting was also described in *Cork Examiner*, 25 September 1924.

⁵⁹ *Cork Examiner*, 25 September 1924.

⁶⁰ *Statistical Abstract of Ireland 1931* (Dublin, 1931), p 158. In 1947-48 there were an average of 817 cars a day parked in the city centre, though accommodation existed for only 560. Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 23 March 1948, CP/C/A 18, CAI.

path with a baby enjoying its bottle. Respectable citizens are loath to pass this thoroughfare. Numbers of women and children range themselves along paths poking handfuls of onions into people's faces. On Saturdays, cars, motors etc. are often held up owing to congestion. With the help of the Civic Guard and Corporation officials this nuisance could be removed in a day.⁶¹

That the Council had not fixed the irksome issue of street trading was criticised in the inquiry report of Nicholas O'Dwyer who described it as 'one of the most difficult problems with which the Council has been confronted. The traffic has been seriously obstructed in certain streets and business premises ... have been cut off from the roadway by continuous lines of stalls along the channels'.⁶² The City Manager Philip Monahan finally tackled the problem in 1929. Monahan claimed that byelaws under the Street Trading Act were 'not intended to abolish street trading in the City but to regulate it in such a manner that it shall not be an obstruction to the ordinary traffic of the City nor to the business of other traders'. If found trading in an unauthorised street, a stall holder was liable to have her goods seized by the Civic Guards. The Commissioner described street trading in North Main Street, at Daunt's Square and on the North Gate Bridge as 'a serious obstruction to traffic'. Monahan acknowledged that 'it may be a hardship on traders to move to other places' but warned that unless trading ceased in prohibited areas, the full powers of the act would be used. Trading was allowed to continue in designated city centre areas.⁶³ Also, a trader had to purchase a license and display a badge to prove legitimate, licensed status. This was a yearly license and may have resembled rates enough to placate shop owners. Licensed and labelled, street trading was allowed to continue in a small area of the city. In order to assess the impact of this act, we need to examine where many of the stalls were located. Traders were surveyed by the Gardaí on 18 October 1928. Approximately 120 women traded in the South district of the Garda Síochána. All had permanent addresses and traded largely in Cornmarket Street, North Main Street, the Coal Quay and Kyle Street. In the North district, 29 people were listed, trading mostly in Shandon Street, Blarney Street and Wolfe Tone Street, areas later at the centre of slum clearance schemes.⁶⁴ Though the

⁶¹ *Cork Examiner*, 17 December 1924.

⁶² *Cork Examiner*, 1 November 1924. The report is reproduced in full here, but could not be found in local or national archives.

⁶³ A special sitting of the Commissioner, 4 January 1929, CP/C/A 15, CAI.

⁶⁴ Chief Superintendent to Philip Monahan, 3 December 1928 CP/Files/41 CAI. The gender balance in the covered market, which eventually became the English Market, was not so favourable to women. Out of

byelaw schedule listed every street in the city except those specifically exempted, the enforcement of the act was not uniform or severe. Monahan had originally raised the matter to clear traders from 'three streets of the city considered unsuitable for such purpose. Now that this object has been fully achieved, he is satisfied with the present position and suggests that matter should be allowed to rest'. It was therefore considered unnecessary to bring the provisions of the act into operation.⁶⁵ Traders on the North Main Street, Daunt's Square and the North Gate Bridge were targeted by the byelaws and the initial problem solved. However, defining the appropriate use of streets was soon beyond the control of Cork Corporation or the City Manager. The opinions of ratepayers and public representatives were superseded by those of the Gardaí who gained more control over public areas than any other group. When the issue of street trading was raised again in 1938, it was the Chief Superintendent for Cork, not the City Manager, who decided on regulation and enforcement.

Motorised transport brought the corresponding need for police supervision of traffic, the most important increase in police duties in the twentieth century. The power to control vehicular traffic was wedded to the regulation of pedestrians and the surrounding streetscape. In 1928 the *Garda Síochána Code* stated that the purpose of legislation on road traffic was 'to increase the powers of, and to establish a system of supervision by, the Garda Síochána over the general traffic so that ... it would be almost impossible for an accident to occur'.⁶⁶ An officer was to discourage 'the practice of pushing perambulators side by side' on a busy footpath and to move on groups standing on the footpath or at corners. Gardaí were to 'deal firmly with flower sellers or others who stand on sidewalks, or annoy respectable persons by persistently following them'.⁶⁷ Orderly, docile and respectable streets patrolled by the Gardaí were envisaged. But in municipal areas, policing on the streets was split between the Corporation and the Gardaí. In the 1920s, street inspectors employed by the local authority inspected obstructions of the thoroughfare and vehicular traffic.⁶⁸ When the Road Traffic Bill 1931 was introduced, Cork's City Manager suggested to the Borough Council that

78 stall holders, just 15 were women. Minutes of the Tolls and Markets Committee, 10 May 1920 p 173, CP/C/CM/TMA 9, CAI.

⁶⁵ S.A. Roche to Secretary, Department of Local Government and Public Health, 14 June 1929, CP/Files/41, CAI.

⁶⁶ *The Garda Síochána Code 1928* (Dublin, 1928), p 174.

⁶⁷ *The Garda Síochána Code 1928*, p 174.

⁶⁸ See the Minutes of the Hackney Carriages Committee, CP/C/CM/HCC/A 4, CAI.

power to make traffic byelaws be transferred from the Corporation to the Garda Commissioner. Monahan suggested that the Gardaí retain powers 'to deal with all forms of Street Nuisances, such as, those caused by the exposing for sale of goods on the footway, the dumping of refuse or sweepings in the public street, defective eaveshoots and downpipes etc'.⁶⁹ The Road Traffic Act 1933 gave sole responsibility for traffic conditions to the Garda Commissioner (see glossary). Gardaí now possessed more control over the regulation of traffic than at any time in the history of the police force⁷⁰ and there was a corresponding increase in police surveillance of public street space. For example, under the Shops (Hours of Trading) Act 1938, the policing of shop opening hours was transferred from local authorities to the Gardaí⁷¹ (see chapter 1 and glossary).

In 1938, street trading was again raised when the Chief Superintendent for Cork J.J. Hannigan wrote to Monahan on the forthcoming Cork Traffic Byelaws.⁷² Hannigan wanted to open up Cornmarket street and adjoining thoroughfares to traffic and suggested the Corporation make byelaws under the Street Trading act of 1926. Monahan consulted the City Solicitor who wrote 'since street trading is entirely a matter for the Guards, if they think there is a need for regulations, I suppose we should have them'.⁷³ The renouncing of regulatory powers by the local authority and their transferral to the Gardaí was significant. Policy making within a bureaucratic framework, conducted without due regard to the consequences of legal prohibition and law enforcement became the norm. While local politicians may not have behaved any differently, that they were denied the opportunity to voice public opinion reflects the deeply unrepresentative character of technocratic power. The Minister for Justice signed the Street Trading (County Borough of Cork) Order in 1941, prohibiting trading other than the sale of newspapers in city streets. In November 1942, Alderman D.G. Buckley moved that the byelaws be rescinded 'considering the fact that they have caused unnecessary hardships on the street traders of our city who have been carrying on such businesses (handed down from relatives) for over 150 years, without being a hindrance

⁶⁹ Philip Monahan to Lord Mayor and Members of County Borough Council, 2 October 1931, CP/Files/82, CAI.

⁷⁰ Garda Commissioner, *Road Traffic Report 1937* (Dublin, 1937), p 2.

⁷¹ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1938-39*, p 26.

⁷² Chief Superintendent to City Manager, 9 April 1938 CP/Files/41, CAI.

⁷³ Barry St. John Galvin to Philip Monahan, 28 April 1938 CP/Files/41, CAI.

or obstruction to traffic'.⁷⁴ However, nothing came of this protest and trading remained curtailed in the city centre and surrounding suburbs, with the new schedule also listing streets in newly built estates.⁷⁵

Controls on street and stall trading were just one example of the impulse to order public streets. Letters to the *Cork Examiner* complained of children (and occasionally adults) playing ball, one correspondent describing it as 'a growing evil in our streets'.⁷⁶ Parents of children over 8 years old who obstructed the thoroughfare with ball playing were fined in the Cork District Court.⁷⁷ Such was the problem of children on the streets that Rev. Dr Thomas of St Peter and Paul's Church condemned it from the pulpit.⁷⁸ The Corporation was asked to make byelaws preventing 'persons using ... shop windows as back rests' and to discipline 'itinerant street musicians'.⁷⁹ The complainants may not have represented public opinion as a whole, but those registering their dissatisfaction succeeded in portraying themselves as such. Nowhere in the records did members of the public support the rights of citizens to use public streets as play areas or marketplaces. The use of public space by men, women and children challenged interest groups such as shopkeepers and offended the sensibilities of some individuals. Errant ball-playing children and their careless parents needed guidance on proper behaviour, advice that was administered primarily by the police service and courts in the form of fines or arrests. One of the most significant interventions into daily social life by the state was the enforcement of legislation making school attendance compulsory.

School Attendance

In 1926, the Dáil passed the first school attendance act for the independent state. The Act updated the attendance provisions of the Irish Education Act 1892, making attendance compulsory for children aged between 6 and 14 years. Exemptions were granted to children 12 years and over for 'light agricultural work for his parent on his parent's land'.⁸⁰ Employment of children of school going age could be prohibited by

⁷⁴ Minutes of County Borough Council Meeting, 24 November 1942 CP/C/A 17, CAI.

⁷⁵ Street Trading (County Borough of Cork) Order 1941, 11 November 1941, CP/Files/41, CAI.

⁷⁶ *Cork Examiner*, 1 December 1924.

⁷⁷ *Cork Examiner*, 21 February 1925

⁷⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 1 December 1924.

⁷⁹ Letter from the Cork Publicity Association Ltd. in Minutes of the General Purposes Committee, 3 April 1934, p 312, CP/C/A 16, CAI.

⁸⁰ Section 4 (3-4) School Attendance Act 1926.

ministerial regulation.⁸¹ Upon a second conviction for truancy, the courts could commit a child to an industrial school or to the care of another relative⁸² (see glossary). The Act was deemed an immediate success by the Department of Education when enrolments and attendances increased nationwide. A preliminary scrutiny of attendance records suggested increases from 2% to 10% in certain areas.⁸³ Attendance in the urban boroughs where school attendance committees enforced the legislation was among the highest in the country. Unlike their rural counterparts, urban children were not granted exemption from attendance to contribute to the family economy. Part-time work by children on city streets was decried by some in authority, who viewed the public street as a dangerous corrupting influence on young people.⁸⁴ Dublin children involved in street trading were vulnerable to the evil moral and physical effects of the activity.⁸⁵ Dr Myles Keogh, who administered trading licences in Dublin city, considered that regulation was but 'a method of legalising an evil'.⁸⁶ He recognised however, that prohibiting children from street trading would cause 'great hardship' to the poorest families in Dublin city dependent 'on the scanty earning of the children for their livelihood'.⁸⁷ Civil servants in Cork city's employment exchange hoped the Corporation would regulate street trading to prevent 'the unseemly and undisciplined conduct of young boys and girls around the city streets and outside the cinemas late at night'.⁸⁸ In 1932 Monahan felt that restricting juvenile street trading would be 'imprudent' given the economic circumstances of the city. He estimated that 200 children traded after school hours; a number of these were girls aged between 8 and 14 years. Wisely, Monahan believed that alterations in the economic circumstances of parents were more likely to affect juvenile employment than municipal byelaws.⁸⁹ Yet in 1937 Cork Corporation regulated children's trading activities with byelaws under the Employment of Children Act 1903 (see glossary). The byelaws prohibited girls under 16 years from trading altogether, giving permission only to boys between 14 and 16 years old.

⁸¹ Section 7 (1-4) School Attendance Act 1926.

⁸² Section 17 (4) School Attendance Act 1926.

⁸³ *Report of the Department of Education 1925-27*, p 6-7.

⁸⁴ For the nineteenth-century roots of this attitude see Maria Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, (Cambridge, 1995), Chapter 3.

⁸⁵ *Irish Times*, 9 February 1923.

⁸⁶ *Irish Times*, 9 February 1923.

⁸⁷ *Irish Times*, 9 February 1923.

⁸⁸ B. Gilleece (Secretary Juvenile Advisory Committee, Employment Exchange, Department of Industry and Commerce) to C. Harrington (Town Clerk) 24 November 1932, CP/Files/141, CAI.

⁸⁹ Philip Monahan to Stephen Roche Secretary Department of Justice, 30 May 1932, CP/Files/122, CAI.

Licences were given only if there was no other 'suitable' employment available. Street trading included 'the hawking of newspapers, matches, flowers or other articles, playing, singing or performing for profit, shoe blacking and any other like occupation in streets or public places'. A licence could be suspended if used 'as a cloak for begging, immorality, imposition or other improper purposes'.⁹⁰ In 1938, litter byelaws⁹¹ and regulations on parking⁹² signalled an increasing concern with the management of public streets. Regulating the employment of children on the streets was thus a statement about the character of public space as well as the nature of childhood and the family.

Streetscapes were subject to increasing surveillance by the Gardaí in independent Ireland. The criminalisation of street activities did not immediately or obviously affect Travellers, but the erosion of official tolerance for unconventional use of public space signalled greater intolerance towards Travellers. Once official respectable standards for public behaviour were set, all had to conform to these rules. Arguably, by eroding street life in Irish towns and villages, the criminal law and its enforcement agents widened the gap between Traveller and settled attitudes to public and private space. However, it was the large-scale building projects of local authorities that most definitively shaped Irish spatial geography. The 1930s saw the embryonic beginnings of town planning in Ireland, while administrators grappled with the reality of developing and defining uses of public and private space in publicly owned housing estates.

Housing

The provision of public housing marked the most significant intervention by local authorities into the lives of citizens. While housing the poor began in the nineteenth century under the Labourers Acts and the Housing of Working Classes Acts, there were major policy changes in the twentieth century. The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1931 was intended to increase government assistance to those in the greatest need – urban slum dwellers (see glossary). However, in the period 1932 to 1942, twice the number of planned labourer cottages were built while only two-thirds of the targeted

⁹⁰ Byelaws on 'Employment of Children and Street Trading by Persons under 16 years of age' passed on 26 April 1937, CP/Files/143, CAI.

⁹¹ Philip Monahan to Lord Mayor and Members of County Borough Council, 18 November 1938, CP/Files/143, CAI. Anti-litter byelaws were signed 28 March 1939, see CP/Files/41, CAI.

⁹² Philip Monahan to Lord Mayor and Members of County Borough Council, 9 December 1938, CP/Files/143, CAI.

urban houses were constructed.⁹³ This expansion in labourers' cottages occurred despite a hostile reaction from land owners who had to sell an acre per cottage to local authorities.⁹⁴ Grants for new houses and reconstruction were overwhelmingly availed of by farmers. By 1939, subsidies for private housing totalled £3 million, almost 75% of the amount spent on local authority housing in urban areas.⁹⁵ Thus in rural areas, private property was redeveloped and improved, while county councils increased the supply of public housing for the poor. In the cities of Cork, Dublin and Limerick progress was slower as high land and labour costs strained municipal balance sheets. Urban slum clearance had considerable implications for the status of Travellers. The long term consequences for Traveller-settled relations of granting local authorities wide-ranging powers over the urban environment were certainly unintended.

Before independence, 3,363 dwellings had been built in four county boroughs, 2,251 of these in Dublin, with just over 500 constructed in Cork city.⁹⁶ Dublin's slums had gained a certain notoriety and Jacinta Prunty has ably documented the reaction of state and society to these conditions from 1800 to 1925.⁹⁷ This study will concentrate on Cork city and the national impact of housing legislation. The dire living conditions of many Irish citizens required urgent action and the government of a newly independent Ireland did not hesitate. Yet the methods chosen reflected the conservatism of the pro-treaty politicians and their profound distaste for interventionist social policies. A grant of £1 million - intended to be a one-off state subvention - was made available to all urban authorities, while the Housing (Building Facilities) Act 1924 attempted to stimulate demand by providing a rates waiver and financial support to individuals constructing their own houses⁹⁸ (see glossary). The problem was largely unaffected by such measures, since slum dwellers could not afford to build, though rural house builders eagerly availed of the scheme, with 5,588 of the 7,575 houses built up to 1927 located in a county district.⁹⁹ Cork County Borough authorities built just 143 houses

⁹³ Mary Daly, *The Buffer State: the Historical Roots of the Department of Environment* (Dublin, 1997), p 221.

⁹⁴ Daly, *The Buffer State*, p 517.

⁹⁵ Daly, *The Buffer State*, p 223.

⁹⁶ The county boroughs were Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Waterford. *Report of Department of Local Government and Public Health 1925-27*, Appendix XXII (A), p 157.

⁹⁷ Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin Slums: An Urban Geography 1800-1925* (Dublin, 1999).

⁹⁸ The Housing (Building Facilities) Act 1924 was intended to revive private enterprise in the building trade. *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1922-25*, p 81.

⁹⁹ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1925-27*, Appendix XIX, p 249.

with support from the £1 million grant scheme. Progress on public housing was slow in the 1920s.

The legislation introduced in 1931, which conclusively linked public health with housing, signalled a major policy shift. The ill-health long understood to be a consequence of poor living conditions was finally deemed unacceptable by the government. Slum clearance was about the eradication of disease - a precondition for generous government funding was that a Medical Officer of Health declare whole streets 'unhealthy'. Under the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1931, rehousing families from a clearance area would secure central funding for two-thirds of the loan charges incurred. Once the Medical Officer of Health certified properties as 'unfit for human habitation', local authorities could acquire land in and adjacent to an unsanitary area with a Compulsory Purchase Order (see glossary). This legislation encouraged demolition since public housing for families from substandard but not 'unfit' housing secured funding of only one third, as opposed to two thirds if the former residence was demolished. In Cork city, where 614 houses were built from 1922 to 1933, the new legislation enabling slum clearance had a dramatic effect. Between 1932 and 1944, 2,044 houses were constructed.¹⁰⁰ However, as there were 3,500 to 4,000 families in need of housing in 1938,¹⁰¹ construction lagged behind demand.

How significant was a better environment and cleaner surroundings for social attitudes? For slum dwellers from overcrowded tenements the new, modern, plumbed accommodation must have been a revelation. Large gardens and green spaces for public use were novelties for many from the inner cities. Living conditions had changed utterly: in 1926 there were 73 slaughterhouses within the Cork County Borough, including one knackers yard, 12 tripperies, 8 sausage factories and 6 guthouses.¹⁰² In 1934, Monahan hoped to erect a public abattoir to replace tripperies cleared with the slums and restore employment for rehoused slum dwellers.¹⁰³ It emerged subsequently that the Council could not spend public money on replacement piggeries and

¹⁰⁰ Note, undated, CP/Files/42, CAI.

¹⁰¹ George A. Byrne (Housing Superintendent) to Philip Monahan, 24 September 1938, CP/Files/50, CAI.

¹⁰² Annual report of the Meat Inspector for the year ended 31 December 1926, Minutes of the Public Health Committee, CP/C/CM/PH/A 31, CAI.

¹⁰³ Acting city manager to city solicitor, 23 October 1934, CP/Files/41, CAI.

tripperies¹⁰⁴ so rebuilt slum areas became almost exclusively residential, with 'offensive trades' no longer conducted in the vicinity of housing. Suddenly, the poor no longer had to tolerate the stench or filth created by trades such as bone boiler or tripe maker. Such changes in physical geography must have altered citizen's perceptions of their status as well as living environment. Work patterns were also influenced by increased availability of unemployment benefit. After the Unemployment Assistance (Amendment) Act 1938 benefits were more generous, a fact that surely compelled those earning marginal wages to depend on welfare instead. As eligibility for the dole depended upon unemployment, casual or part-time work would preclude benefit.

Despite the desirability of public housing, relocation was a traumatic experience involving dislocation from familiar surroundings, family and friends. The St Vincent de Paul Society provided beds and furniture for new tenants with few possessions, and tried to ameliorate the loneliness arising from the break-up of local communities.¹⁰⁵ Though the new houses were a vast improvement on tenements, occupiers were not shy of criticising the facilities. Houses in Capwell were altered as tenants disliked the ranges provided, preferring open grates.¹⁰⁶ Tenants complained of the remoteness of Churchfield and Fair Hill from the city centre and their employment, while slum dwellers in Shandon Street refused new suburban houses, hoping to secure tenancies in nearby Wolfe Tone Street.¹⁰⁷ Each year, a 'considerable number' of the 110 families who vacated public housing returned to poor conditions, and subsequently reapplied for new houses.¹⁰⁸ Citizens sought to exploit public housing according to their circumstances, with significant factors being school-going children, old or infirm

¹⁰⁴ Philip Monahan to Lord Mayor and Members, 8 February 1935, CP/Files/142, CAI.

¹⁰⁵ *Report of the Annual Meeting of Presidents with the Council of Ireland 1936*, pp. 18-9, SSVP. One Cork man remembered slum clearance thus 'The people had to move. They had no option, no back-up. Who was going to fight for them? When you're poor, you'll find very few friends, especially people of influence. ... Within 20 years, the Middle Parish was levelled off, nearly completely, so that 25,000 people dropped to about 1,000. The city centre lost its vibrancy. It became a cold, heartless place.' Verdon, *Shawlies*, pp. 65-6.

¹⁰⁶ 9 March 1928 p 523 CP/C/A 15, CAI.

¹⁰⁷ Report of General Purposes Committee 14 April 1958, in Minutes of the County Borough Council Meeting, 22 April 1958, p 466 CP/C/A 20, CAI.

¹⁰⁸ Report of General Purposes Committee 5 August 1958, in Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 12 August 1958, pp. 529-30 CP/C/A 20, CAI. Rev. R.J. Dalton wrote about the feelings of 'natives of Cork' when they left old neighbourhoods, 'They pine for the old friendliness and the gossip and the lost homeliness; and it is not strange and unintelligible that many of them find their way back to the squalor and the friendliness of their old homes', 'The Slum Problem in Cork' in B.G. MacCarthy (ed.) *Some Problems of Child Welfare University and Labour Series No. 6* (Cork, 1945), p 73.

relatives, community support networks and local loyalties. Tenants also began to mobilise to improve their new communities. In the new suburb of Gurranebraher a Parochial Improvement Society was established and lobbied the Council for a grant to build a parish hall.¹⁰⁹ While the parish priest was probably central to this initiative, residents understood the concept of articulating their rights after receiving their houses through a bureaucratic process that defined and validated their claims. The Cork Corporation Tenants Protection and Development Association approached the Council on many issues, from establishing differential rental systems to Traveller campsites.

Most complaints from Corporation tenants did not detail why they objected to Traveller encampments, but it is likely they disliked the litter surrounding an unserviced camp site, and wandering horses. Encampments in Cork County Borough were concentrated on the northside, adjacent to Corporation houses. In 1958, a deputation from the Cork Corporation Tenants Protection and Development Association complained to the Corporation of the 'nuisance caused by itinerants'. The Lord Mayor (Richard Valentine Jago of the Civic Party) responded by calling on the Manager to institute proceeding 'each week against owners of caravans trespassing at Fair Hill until caravans have been removed'.¹¹⁰ Prior to the expansion of public housing on the northside, Fair Hill had been a rural area remote from the city centre. A consequence of slum clearance and low density, urban sprawl was the encroachment of the city on a rural hinterland where Travellers had camped seemingly unnoticed. As housing swallowed traditional campsites, Travellers and public tenants came into conflict. Except for one reference to the Carrigrohane Road on the southside,¹¹¹ all complaints about Traveller camps cited parts of the city dominated by public housing schemes. Tenants mobilised to lobby the Corporation, founding an association¹¹² and a rather ominously named Protection and Development Committee.¹¹³ From the Council minutes alone, it would appear that Travellers only camped in the vicinity of Churchfield and Gurranebraher. Perhaps camp sites were concentrated on waste ground

¹⁰⁹ Minutes of Quarterly Meeting of Council, 11 October 1955, p 14, CP/C/A 20, CAI.

¹¹⁰ Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 22 April 1958 p 469, CP/C/A 20, CAI.

¹¹¹ Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 12 February 1957 CP/C/A 20, CAI.

¹¹² Churchfield Tenants' Association, Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 13 May 1958, pp. 478-9 CP/C/A 20, CAI.

¹¹³ Knockfree Housing Estate Protection and Development Committee, Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 14 November 1961 p 496 CP/C/A 21, CAI.

in public housing estates, but the silence from the residents of Model Farm Road and Blackrock can be explained in another way. (As chapter 6 shows, middle-class home owners were capable of vociferous opposition to Travellers.) Local authority tenants were accustomed to lobbying the Corporation who acted as their landlord and represented their interests. When Travellers camped on public land, as the landlord, Cork Corporation received complaints from residents adjacent to the land. Since the Corporation owned little if no land in the expensive southern suburbs of the city, it would not receive complaints from tenants living there. Travellers camping on private land could be moved on by the Gardaí or by local residents forcing a landowner to clear the site. Tenants of public housing were accustomed to dealing with local politicians and officials. Also, the local authority exercised considerable regulatory control over public housing, so tenants naturally turned to the administrators of byelaws to police open space in their housing estates.

Local authority tenants were themselves subject to much regulation, which varied according to administrative area. Tenants' opportunities for self employment and subsistence food production could be restricted by regulations circumscribing uses of the house and garden. Many local authorities encountered problems in developing adequate facilities for tenants. Tenants in Dublin city wanted small workshops where they could continue to operate businesses that had been located in tenement basements. Although Dublin Corporation officials were sympathetic, it was impossible to implement under planning regulations. Council tenants in Nenagh, County Tipperary wished to keep pigs in their back gardens, while Westmeath County Council wanted to provide cow parks for labourers' cottages.¹¹⁴ Local authorities in built-up areas enforced byelaws regulating the keeping of animals particularly pigs, which were considered especially dangerous to public health.¹¹⁵ A strict demarcation between urban and rural was largely the result of public owned regulated property complying with planning schemes and usage patterns. Urban food production was hindered by these regulations. While the enforcement of regulations on nuisances and public health issues can be only speculated upon, we cannot ignore their significance. Sanitary officers were active in

¹¹⁴ Daly *The Buffer State*, p 341.

¹¹⁵ The 'pig in the parlour' was not confined to the countryside. A resident of Cork's crowded inner city recalled, 'I saw one house with the back rooms boarded off and a couple of pigs in it', Verdon, *Shawlies*, p 87.

Cork County Borough examining private property for public health nuisances.¹¹⁶ No doubt public housing was also closely monitored. A further consequence of the expansion of public housing, which underscored the division between urban and rural, was that market gardens on the fringes of the city, that supplied the city's fresh produce were swallowed up by new housing estates. Vegetables came from increasingly far afield as the urban area differentiated itself from its immediate rural hinterland.¹¹⁷ Such unexpected and unforeseen consequences of public building projects could not be remedied by a local authority whose budget was as limited as its powers to intervene. The formal planning process instituted in 1934 further politicised the appropriate uses of public and private space.

The Planning Process

The Town and Regional Planning Act 1934 attempted to control and regulate development to advance 'social betterment and industrial progress'.¹¹⁸ The Minister and his department hoped that local interest in 'greater cleanliness and brightness' would replace the 'general apathy and inertia' regarding the appearance of towns and villages across Ireland.¹¹⁹ Clearly defined plans, formulated and implemented by local authorities, would promote the need for planning in the public mind. The Minister acknowledged that change would discomfit certain members of society, cryptically stating,

A great deal might be done inexpensively without recourse to legal measures, and, indeed without offence or annoyance even to delinquents.¹²⁰

What exactly is meant by this brief reference is impossible to say. The Minister outlined how local authorities bore a heavy responsibility for the appearance of towns and villages, since they controlled large public buildings as well as open spaces and parkland. The department urged local authorities to landscape public recreation grounds with 'suitable flower beds', though acknowledged that this was not directly dependent upon planning powers in the new Act. Concluding, the Minister reminded local

¹¹⁶ Over 2 weeks in November 1926, city officials inspected 2,733 houses, yards and premises and served 243 orders to abate nuisances. Minutes of Public Health Committee, 24 November 1926, CP/C/CM/PH/A 31, CAI.

¹¹⁷ Minutes of County Borough Council Meeting, 28 June 1955, pp. 593-4, CP/C/A 19, CAI.

¹¹⁸ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1934-35*, p 16.

¹¹⁹ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1934-35*, p 17.

¹²⁰ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1934-35*, p 17.

authorities that their functions had 'a very intimate bearing on public welfare', particularly in the context of spending on housing, school medical services and child welfare schemes.¹²¹ This advice on planning from the department is intriguing, ranging from cleanliness, delinquents, and flower beds to welfare schemes. While castigating a widespread lack of interest in public space, the department seemed to imply that even 'delinquents' had a stake in streetscapes. It seemed to conclude that neat, well-maintained public space was a corollary of rising living standards made possible by preventative medicine and slum clearance. Yet, according to John Collins, the Town and Regional Planning Acts 1934 and 1939 conferred 'few if any positive powers' on local bodies or the central authority.¹²² Planning did not gather momentum after this legislation; uncertainty over compensation for private landowners gave local authorities cause to hesitate.¹²³ Despite the failure to implement the Act, the language of amenity had entered the administrative and public consciousness. Landscape could be viewed as a resource, a product to be consumed by local people. The appearance of public space was considered as important as its cleanliness or safety. By viewing the environment as an amenity, the government promoted the appropriate usage and development of a valuable, consumable resource. Residents of an area could see public space as integral to and reflective of the values of their community. Although local authorities did not create detailed plans for future developments as envisaged by the Acts, they possessed powers to veto certain uses of private property. Ownership of property was no longer absolute; permission for development rested not with the landowner but representative local government. Greater involvement of local communities in planning the appearance of their areas brought about a revolution in private and public space in Ireland.

Initial moves towards improvements in public space were made during World War II or 'the Emergency'. In response to wartime conditions, parish councils were founded by the government. These bodies interested themselves in the 'social and economic welfare' of their communities. Some 1,133 parish councils were formed, undertaking specific emergency work but also organising the tillage campaign, ploughing matches and cultivating allotments. Others concentrated on improving their

¹²¹ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1934-35*, p 17.

¹²² John Collins, (second ed. by Desmond Roche) *Local Government* (Dublin, 1963), p 108.

¹²³ Collins, *Local Government*, p 108.

local amenities by 'removing rubbish dumps, cleaning neglected graveyards etc'.¹²⁴ These councils did not survive after the war, their services being quickly dispensed with in favour of professional local government. Also in 1940, the Acquisition of Derelict Sites Act was passed. Legislation already empowered local authorities to compulsorily acquire dangerous derelict sites, but the 1940 Act was the first to define unsightly appearance and ruinous condition as dereliction. Sites that were 'unsightly and detrimental to the amenities and appearance of a town and its surroundings' could be acquired by a local authority and improved. Central funding was available to fund these improvements.¹²⁵ An Taoiseach, Eamon de Valera, was anxious that local authorities would 'proceed energetically' with the acquisition and development of derelict sites.¹²⁶ The Department of Local Government and Public Health encouraged the use of the act, noting that the clearance of derelict sites would provide employment over the winter months.¹²⁷ De Valera had attached 'considerable importance' to the poor relief aspects of the act and hoped that local authorities would make 'full and early use of their powers' under the act.¹²⁸ Wartime stringency curtailed the finances of many local authorities and progress on the acquisition and clearance of derelict sites was slow.¹²⁹ After the war, the Department of Local Government once again urged the clearance of derelict sites 'to improve the appearance and amenities of any parts of their districts'.¹³⁰ The Minister for Local Government wrote to the Taoiseach 'I feel keenly myself on the eradication of these ruins and derelict buildings to be seen in some of our towns and villages and strewn along the main country roads'.¹³¹ Reclamation of waste and marginal land had implications for Traveller camping there. When Dublin Corporation reclaimed derelict sites in the city centre, Travellers and Gypsies were evicted (see chapter 3). It is not unreasonable to assume that reclamation projects in urban and rural areas across the country would have had a similar effect. The Commission on Itinerancy

¹²⁴ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1940-41*, pp. 17-18.

¹²⁵ Explanatory memo, 3 August 1939, DT S 11227, NAI.

¹²⁶ M. Ó Múimhneacháin to Rúnáí Local Government and Public Health 18 September 1940, DT S 11227, NAI.

¹²⁷ Circular 88/40, Rúnáí to Secretary of each board of public health and clerk of each UDC, 18 September 1940, DT S 11227, NAI.

¹²⁸ P. O Cinnéide, Rúnáí to Rúnáí Department of Local Government and Public Health, 28 April 1941, DT S 11227, NAI.

¹²⁹ See a defence of local authorities in, Hurson to Secretary Department of Taoiseach, 30 September 1941, DT S 11227, NAI.

¹³⁰ Circular 1/52 30 September 1952, DT S 11227 B, NAI.

¹³¹ Minister to Taoiseach, 14 October 1952, DT S 11227 B, NAI.

noted that Travellers camped on 'undeveloped building sites, the residue of ground left over after building operations – unfenced, open or derelict areas whether public or private'.¹³² Fencing of open land in Dublin and Cork was used to close Traveller campsites.¹³³ These barriers could be erected the day after Travellers had vacated a site,¹³⁴ demonstrating the extraordinary potential for rapid response within local bureaucracy. Availability of campsites would have been considerably reduced as the landscape was redefined. Works carried out under the Employment and Emergency Relief Scheme could have had similar effects. In Cork city, the City Engineer funded the landscaping and fencing of open space used by Travellers under this scheme.¹³⁵ Public relief works remained popular with local and central government throughout the period under review. Demanding manual labour in exchange for unemployment assistance revealed the tenacity of nineteenth-century attitudes towards the able-bodied male, seen as less deserving than women, children, the elderly and the sick. Works that required unskilled labour and cheap materials were funded under unemployment relief schemes. The exclusion of Travellers from publicly owned open spaces was probably facilitated by relief works but the reasons for such works were not stated so validation for this theory is difficult to find. Apparently innocuous relief works and the development of public amenities were not necessarily innocent. In 1960, the creation of a public park in Dublin's hinterland was urged because Travellers were camping on private ground from which the county council had no authority to remove them.¹³⁶ A council acquiring land for a public park is superficially unremarkable, until the covert reasons behind the development of this 'amenity' are considered.

The concept of a public amenity which was introduced into the street and landscapes by the Town Planning Acts acquired more significance in the context of tourism. Bord Fáilte Éireann encouraged local interests to abolish eyesores in order to

¹³² *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 52.

¹³³ '...the Corporation erects spudstones or small walls around vacant spaces. Steps of this nature recently taken to protect a space in Dolphin's Barn Street proved most effective.' Minutes of the Municipal Council of the County Borough of Dublin 1953, p 210; Embankments were raised 'in places where itinerants encamp or are likely to do so', Minutes of County Borough Council Meeting, 14 November 1961 p 496, CP/C/A 21, CAI.

¹³⁴ Minutes of County Borough Council Meeting, 14 November 1961 p 496, CP/C/A 21, CAI.

¹³⁵ Report of the City Engineer, 13 October 1964, p 420, CP/C/A 22, CAI.

¹³⁶ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 181, col. 427 (3 May 1960).

attract more tourists, while also improving the environment for local consumption.¹³⁷ In 1959, Bord Fáilte inaugurated a tidy towns and villages competition, a scheme which initiated the creation of a uniquely Irish streetscape.¹³⁸ The Department of Local Government urged local authorities to enter the tidy towns competition stating, 'It is clearly in the national interest that maximum number of towns and villages should participate, so that there may be widespread awakening of civic consciousness in the direction of making and keeping towns clean, tidy and generally attractive'.¹³⁹ The Minister stressed the importance of the leadership offered by local government, 'It should not be necessary to point out how discouraging it may be to local residents if negligence or lack of interest on the part of sanitary authorities results in dirty streets and littered unkempt open spaces'.¹⁴⁰ Local authorities were also reminded of their byelaw powers over litter.¹⁴¹ Increasingly, public spaces were managed according to tourist and amenity needs, as well as public health considerations. Improvement grants for derelict sites may have been sought with the express purpose of excluding Travellers from familiar camping grounds, or this may have been an unlooked-for consequence of reclamation. Financing and the incentive of attracting tourists facilitated a redefinition of public space at local level. The aspiration for ordered public space was a powerful one, profoundly influencing the citizen's relationship with their environment. Undoubtedly, the promotion of neat, orderly public space landscaped and tailored for public consumption further denigrated Travellers by rendering their encampments unsightly to the all important tourist. A mythical tourist figure appalled by the existence of Travellers was occasionally held up to justify opposition to Traveller encampments. An editorial in the *Tipperary Star* in 1955 included the brief reference 'They are anything but an encouragement to the tourist'.¹⁴² In the Dáil, deputies complaining about the 'tinker nuisance' do not refer to tourism until 1949.¹⁴³ Deputy Manley feared that tourists would find Travellers dirty and presumably draw conclusions about the

¹³⁷ *Bord Fáilte Éireann Newsletter* 4 (1957). Thanks to Eric Zuelow for this reference.

¹³⁸ Thanks to Eric Zuelow for this information.

¹³⁹ *Report of the Department of Local Government 1958-59*, Appendix XXIII, p 114.

¹⁴⁰ *Report of the Department of Local Government 1958-59*, Appendix XXIII, p 115.

¹⁴¹ *Report of the Department of Local Government 1958-59*, Appendix XXIII, p 115.

¹⁴² *Tipperary Star*, 10 December 1955. Thanks to Dr Anne Dolan for this reference.

¹⁴³ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 117, col. 1572 (21 July 1949).

cleanliness or otherwise of all Irish people.¹⁴⁴ Travellers annoying tourists by begging was most frequently mentioned, particularly by a Galway deputy who criticised government inaction on the problem.¹⁴⁵ Only one deputy sought to present Travellers as a tourist attraction in themselves saying ‘the tourists almost break their necks looking out the windows of cars or trains to see what they describe as attractive nomads’.¹⁴⁶ The disgusted tourist was convenient, a useful and publicly acceptable justification for outrage, but also indicated a growing consciousness of appearance of landscape and people as a consumable product. The nuisance to tourists of begging Travellers in Killarney formed the Gardaí’s case against Nora O’Brien and Mary Faulkner in 1955. The vicinity of the new tourist office was ‘haunted’ by beggars and the Gardaí described streets of beggars ‘lined up by the hundred’.¹⁴⁷ Begging was illegal, irrespective of whether natives or foreigners were approached but the Gardaí clearly believed that begging from tourists was a greater evil and expected the courts to support this assessment. A Cork councillor also complained of beggars causing a ‘nuisance’ to tourists in the city.¹⁴⁸ Whether these tourists were domestic or foreign is unknown.¹⁴⁹ The question of domestic tourism must be raised – what did Irish people as tourists, travelling in their own country expect? Munster people flocked to see the caravan parade during the Cahirmee Horse fair suggesting that Traveller culture could be a domestic tourist attraction (see chapter 1). We can but speculate on the experience of Irish people as tourists travelling and consuming Irish public space. As domestic tourists took to camping and caravanning during and after World War II, local authority control over unauthorised campsites was strengthened. This issue was crucial for relations between Travellers and settled people. A growth in domestic tourism allied to later Bord Fáilte initiatives may explain an ever increasing tendency to view the landscape as an amenity.

¹⁴⁴ ‘When we are inviting tourists here, we should prove we have a sense of order, a sense of decency and a sense of tidiness’ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 163, col. 728 (4 July 1957); *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 167, col. 158 (15 April 1958).

¹⁴⁵ Mr Coogan, *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 167, col. 162 (15 April 1958); *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 174, col. 283 (9 April 1959).

¹⁴⁶ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 167, col. 165 (15 April 1958).

¹⁴⁷ *Kerryman* (Kerry ed.), 23 July 1955.

¹⁴⁸ Report of the General Purposes Committee, 20 April 1956 p 103, CP/C/A 20, CAI.

¹⁴⁹ A complaint about begging vagrants from Galway Chamber of Commerce suggests that the tourist opinion which mattered was British or American. It is important to note that the ‘vagrants’ mentioned may not necessarily be Travellers, as the author assumes. Helleiner, *Irish Travellers*, p 53.

The Local Government (Sanitary Services) Act 1948

Outdoor holiday making increased in popularity during and after World War II. Camping and caravanning increased during the Emergency because the war proved an insurmountable obstacle to foreign travel. According to the government, camping continued to increase immediately after the war and was in need of regulation. In Britain, motor caravanning had become popular in the 1930s and continued to grow throughout the 1950s.¹⁵⁰ Unlike its parent organisation, the Irish branch of the Caravan Club of Great Britain and Ireland was politically inactive and did not lobby the government for facilities for its members.¹⁵¹ To control the growing practice of holiday camping the government enacted the Local Government (Sanitary Services) Act 1948. The powers of this Act formed the basis for the reactions of many local authorities to Traveller campsites. This Act combined a desire to protect public health from unserviced camp sites with the concept of a public amenity. Interestingly, as growing numbers of Irish people were taking to caravanning or camping after World War II, the publicly expressed antipathy towards Travellers intensified.

The Local Government (Sanitary Services) Act 1948 was a major statute which extended and amended public health legislation dating from 1878 (see glossary). It regulated the maintenance of graveyards, the provision of sewerage and water supplies, public bathing facilities and temporary dwellings. According to the Minister, the powers over temporary dwellings were drafted to deal with the sanitary consequences of the 'considerable growth in the practice of holiday camping in tents, huts and caravans'.¹⁵² Section 20 of the Local Government Act 1925 contained regulatory powers over temporary dwellings but these were unsuitable as 'this Section was framed primarily, ... to apply to those itinerants who are in the habit of dwelling temporarily on road margins'.¹⁵³ Balrothery Rural District Council (1928-29)¹⁵⁴ Bundoran UDC (1929), Howth UDC (1935)¹⁵⁵ and Galway Borough Council (1943)¹⁵⁶ had enacted byelaws to

¹⁵⁰ Philippa Basset, *A List of the Historical Records of the Caravan Club of Great Britain and Ireland* (Birmingham and Reading, 1980), ii.

¹⁵¹ Some form of activity continued. A 1957 caravan rally was organised by the Munster centre of the Irish division of the Caravan Club. Yet most of the 35 caravans in the rally were from Belfast, indicating a lack of enthusiasm in the Republic for organised caravanning. *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 20 July 1957

¹⁵² *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 107, col. 1013 (4 July 1947).

¹⁵³ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 107, col. 1013 (4 July 1947).

¹⁵⁴ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1928-29*, Appendix XVII p 189.

¹⁵⁵ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1935-36*, Appendix XXVIII p 299.

¹⁵⁶ Helleiner, *Irish Travellers*, pp. 54-5.

control temporary dwellings under the 1925 statute. Helleiner states that Galway Borough Council drafted these byelaws 'to put itinerants out of the area'.¹⁵⁷

The new legislation allowed local authorities to license camp grounds, regulate their development and completely prohibit camping in designated areas. Though originally intended to control temporary holiday dwellings, the powers of the 1948 Act were used to continually move Travellers on. Buncrana, Bundoran and Bray Urban District Councils, as well as Donegal County Council almost immediately availed of additional powers over temporary dwellings.¹⁵⁸ As popular seaside resorts, Bundoran and Bray may have needed to control temporary holiday accommodation. In contrast, measures within the legislation that provided a simplified procedure for water and sewerage connection were not enthusiastically applied. Rural sanitary authorities were urged to use the legislation to extend private water supplies but the department found their response 'in general, disappointing'.¹⁵⁹ Yet, a number of local authorities eagerly embraced the power to prohibit camping under section 31 of the act. An order under section 31 prohibited temporary dwellings if the authorities felt such dwellings would be 'prejudicial to public health or the amenities of the locality or would interfere to an unreasonable extent with traffic on any road'¹⁶⁰ (see glossary). However, the prohibitive powers of section 31 of the sanitary services act were found legally wanting in 1952.

In order to control Travellers camping in open space in the city centre,¹⁶¹ Limerick Corporation made an order under section 31 in late 1951. The order made temporary dwellings within 300 yards any house or road in the confines of the city borough illegal. Once the order was passed the Corporation lost no time in bringing Travellers to court for breaching the new byelaw. The defendants were fined nominal sums but District Justice Gleeson was 'revolted' by the sweeping powers of the new byelaw.¹⁶² Mr J.J. Sexton, the solicitor who represented the defendants, sought legal advice on the constitutionality of the byelaw with a view to challenging it in the High

¹⁵⁷ Helleiner, *Irish Travellers*, p 54.

¹⁵⁸ *Report of the Department of Local Government 1948-49*, p 21.

¹⁵⁹ *Report of the Department of Local Government 1948-49*, p 21.

¹⁶⁰ Local Government (Sanitary Services) Act 1948, Section 31 (1).

¹⁶¹ Dominick Street and Lady's Lane were mentioned as camping sites in *Limerick Leader*, 9 January 1952 and *Limerick Leader*, 16 January 1952.

¹⁶² *Limerick Leader*, 9 January 1952.

Court.¹⁶³ The unsympathetic attitude of District Justice Gleeson towards the Corporation's plight rendered the city authorities powerless. The Manager, Mr Matthew Macken, described how such leniency meant that 'gypsies from all parts of the country are now facing towards Limerick'.¹⁶⁴ The Mayor even offered to give evidence on the 'nuisance these people are causing'.¹⁶⁵ The city authorities pressed ahead with more prosecutions and District Justice Gleeson reconsidered the new byelaw in January 1952. He was not satisfied that the Corporation could prohibit all caravans, tents, sheds and shelters in the city. Unwisely, Mr W.J. Dundon for the Corporation submitted that 'until a person is prosecuted he may assume that he is not infringing the Order'.¹⁶⁶ Gleeson responded that if the Corporation were to 'pick and choose' the law would be brought into contempt. He believed his court had the power to decide if the order was *ultra vires*, because it was the only authority 'which stood between the executive and a particular section of the community'.¹⁶⁷ When Mr Sexton pointed out that his clients wished to state they were 'not tinkers but horse dealers', Gleeson replied, 'Let me say that I have always found tinkers to be well-conducted and well-behaved'.¹⁶⁸ In February, Justice Gleeson found the order to be bad in law and referred the case to the High Court.¹⁶⁹ On 16 May 1952 the High Court found the order under section 31 of the Sanitary Services Act to be *ultra vires*. If the order was good, 'nobody could camp out in a tent or a sleeping porch or in his own garden' without the Corporation's consent.¹⁷⁰ The common law rights apparently safeguarded in the 1948 act would be undermined.¹⁷¹ The President of the High Court described the order as 'manifestly unjust' since it involved 'such oppressive and gratuitous interference with the common law rights of those affected as could find no justification in the minds of reasonable men'. The High Court further declared that the legislature never intended the Corporation to make such an order.¹⁷²

¹⁶³ *Limerick Leader*, 9 January 1952

¹⁶⁴ *Limerick Leader*, 16 January 1952.

¹⁶⁵ *Limerick Leader*, 16 January 1952.

¹⁶⁶ *Limerick Leader*, 26 January 1951.

¹⁶⁷ *Limerick Leader*, 26 January 1951.

¹⁶⁸ *Limerick Leader*, 26 January 1951.

¹⁶⁹ *Limerick Leader*, 16 February 1952.

¹⁷⁰ *Irish Times*, 17 May 1952.

¹⁷¹ Exemptions to the powers of the local authorities are outlined in section 34 (12) Sanitary Services Act 1948. See glossary.

¹⁷² *Irish Times*, 17 May 1952.

The order was originally made in response to public outrage at the 'influx' to Limerick of gypsies and tinkers. Wise after the event, the *Limerick Leader* reflected 'Obviously the Corporation went a bit too far'.¹⁷³ The case of *Limerick Corporation v. Mary Sheridan* was circulated to all local authorities by the department, outlining the proper application of the 1948 Act. According to the High Court, a prohibition order had to be restricted in application, rather than covering to the whole or major part of a sanitary district. Future prohibition orders were to be drafted with regard to amenities, public health considerations and traffic: 'the less general the application of the Order the better'.¹⁷⁴ Section 31 was therefore unsuitable if a local authority wished to remove temporary dwellings which they considered unsightly or unsanitary. The Department drew the attention of local authorities to the nuisance provisions of sections 32 and 33, which 'were designed for dealing with individual temporary dwellings or small collections of temporary dwellings'. Sanitary authorities had preferred to use 'the more drastic powers of section 31 or 34' but it was hoped that this would become 'more sparing and discriminate' in the wake of the high Court judgement.¹⁷⁵ Mrs Mary Sheridan, who was prosecuted by Limerick Corporation for placing her caravan within 300 yards of a city-centre street, moved into a house just as the High Court gave its judgement. Two of her sons had bought their 78 year old mother a small house in the Limerick Blackboy Pike. She was glad the courts had overruled the Corporation since it allowed her children to 'continue to go through their own country as free people, not like caged birds as the Limerick Corporation and other Councils would like to have them'.¹⁷⁶ But the High Court decision did not silence Limerick's burghers for long.

In 1955, a Corporation deputation met the Minister for Local Government Mr O'Donnell, to ask for new laws to 'crib, cabin and confine' itinerants'.¹⁷⁷ The shift in nomenclature from tinker and/or gypsy to itinerant, in the space of two years is particularly noticeable, since it originates from the same body of men from the same area. The Corporation sought power to control the 'filthy habits' of certain classes of itinerants who were 'a source of serious scandal and embarrassment to the

¹⁷³ *Limerick Leader*, 26 May 1952.

¹⁷⁴ *Report of the Department of Local Government 1953-54*, Appendix XV, p 94.

¹⁷⁵ *Report of the Department of Local Government 1953-54*, Appendix XV, p 94.

¹⁷⁶ *Sunday Press*, 18 May 1952.

¹⁷⁷ *Limerick Leader*, 12 March 1955.

neighbourhood'.¹⁷⁸ What the corporation sought were special powers that would enable them to license Travellers living in the city. This license could then be withdrawn and Travellers expelled if 'they did not conduct themselves'.¹⁷⁹ The Minister did not comment on this suggestion and instead asked if any of powers under the Sanitary Services Act could be useful. The Manager stated that the Corporation felt that that any action it took under the act would be found *ultra vires* and the deputation urged the Minister to amend the law 'so that effective control might be exercised over itinerants'.¹⁸⁰ The minister was '100% in sympathy' with the Corporation but he felt that legislation could not be introduced in the immediate future. O'Donnell also stated that the Church authorities 'expressed the wish on a number of occasions that these itinerants should reside in some area so as to enable the children to receive some reasonable education, and also to receive religious instruction'.¹⁸¹ However, he invited the corporation to prepare suggestions for the amendment of legislation which he would sympathetically consider. This the deputation undertook to do.¹⁸² No legislation proposing to license Travellers was ever placed before Dáil Éireann. Despite appeals to apply section 34 of the act sparingly, in 1959 it was in force in the County Health Districts of Wexford, Wicklow, Dublin, Clare (Kilkee town), Galway, Cork (in coastal electoral divisions) and in the urban districts of Galway, Wicklow, Bray, Arklow, Youghal and Bundoran. Byelaws under section 30 in respect of the use of temporary dwellings were made in the County Health districts of Wicklow, Monaghan, Louth, Sligo, Westmeath and Waterford and for the urban districts of Tipperary, Carrick-on-Suir, Thurles, Dundalk and Templemore.¹⁸³ Some of these byelaws probably applied to holiday camping, particularly in Bray, Youghal and Bundoran. Yet section 34 was enacted in areas far from the tourist trail, such as the urban districts of Tipperary, Carrick-on-Suir, Thurles, Dundalk and Templemore, suggesting the powers were directed against Traveller rather than holiday camp sites. The sporadic nature of the use of powers is the most salient point. Although Limerick Corporation felt the legislation was not drastic enough, many authorities had no need for its powers. After all,

¹⁷⁸ *Limerick Leader*, 14 March 1955.

¹⁷⁹ *Limerick Leader*, 14 March 1955.

¹⁸⁰ *Limerick Leader*, 14 March 1955.

¹⁸¹ *Limerick Leader*, 14 March 1955.

¹⁸² *Limerick Leader*, 14 March 1955.

¹⁸³ Minutes of meeting, 7 September 1959, DH B132/372, NAI.

Travellers were illiterate and vulnerable; the observance of legal niceties was probably not a priority for local authorities who forced Travellers to move on. At least one sanitary authority employed an official whose sole purpose was to keep Travellers and their temporary dwellings on the move.¹⁸⁴ As not all local authorities acted within the provisions of the 1948 Act, their actions against Travellers were of dubious legal standing.¹⁸⁵

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed assertions by other scholars that nationalism was a potent force in excluding Travellers from Irish society. Weaknesses in Hart's methodology have undermined his totalising interpretation of IRA violence as it related to Travellers. MacLaughlin's positing of a deterioration in Traveller-settled relations in the nineteenth century lacks any historical evidence and describes antipathy towards Travellers as an inevitable consequence of nationalism. This attractive theory denies the significance of change in the twentieth century while unfortunately leaving little hope for the future.

This analysis has focused on why Travellers became visible and problematic to certain sections of Irish society. Many families in urban and rural areas were characterised by family labour and self employment. In common with Travellers, they exploited seasonal opportunities and niche economies. When compulsory school attendance was enforced, urban families lost a valuable source of income. Trading was heavily regulated under the Street Trading Act, as business interests sought to stifle competition from hawkers and stall holders. Trading without a licence was illegal, effectively criminalising an informal, female occupation. Bureaucracy favoured the literate and educated, skills lacking in Ireland's poor. Informal entrepreneurial methods of scraping a living were heavily regulated partly because of their public character. The use of public streets by men, women and children as workplaces and play areas was increasingly confined and enforcement improved once the Gardaí gained sole control over the streetscape. Travellers largely escaped the consequences of the Street Trading and School Attendance Acts, but definitions of public space had considerable implications for their position in Irish society. Conventional behaviour on the street was enshrined in byelaws and regulations, reducing tolerance for unacceptable usage of

¹⁸⁴ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 53.

¹⁸⁵ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 53.

public space. When trading and whole family economies among the poor were eroded, Travellers remained characterised by these features.

The similarities in social and economic organisation between Travellers and the settled people were reduced still further by public housing. Suburban estates were completely residential, the first time poorer members of Irish society experienced a spatial division between work and home. Sanitation also raised living standards considerably. People who had secured tenancies because of need were made increasingly conscious of their right to certain standards and services. However, these were not always forthcoming as local authorities possessed neither the powers nor budget to fully develop new housing estates.¹⁸⁶ To secure greater facilities and to lobby their landlord, residents established neighbourhood organisations. Public housing expanded into rural areas and encroached upon traditional campsites, so that tenants and Travellers lived in closer proximity. Therefore, as the physical distance between Travellers and settled people narrowed, the social distance increased. Travellers became different to poorer members of the settled community who changed under the influence of increased government regulation. Settled children no longer worked, while Traveller children contributed to the family economy. Informal employment was complicated for settled people by the regulations that accompanied welfare provision and licences were required for a traditional activity such as trading. In addition, some residents were organised and politically active, though how representative neighbourhood lobby groups were is a matter for conjecture. Perhaps what local authority tenants hated most about Travellers was their resemblance to their not so distant past. Before benefits, subsidised housing and compulsory school attendance, the Irish working class and Travellers were remarkably similar.

Yet, the most important factor in Traveller-settled relations was land usage. To earn a living, nomadic families needed access to numerous campsites across the countryside. Waste land appears to have been plentiful, especially as the population was declining in rural areas of the south and west. Reclamation projects during the Emergency reduced opportunities for access to marginal land, while planning and

¹⁸⁶ Dublin Corporation felt it did not have the resources to provide playgrounds, nurseries, youth clubs, community centres etc. Ruth McManus, *Dublin 1919-1940 Shaping the City and Suburbs* (Dublin, 2002), p 226.

regulation instituted legal norms for development. Government officials began to view the environment in more aesthetic terms, perceiving it as a product in its own right. Tourism further encouraged officials and the public to regard the landscape as a marketable resource. Unlike the changes discussed earlier in the chapter, this commoditisation of the landscape was not limited to poorer members of society. The pan class appeal of the language of amenity signalled the greatest threat to informal land usage by Travellers.

This chapter has briefly touched upon the welfare system, though I have preferred to examine the geographic implications of state support. While chapter 2 has been an attempt to contextualise the position of Travellers, chapter 3 will outline the specific efforts of the state and private charity to target Travellers. This will reveal the sporadic nature of formal contact between Travellers and settled people.

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Chapter 3

Welfare and Entitlement in the Irish State

This chapter will examine the system of welfare distribution in independent Ireland. Voluntary charity and state welfare not only coexisted but their divergent aims and methods complemented each other. As described in chapter 1, the care of certain groups such as homeless men and women was left to voluntary agencies. The government had little need to develop a comprehensive welfare system while the Society of St Vincent de Paul and the Legion of Mary ministered to the poor. Traveller families who could not obtain even subsistence welfare were forced to rely on voluntary groups for charitable assistance.¹ Thus, government administered social welfare developed in a piecemeal fashion, with Travellers as a group among the last in society whose entitlement to assistance was recognised. This recognition followed the publication of the *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* in 1963, which marked a shift in the relationship between Travellers and the state.

This chapter will outline how Travellers were perceived by the state and voluntary agencies before the shift in attitudes and policy in the 1960s. An historical outline of the social welfare system in twentieth-century Ireland is essential in order to understand the nature of the Traveller-settled relationship. How the Society of St Vincent de Paul perceived the poor and Travellers in particular will be outlined. The Society's long standing missionary work with Travellers and Gypsies in Dublin city will also be detailed. This chapter will also analyse the problem-solving impetus of government policy and explain why Travellers were not noticed by government as a social problem prior to the 1960s. Both administrative divisions of responsibility and the prevailing welfare ethos explain this omission. Occasionally efforts were made to target Travellers for public health reasons or on the basis of problems caused by vagrancy and homelessness. These attempts were piecemeal and sporadic, reflecting the absence of a coherent attitude to Travellers among civil servants and politicians. Even as government intervention in society expanded during and after World War II, Travellers were effectively ignored.

¹ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1947*, p 77, SSVP.

Ethos: Welfare and Public Health

Historians of women have made an important contribution to our understanding of nineteenth century welfare systems and the poor as objects of charity.² Maria Luddy's comprehensive study of women and philanthropy in nineteenth century Ireland described both charitably-inclined females and the women they sought to aid. Middle- and upper-class women dispensing charity sought to impose 'a middle-class sense of morality' on the poor.³ It is impossible to determine if they succeeded but the recipients of charity were 'willing and able' to tell the philanthropists what they wished to hear.⁴ Materially, the relationship of the poor with relief agencies was profoundly unequal but individuals maintained a measure of independence by manipulating the system. It is accepted that nineteenth-century welfare was characterised by a division between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, and was heavily influenced by class and gender bias. Although the reformatory zeal of nineteenth century philanthropy did not colour the relief offered by the independent Irish state, the benefits system continued to implement a social and political agenda. In fact, the focus moved from charity to government intervention in many areas of daily life. As discussed in the previous chapter, the government sought to control or reform education, streets, housing, sanitation and tourism. As the state's influence over individuals grew, it was inevitable that Travellers would be subject to its scrutiny. Yet a number of factors prevented this: chief among these were pecuniary imperative and the structure of the administration itself.

The Irish state inherited a poor law system roundly condemned by the new ruling revolutionary class.

The Irish Republic fully realises the necessity of abolishing the present odious, degrading and foreign Poor Law system, substituting therefor [sic] a sympathetic native scheme for the care of the Nation's aged and infirm, who shall not be regarded as a burden, but rather entitled to the Nation's gratitude and consideration.⁵

Significantly, the poor law was primarily associated here with care for the elderly although the system also provided material support for the able-bodied unemployed.

² See especially Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy*; Maria Luddy and C. Murphy (eds), *Women Surviving* (Dublin, 1989).

³ Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy*, p 2.

⁴ Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy*, p 88.

⁵ Sinn Fein, *The economic programme of Sinn Fein which is founded on and to which is prefixed the Democratic Programme of Dáil Éireann* (1924).

The guarantees given to the working classes were less expansive. The Dáil determined to draft legislation 'with a view to a general and lasting improvement in the conditions under which the working classes live and labour'.⁶ The poor law was not replaced but renamed: outdoor relief became home assistance and the workhouse was restyled the county home.⁷ The most important change was that relief was more readily available outside the workhouse.⁸ The Department of Local Government and Public Health felt the reforms had 'revolutionised local government administration'.⁹ For those applying for home assistance, the Board of Guardians had been abolished but, as before, entitlement remained at the discretion of the local authority. Vagrants and casuals denied access to the newly respectable county homes hardly welcomed the revolution. The poor law system was now officially native: created and administered by Irish representatives, it was democratic in origin but no more sympathetic than its 'colonial' predecessor. Mary Daly has astutely noted that the reforms of local government were 'dynamic in matters which did not entail major expenditure such as administration and personnel reform, conservative on costly items such as housing'.¹⁰

Expanding welfare entitlement was not a priority for the first Cumman na Gaedheal government, which was preoccupied with financial retrenchment. Old age and blind pensions were cut while the private sector was expected to address the shortage of affordable housing for the poor. The *Irish Times* urged the Free State government to abolish the dole - a 'feature of British rule' - since the system had a 'demoralising effect ... on the fibre of the nation'.¹¹ In line with the poor-law tradition where medical treatment was universal, welfare entitlement in independent Ireland focused primarily on the health needs of the population. Cash handouts to the needy were avoided. The department responsible for administering the system considered relief to be potentially 'unnecessary or demoralizing'.¹² Philip Monahan commented on the 'strange anomaly' within welfare policy.

On the poor law side Government policy would appear to be restriction and limitation of gratuitous assistance as much as possible. On what might be termed

⁶ Sinn Fein, *The economic programme of Sinn Fein*.

⁷ See Joe Lee, *Modern Ireland: Politics and Society 1912-85* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 124-5.

⁸ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1922-25*, p 64.

⁹ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1922-25*, p 11.

¹⁰ Daly, *The Buffer State*, pp. 116-7.

¹¹ *Irish Times*, 28 March 1922.

¹² *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1927-8*, p 88.

the public health side, liberality appeared to be encouraged. The provision of school meals and the organisation of child welfare and school medical schemes and the loose supervision over them by the central authority were instances of this.¹³

Monahan's allusion to schemes covering children is significant. The expanding welfare provision for children was a feature of the benefits system in twentieth-century Ireland. Contrary to its policy of fiscal prudence, from 1922-24 central government urged local authorities to provide free meals for school children.¹⁴ The high mortality rates among illegitimate children worried the Department who hoped that antenatal institutions for unmarried mothers would reduce death rates.¹⁵ From 1932, free milk was distributed to 'necessitous children' at the discretion of local authorities who particularly targeted children under 5 years old.¹⁶ By March 1933, 67,161 children were in receipt of free milk.¹⁷ Free children's footwear was distributed from 1944-45.¹⁸ The School Medical Service surveyed the 'general physical condition' of children in National Schools.¹⁹ Generally, Traveller children would not have availed of these benefits since they did not attend school or possess a fixed abode, both vital criteria for inclusion in these schemes.

The common element in all these schemes was their locally administered character. Universal access to assistance on the basis of clearly defined conditions was not available in the early years of the state. Some local authorities refused to distribute relief to those eligible for it and had to be reminded by central government of their duty to assist 'any poor person who was unable by his own industry or other lawful means to provide the necessities of life for himself or his family'.²⁰ Despite the shortage of materials during World War II, the government intended to enlarge its programme of public works 'which would provide employment for unemployed persons instead of resorting to direct relief for the unemployed'.²¹ Such works did not necessarily improve

¹³ *Cork Examiner*, 10 February 1926.

¹⁴ The cost of the schemes was split between central government and rates funded local government. That authorities were unwilling to fund these schemes is not surprising in the context of dissolutions of councils for excessive spending. *Report of Department of Local Government and Public Health 1922-25*, p 50.

¹⁵ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1930-1*, p 65. See also *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1935-6*, p 87.

¹⁶ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1932-3*, p 123.

¹⁷ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1932-3*, p 124.

¹⁸ *Report of the Department of Social Welfare 1947-49*, p 49.

¹⁹ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1922-25*, pp. 35-6.

²⁰ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1934-35*, p 171.

²¹ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1940-41*, p 8.

infrastructure since the schemes chosen used the maximum number of unskilled labourers and minimum amount of materials.²² Among the administrators of the reformed poor law system there was a clear reluctance to distribute cash benefits to the unemployed. Believing that poor relief was damaging to the recipient reinforced ideas about the integrity of poverty promulgated by the Catholic Church. As defined by Catholic theology, charity was not a means to relieve the near starvation endured by the poorest in society but a supernatural manifestation of Christ's love.²³ Even aid from the Catholic brothers of the St Vincent de Paul Society was considered potentially damaging to the sanctity of the poor. Bishop Daniel Cohalan of Cork threatened to withdraw permission for church gate collections from the St Vincent de Paul. To cries of 'No' from an audience of Cork worthies he defended himself thus:

If I thought in the least that charity, like the dole, was tending to corrupt the people, I would without hesitation and without a moments delay, stop that collection at the doors. While there was undoubtedly necessity for it – the system of the dole was a necessity – at the same time he thought it had a very detrimental effect upon young men particularly.²⁴

Until the establishment of the Department of Social Welfare in 1947, there was no definitive break with a poor law system that grudgingly supported the unemployed for short periods and demanded labouring work from able-bodied men on assistance. Despite revolutionary aspirations of reforming the benefits structure, Irish administrators never systematically removed poor law structures. The taint of pauperism lingered long: in 1949 the Department of Social Welfare noted that 'even today the stigma of the poor law has not been entirely eradicated from the public mind in regard to any form of State insurance or assistance'.²⁵ Voluntary charity was not so marked and the St Vincent de Paul Society was held in great esteem by the public. The Legion of Mary also provided charitable assistance though its members focused more on religious instruction than the practicalities of food, clothing and monetary assistance. These lay organisations did offer help to Travellers, although it was primarily spiritual assistance rather than material aid.

²² Daly, *The Buffer State*, p 180.

²³ Humanitarian benevolence and Christian charity were two very different things. See Joseph E. Canavan S.J., 'Property and the Church', *Studies*, 24 (March 1923), pp. 395-6.

²⁴ *Cork Examiner*, 17 December 1925.

²⁵ *Report of the Department of Social Welfare 1947-49*, p 27.

Voluntary sector: Aims and Methods

One of the most important lay organisations was the Catholic Society of St Vincent de Paul.²⁶ It was a nationwide movement with comprehensive annual reports and annual meetings.²⁷ Until after Vatican II, it was an all male society. The Ladies Association of Charity of the St Vincent de Paul established in Ireland in 1843 cared for households where the woman was the breadwinner and raised funds for their male counterparts.²⁸ The visitation of the poor in their homes was the fundamental tenet of the Society, though no form of charitable assistance was prohibited.

The title of the poor to our commiseration will be their poverty itself...Neither class, politics, nor creed excludes anyone from claiming its help...In the care of the Catholic poor alone does it look to the observances of the duties of religion. But with all, of every creed, it seeks diligently to promote habits of temperance, cleanliness, thrift, industry and general morality.²⁹

Though middle-class values – thrift, industry and general morality – were promoted by the Society, the censorious attitude often encouraged by the differentiation between deserving and undeserving poor was absent. Most importantly, the Society existed ‘first of all, for the spiritual benefit of the members, secondly for the spiritual benefit of the poor, and in the third for the relief of the material needs of the poor’.³⁰ Though Catholicism was fundamental to the Society’s members, most of its work was not directly religious. Its members sought to promote religion by relieving families of crushing poverty, thus turning the thoughts of the poor from daily survival to spiritual welfare. Often, the Society struggled with this spiritual mission in the face of overwhelming poverty. The possibility of misunderstanding the Society’s true spiritual purpose is hardly surprising when nationwide in 1926, it was estimated that 27,529

²⁶ In 1833 Frederick Ozanam, a Catholic student in the University of Paris, founded the Society of St Vincent de Paul. St Vincent de Paul is the patron saint of the poor and the Society sought to aid the poor by visiting their homes.

²⁷ The Society was composed of conferences located in parishes. Conferences reported directly to the Council of Ireland or to Particular Councils established at a diocesan level. Today, the parish conference remains though the other structures of the Society were reformed in the 1960’s and 1970’s. See *Report of the Task Force Approved by the President to Consider the Role and Structure of the Council of Ireland February 1978* (Dublin, 1978), SSVP.

²⁸ In Cork, the Ladies Association of Charity of the St Vincent de Paul Society raised £400 in a sale of work, which they handed over to ‘the gentlemen of the St Vincent de Paul Society’. *74th Annual Report of the Ladies Association of Charity of the St Vincent de Paul Society, Year ending 31 December 1927* (Cork, 1928). The Ladies Association was revitalised in Dublin by Margaret Aylward, later the founder of the Sisters of the Holy Faith, *Luddy Women and Philanthropy*, p 39.

²⁹ *Origins and Objects of the St Vincent de Paul and its Workings in Ireland* (Dublin, 1923 edition), pp. 12-3, SSVP.

³⁰ *67th Annual Meeting of the Presidents with the Council of Ireland* (Dublin, 1923), p. 23, SSVP.

people had benefited from the assistance of the St Vincent de Paul Society.³¹ A measure of its importance can be gauged by the fact that Sir Joseph Glynn, the President of the Society, was a member of the Commission appointed in 1925 to report on Poor Law reform.³² In 1927, the importance of the Society was noted in the *Report of the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor, Including the Insane Poor*. The report acknowledged that private charity covered a wide field and relieved the ratepayer and taxpayer of considerable expense. For the most part, public and private charity 'functioned independently of each other'.³³ This distance from 'purely relieving bodies', suited a Society with wider spiritual aims. The international headquarters of the St Vincent de Paul in Paris advised the Council of Ireland not to co-operate with other agencies.³⁴ Fiscal means differentiated voluntary charity from state aid but voluntary aims and strengths were also unique. Though a common end - the relief of poverty - was sought, the report clearly stated that the work of voluntary charity was often more effective than state aid, particularly in working with homeless men. While this charitable work benefited the state, the commission noted,

We however recognise that they owe such beneficial results as they may be able to accomplish primarily to the fact that they are voluntary and actuated by higher motives than the provision of material necessities. To bring them into any kind of even distant relationship to the Poor Law would probably mean their destruction.³⁵

The contagion of officialdom could be contained if charitable societies worked without any state interference. The only acceptable relationship envisaged was if the state contributed initial capital costs and left the running of facilities in voluntary hands.³⁶ In 1927 the voluntary sector refused to carry the responsibility of relief and employ the bureaucratic methods of state aid. Believing firmly that the provision of basic necessities lay with the state, charities perceived their work as reformatory and thus primarily spiritual.

On a pragmatic level, the strength of St Vincent de Paul society was, and continues to be, its ability to respond to changing circumstances. There were

³¹ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1926*, p 12, SSVP.

³² Glynn also sat on the committee of inquiry into Health Insurance and Medical Services. See *Interim Report of Committee of Inquiry into Health Insurance and Medical Services* (Dublin, 1925).

³³ *Report of the Commission on the Sick and Destitute Poor*, p 84.

³⁴ *Report of the Commission on the Sick and Destitute Poor*, p 59.

³⁵ *Report of the Commission on the Sick and Destitute Poor*, p 87.

³⁶ *Report of the Commission on the Sick and Destitute Poor*, p 87.

comprehensive schemes of special works in operation according to supply and demand: penny savings banks, coal distribution, clothes and boots distribution, allotments, night shelters for the homeless, St Vincent's orphanage in Glasnevin, missions to seamen, visitation in hospitals and county homes, distribution of catholic literature, night classes and religious instruction etc. Aid offered to Travellers and Gypsies was just a small part of the Society's work. The Society was a reactive organisation whose work illustrated the shortcomings of public policy and administration by responding to needs unaddressed by the state or created by methods of distributing state benefits. The Society approved of the Free State, claiming that 'the passage of political power from the hands of the few into those of the many has led to the extension of social works on a vast scale'. The Society committed itself to helping the state or municipality whenever called upon³⁷ and was distinctly reluctant to criticise the administration. In 1939, a member advocated lobbying the government to remove 'the unchristian regulation', which did not include the size of a family in the payment of Unemployment Assistance. President Sir Joseph Glynn believed there was a genuine grievance, but 'without talking politics' he felt that approaches from individual members to their local representatives was the best course of action.³⁸ Despite its knowledge and experience, the Society did not address its concerns directly to the government. The St Vincent de Paul Society did not develop a social critique or a reformist agenda, and this reluctance to lobby for more humane administration of state aid displays particular conservatism. The spiritual foundation of the Society precluded analyses of the causes of poverty or a real belief that it could be eradicated. Along with much of Irish society at this period, the St Vincent de Paul fatalistically accepted the existence of 'the poor who are always with us'. The Society often shared members with a growing lay organisation, the Legion of Mary.³⁹

The Legion of Mary was founded by Frank Duff in 1921. A lay organisation 'at the disposal of the bishop ... and the parish priest' it offered its services in the battle

³⁷ The Society did distribute aid on behalf of the state: in 1928, £15,000 was distributed on behalf of the Dublin Union Commissioners; in 1930 £8,050 was received from the Dublin Union for distribution by the Society. *Report of the Annual Meeting of Presidents with the Council of Ireland 1930*, p.12, SSVP.

³⁸ *Report of the Annual Meeting of Presidents with the Council of Ireland 1939*, p 8, SSVP.

³⁹ Frank Duff had himself begun 'his social career' with the St Vincent de Paul. See Leon Ó Broin, *Just Like Yesterday: An Autobiography* (Dublin, n.d.), pp. 127-130.

'perpetually waged by the Church against the world and its evil powers'.⁴⁰ The Legion was established with the primary object of 'making its members holy'⁴¹ rather than a specific mission to the poor. Work with Travellers and Gypsies was 'a comparatively small part of the Legion's work'.⁴² It formed part of a remit that sought to 'work for the last ones of Christ',⁴³ seeking out the 'derelict or abandoned classes'.⁴⁴ Chief among these neglected groups were homeless men and women who were catered for in the Dublin city centre hostels, Morning Star and Sancta Maria respectively.⁴⁵ The St Vincent de Paul and the Legion of Mary both attempted to reach out to Travellers. The differing programmes and reasons for targeting Travellers reveal much about formulation of charity and the aims of two significant lay organisations in twentieth-century Ireland. The aid provided by the St Vincent de Paul appears more significant than that offered by the Legion of the Mary, but this judgement is hardly definitive since the Legion refused this researcher access to archival material.

Charity work with Travellers and Gypsies

Aiding Travellers and Gypsies first became a special work of the St Vincent de Paul Society in 1931. The initiative came from clergy who asked members of a Rathgar Conference to visit the 'gypsies'. The activity was extended to other conferences and the committee for gypsy visitation, St John Francis Reggis, was established in Dublin in 1932. Brothers visited 27 families totalling 135 people in 1931-2. Many of these families were from Wales, which suggests that the term 'gypsy' refers to Anglo-Romanies rather than Irish Travellers. Some of these Gypsies may have been Protestant, as the complaints from the Church of Ireland rector outlined in chapter 1 suggest. In contrast to other home visitation, no material aid was ever offered or asked for, as the work was 'purely spiritual'. This missionary activity was aided by the 'untiring zeal' of a number of Jesuit friars.⁴⁶ St John Francis Reggis members were exclusively concerned with the relationship of Gypsies to the Church and ensuring baptism of their children.

⁴⁰ *The Official Handbook of the Legion of Mary* (Dublin 1993), p 9.

⁴¹ *The Official Handbook of the Legion of Mary*, p 72.

⁴² Cecily Rosemary Hallack, *The Legion of Mary* (5th edition, London, 1950) p 157. For a description of missionary work among 'gypsies or tinkers' see pp. 157-161.

⁴³ *The Legion of Mary* (Dublin, 1937), p 197.

⁴⁴ *The Legion of Mary*, p 199.

⁴⁵ Sancta Maria was founded in 1922, the Morning Star hostel in 1927.

⁴⁶ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1932*, p 115, SSVP. Unfortunately, there is no corroborating evidence for this in the archives of the Jesuit community in Ireland.

The children were placed in local convent schools, while adults received religious instruction in their caravans. The Dublin brothers appealed to members across the country to include caravna-dwellers in their work.⁴⁷ Subsequent discussion refers to 'tinkers and gypsies' suggesting that conferences apart from the Dublin city based Gypsy Visitation Guild ministered to Travellers.

At the 1933 meeting of conferences, the question of gypsy visitation was discussed. No visits were paid to caravans in Ulster though a number of brothers expressed a willingness to bring the subject before their conferences.⁴⁸ Leinster conferences, excluding Dublin city and South County Dublin 'resolved that such work should be taken up without delay, especially from the spiritual side'.⁴⁹ A Cork member was not enthusiastic believing that visitation would be of little advantage 'owing to the "Bohemian" tendency of the "Cork" gypsies'. In Thurles however, a conference had already begun work with Travellers and their efforts were rewarded with 12 Confirmations.⁵⁰ The conferences in Connacht had no prior experience of working with 'the "tinker" class', but the brothers were urged to 'do something for them and their children, especially with regard to the reception of the Sacraments and the attendance at Mass'.⁵¹ Connacht members were reluctant to consider the work, prompting Sir Joseph Glynn to hope that 'my Connaught friends are not going to abandon the tinkers'. Glynn continued:

They are decent people, who want a little attention from a society such as ours, so that they would take the pledge now and again. They want to be followed up, because when they are strolling around the country they are inclined to be careless about the children's welfare in not sending them to school or having them Confirmed. My experience is that if they are taken quietly they will do whatever is necessary.⁵²

The Society's aims in regard to Travellers and Gypsies were modest: significantly reformatory missionary work did not include settlement. The extent of the Society's work among Travellers and Gypsies is difficult to quantify. As a special work, the activities of the Gypsy Visitation Guild were reported annually. Work by individual conferences was published only as a general summary, describing principal activities. If

⁴⁷ *Report of the Annual Meeting of Presidents 1933*, pp. 26-7, SSVP.

⁴⁸ *Report of the Annual Meeting of Presidents 1933*, p 37, SSVP.

⁴⁹ *Report of the Annual Meeting of Presidents 1933*, p 41, SSVP.

⁵⁰ *Report of the Annual Meeting of Presidents 1933*, p 43, SSVP.

⁵¹ *Report of the Annual Meeting of Presidents 1933*, pp. 35-6, SSVP.

⁵² *Report of the Annual Meeting of Presidents 1933*, p 44, SSVP.

contact with Travellers was incidental to the main work of a conference, it would not have been reported. The decision to work with Travellers and Gypsies was taken at a local level, by brothers responding to perceived need within a parish boundary. The influence of the parish priest must also be considered. Thus charity offered to Travellers by the Society was dependent upon the interest of individual conferences and brothers. For example, a principal work of St Joseph's conference in Thurles was its efforts to teach Traveller children in 1934 and 1935. This was done during fair days, when conference members sought out Traveller children and taught Catechism for Confirmations.⁵³ The spiritual education of Traveller children was the most notable feature of this conference's work.

In 1936, the Annual Meeting of Presidents discussed ongoing work with the 'Tinkers and Gypsies'. At the Munster group meeting it was noted that 'on the whole they are quite decent members of the community' and one brother reported that eight children were confirmed on one occasion.⁵⁴ Travellers in Connacht were assisted when they passed through Westport but the efforts of Galway conferences were impeded by the local authority. It was reported that 'as the authorities in Galway will not allow them to be within a certain distance of the city at weekends and this places them outside the areas of the different conferences, the work has been passed on to the Legion of Mary'.⁵⁵ As regional group meetings did not discuss work among tinkers or gypsies each year, the extent of contact cannot be accurately described. It seems likely that once brothers embarked on a programme of visitation it would not be easily abandoned. Nevertheless, Traveller mobility and the uneven geographic distribution of the St Vincent de Paul society⁵⁶ would have made sustained visitation difficult. Work with Travellers and Gypsies in Dublin was more consistent, due to the commitment of members and because some families lived in the city all year round.

The Committee of St John Francis Reggis reported that 64 families comprising 325 people were visited regularly in 1933. A curate and women volunteers taught

⁵³ *Report of the Annual Meeting of Presidents 1934*, p 16, SSVP; *Report of the Annual Meeting of Presidents 1935*, p 13, SSVP.

⁵⁴ *Report of the Annual Meeting of Presidents 1936*, p 30, SSVP.

⁵⁵ *Report of the Annual Meeting of Presidents 1936*, p 33, SSVP.

⁵⁶ The Society was far from nationwide, being concentrated in cities and large regional towns. The establishment of new conferences was not trouble free - clerical resistance in County Cork frustrated efforts to expand into the regional towns of Kanturk and Midleton. Some local clergy believed that charity was the exclusive preserve of female religious already present in the towns. *Report of the Annual Meeting of Presidents 1934*, p 12, SSVP.

classes because attempts to secure places for the children in National Schools had failed. Thirty or forty children, both boys and girls, learnt reading, writing, arithmetic and Christian Doctrine. Both boys and girls received education when women also volunteered to teach. Reform of the adults was proving difficult and inducements to 'lead better lives' were ignored. The brothers noted that,

although anxious to send their children to school and give them a Christian education, they are slow to reform themselves. A great difficulty presents itself with adults as they are slow to take advantage of even instruction in convents. However, efforts are on foot to arrange a Retreat in the near future solely for gypsies or caravan dwellers.⁵⁷

The Committee was named the 'Gipsy Visitation Guild' in 1934 but its work was severely disrupted when, in early 1934, Dublin Corporation evicted caravan dwellers. Despite the brothers efforts to prevent it, a large number of families encamped in the city were evicted. Many left Dublin for the country and classes for children and adults ended. Visitation was more difficult as those who remained were scattered throughout the city and suburbs. The brothers continued with their work, securing entry into convent schools for children and exhorting parents to attend Mass, though with limited success. Material help was given only in cases of necessity.⁵⁸

By 1935, the Guild could claim that except for those living far outside the city, the children of all the families visited were attending school. 48 families were visited, totalling 200 people. The living conditions of these families varied.

the greater number ... take up their abode in vacant yards throughout the city – outside the city their stay on the side of the road is very short because they are compelled to move frequently.⁵⁹

Unfortunately, the St Vincent de Paul reports do not indicate if families living in yards travelled occasionally, if at all. However, it was noted that 'some families come for years to the same address, others do not remain for any length of time and are constantly changing from place to place'.⁶⁰ This does imply a fixed pattern of nomadism centred

⁵⁷ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1933*, pp. 163-4, SSVP.

⁵⁸ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1934*, pp. 147-8, SSVP.

⁵⁹ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1935*, p 168, SSVP.

⁶⁰ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1940*, p 123, SSVP.

upon a permanent address among some families.⁶¹ Having succeeded in providing education for children, the brothers turned their attention to marriage traditions.

Irregularities or deviations from the Catholic form of marriage were now the focus of the brothers' considerable energies. Families visited by the brothers were encouraged, with some success, to conform to formal Catholic structures. Efforts to regularise marriage practices began to show results in 1936 when a number of young couples approached the Guild seeking their advice. Introductions to the clergy, baptism certificates and courses of instruction were provided. All children born to Catholic parents during the year were baptised.⁶² The detail 'Catholic parents' suggests that there were other faiths among the families visited by the Guild. By 1938, the Guild was pleased to report that elopements 'without any idea of a religious ceremony' had ended, as young couples approached the Guild for guidance on a formal Church ceremony. The effects of lay missionary efforts on Traveller and Gypsy society may have been considerable. As the Guild's work was concentrated on a static population in Dublin city, the impact can be measured, if only from the perspective of the Society members. Traveller reaction to the introduction of formal Church structures may never be known, but it seems clear that the community chose to change marriage practices. Since, despite the brothers' entreaties Mass attendance did not noticeably improve, the Travellers themselves made the decision to participate in Catholic marriage ceremonies. The Gypsy Visitation Guild did not force families to conform, as it had no power to do so. By not distributing material aid, the brothers renounced a charity's most powerful reformatory weapon. Without financial leverage, the brothers relied on persuasion and encouragement to change the observance habits of Travellers. Yet spiritual work did not entirely preclude forms of material assistance. Initially, the brothers were reluctant to give material assistance and yielded 'only in extreme cases as it might interfere with our spiritual work'.⁶³ While provision tickets were not distributed as in normal visitation, occasional grants were provided. By 1936, the attitude had changed and criteria for aid were less strict. Provision tickets were given when the wage earner was ill, for part

⁶¹ For example, the well-known Traveller piper, Johnny Doran (1908-50) was based in Dublin during the winter but travelled during the summer months. See Fintan Vallely (ed.), *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music* (Cork, 1999), pp. 404-5.

⁶² *Report of the Council of Ireland 1936*, p 171, SSVP.

⁶³ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1933*, p 164, SSVP.

purchase of horses, for wood to build wagons, for clothing, boots and marriage fees.⁶⁴ A cash grant for a horse and wagon was given to a mother and five children who had been forced to live in halls.⁶⁵ This fact undermines MacLaughlin's argument about the middle classes denigrating and suppressing nomadism. The members of St Vincent de Paul were inevitably middle class, possessing the time and money for charity, but they are supporting the pursuit of a nomadic lifestyle. Brothers also provided secretarial services, writing to trace missing relatives⁶⁶ and contacting parishes in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales for baptism and marriage certificates.⁶⁷ The Guild also successfully intervened to prevent evictions of families who received peremptory notices to quit.⁶⁸

Yet, the reports from St John Francis Reggis alter in tone in the mid 1940s. Work among caravan dwellers seems to have suffered a number of setbacks particularly in relation to children's education. By 1945 the brothers could not 'solve the difficulty of the children attending school'.

Schools are usually full and even if there were vacancies, the roving life of the families would prevent their attending for more than a couple of weeks at a time.⁶⁹

The mobility of the Travelling community appears to have increased in comparison with the 1930s. In 1943, the annual retreat run by the Jesuits of Milltown Park was moved from Lent to January 'because many families who make an early start on the road were unable to attend'.⁷⁰ Visitation was difficult as families were increasingly widely scattered across the city. In 1947, this was compounded by Dublin Corporation's closure of 'many yards and open spaces within the city which had been frequented by travelling people, driving most of them to camps in the suburbs'.⁷¹ The exclusion of Travellers from the city continued in 1948, forcing families to the temporary camps

⁶⁴ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1936*, pp. 171-2, SSVP.

⁶⁵ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1937*, pp.174-5, SSVP.

⁶⁶ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1937*, pp.174-5, SSVP.

⁶⁷ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1938*, p 157, SSVP.

⁶⁸ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1937*, pp.175, SSVP.

⁶⁹ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1945*, p 103, SSVP.

⁷⁰ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1943*, p 169, SSVP.

⁷¹ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1947*, p 77, SSVP. There was no reference to Travellers in the Corporation minutes of this year, nor any reason given for this closure of open spaces in the city centre. It is possible that Corporation officials decided to enforce or implement an order or byelaw passed before this date.

outside the city.⁷² From 1951, the work of the St John Francis Reggis Guild for Gypsy Visitation was no longer mentioned in the Report of the Council of Ireland. The Report was shortened considerably and the work of individual conferences not so extensively reported. The Guild remained a special work of the Society until 1958, when it was no longer listed among the Principal Special Works in Dublin. Its disappearance is not noted or explained, though emigration that was depleting the Society's membership could have ended its work. This is also the period when the position of the Travelling community gave rise to public comment and interest. The Society shared the belief of the community at large, that 'something should be done about these people'. The Council of Ireland felt that 'the matter had better be left to the authorities and that we should continue to assist them to the best of our ability, especially in the spiritual sphere'.⁷³ In 1960, following a request from the Commission on Itinerancy, the Society consulted its conferences nationwide and submitted its conclusions to the Commission.⁷⁴ Regrettably, the records of the Commission did not survive and the St Vincent de Paul did not preserve its submission. The Legion of Mary also gave evidence to the Commission.

The Legion's work among Travellers was largely confined to the education of children in preparation for the Sacraments.⁷⁵ Similar to the St Vincent de Paul the Legion attempted to encourage regular mass attendance but this had little effect.⁷⁶ Travellers needed assistance from charitable mediators such as the Legion primarily in order to secure religious education. The high standards of sexual morality among Travellers conformed to the cardinal virtues of Irish society – chastity and fidelity in marriage. The Legion and the St Vincent de Paul were thus concerned with basic religious education of Travellers rather than rescue work among the deviant or immoral. The role of the female religious in educating and assisting Travellers was probably

⁷² *Report of the Council of Ireland 1948*, p 77, SSVP.

⁷³ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1959*, p 10, SSVP.

⁷⁴ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1960*, p 8, SSVP.

⁷⁵ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 88. The Legion ran a 'school on wheels' in Dublin city. 'But until there are more of these mobile schools the open air 'hedge schools' operated by the Legion all over the country and especially in Dublin will continue to be held', *Irish Independent*, 8 July 1961.

⁷⁶ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, pp. 87-88.

significant but the extent of involvement of different orders and convents awaits further study.⁷⁷

When considering charitable aid to Travellers, one must remain aware of the strong local and personal factors involved. Assistance offered by the Society of St Vincent de Paul and the Legion of Mary was determined by its members in individual conferences or praesidia. This piecemeal assistance may have suited the lifestyle and requirements of Travellers who were anxious to see their children receive the Sacraments but not spend years in formal education. Travellers were not considered excessively vulnerable or needy by these voluntary groups – an attitude shared by a government system that effectively ignored them. Conformity to settled values was not the objective of lay charitable organisations who worked with Travellers. The St Vincent de Paul was not trying to reconcile Travellers to their poverty in order to save them from communism. Neither were they encouraging frugality and respectability. By facilitating religious education and the bare minimum of formal education both organisations appeared to accept nomadism as the founding basis of Traveller society. Thus contact between Travellers and charitable organisations was occasional, circumstantial and limited. In comparison to other defined categories such as the elderly or unmarried mothers, Travellers eluded the attention of voluntary charity organisations. Traveller's access to public services was also circumscribed by nomadism. However, there was certain limited contact between Travellers and the benefits system. This contact occurred when Travellers were housed by a few local authorities, and when central departments noticed their non-cooperation with public institutions.

Housing

The importance of housing schemes in changing attitudes to public space among the Irish working class has been discussed in chapter 2. This section will explain the extent to which public housing developments restricted Traveller's access to housing, both temporary and permanent. Before the government endorsed settlement programme was initiated in the 1960s, local authorities dealt with Traveller tenants on an ad hoc basis. The actions of each authority were conditioned by local factors such as the attitude of

⁷⁷ For example, the Ursuline convent in Thurles opened a school for one day a month in 1932, to prepare Traveller children for Holy Communion. Statement of the Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Society 'Memo on Itinerancy re Communication sent to RCB from Custom House', February 1961, RCB. Thanks to Derek Philips, Synod Officer for forwarding this document to me.

the county or city manager and the elected representatives. By 1961, the majority of local authorities had received tenancy applications from Travellers. Most lettings were successful although some Traveller families were ostracised by their settled neighbours, resulting in unhappiness for all.⁷⁸ This reaction by the settled community often made 'the new way of life unattractive, if not intolerable' for many Travellers who returned to the road to escape prejudice.⁷⁹ As chapter 1 showed, settled people also had difficulties adjusting to life in the new housing estates. Unlike settled people, Travellers could escape public housing by returning to the road.

Perhaps more significant than troubles in public housing were the unforeseen effects of slum clearance and the extension of garden suburbs on the Traveller accommodation patterns. Dr Flynn believes that the demolition of cheap private accommodation removed Traveller's opportunities for voluntary settlement.⁸⁰ Tenancies were decided by local authorities and prejudice against Travellers had a detrimental effect upon their chances of securing public housing. In Galway city a Traveller family were removed from the housing list 'on the basis that the Borough Council were not prepared to house families of the itinerant class'.⁸¹ Apart from overt discrimination, securing a tenancy was a bureaucratic process, which undoubtedly militated against a largely illiterate population. John Maher's family were housed in Mulatty County Kildare because he was able to write to the county council on his parent's behalf.⁸² It also appears that compulsory purchase orders on which housing programmes depended may have been used to force Travellers out of urban areas. Dublin Corporation served an order in January 1934, acquiring 54 separate properties, 49 of which were described as 'waste ground'. Many empty spaces had been created by the demolition of property, but marginal land was also included in the purchase order.⁸³ Coincidentally, work by the Gipsy Visitation Guild of St Vincent de Paul was interrupted by the mass eviction of caravan and tent dwellers by the Corporation in early 1934. The compulsory purchase order may have specifically targeted land occupied by Travellers, securing their eviction

⁷⁸ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* p 60.

⁷⁹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 60.

⁸⁰ Interview, Dr Michael Flynn, 2 February 2001. It is worth noting that Old Chapel Lane in Rathkeale, a street strongly associated with Traveller settlement, was condemned by the Board of Health. O'Connor, *Rathkeale*, p 140.

⁸¹ Helleiner, *Irish Travellers*, p 56.

⁸² Maher, *The Road to God Knows Where*, p 167.

⁸³ Schedule of the Compulsory Purchase Order 1933, pp 39-49, Minutes of the Municipal Council of the City of Dublin 1934, DCA.

while simultaneously acquiring property for the housing needs of the city's population. Similar to the cases of amenity and relief works discussed in chapter 2, the sources do not refer to Travellers as a problem that could be solved by public ownership of land, but evidence suggests that restricting informal land usage was an important factor in purchase decisions.

Nevertheless, Travellers in some parts of Ireland did benefit from the slum clearance policies initiated in the 1930s. The history of Traveller contact with the system of government reveals occasional and intermittent contact: some local authorities included Travellers for rehousing under slum clearance programmes. St Mel's Terrace, in Athlone County Westmeath was built in 1933, and housed 31 families 'the majority of which were semi-settled Travellers who had been living in shanties and run-down cottages on the edge of town'.⁸⁴ St Mel's and a similar terrace in Tralee, County Kerry had the largest concentrations of Travellers in one neighbourhood in the country.⁸⁵ From 1933 to 1972, 85 families, mostly Travellers lived in St Mel's. This was three or four times the usual turnover for public housing. Reasons for this turnover varied - some families transferred to other public housing but many returned to the road or emigrated to England. Clearly 'housed' Travellers did not necessarily view themselves as 'settled'. Travellers living in the terrace did not participate in the activities and institutions of the settled community, but this was considered to be largely the fault of settled people who discouraged their attendance. St Mel's tenants did not have any close friends outside the terrace, except among their own relations, and several of the families in the terrace were heavily intermarried.⁸⁶ Thus the premise that housing inevitably led to assimilation and an end to Traveller identity was proved unfounded even before the settlement drive of the 1970s.

In Mullingar County Westmeath a different approach was taken to housing Travellers. Unlike in Athlone, no more than 7 families were housed in any one street. The County Medical Officer, Dr Michael Flynn, helped house 32 of Mullingar's 41 resident Traveller families. The experiment was a success in that 25 families owned their own houses and all the children were attending school.⁸⁷ While the Travellers

⁸⁴ Luan P. Cuffe and George J. Gmelch, 'Housing as a factor in social integration: the Traveller in Ireland', (Unpublished report, April 1972), p 12, Traveller Resource Centre.

⁸⁵ Cuffe and Gmelch, 'Housing as a factor in social integration', p 12.

⁸⁶ Cuffe and Gmelch, 'Housing as a factor in social integration', p 15.

⁸⁷ Cuffe and Gmelch, 'Housing as a factor in social integration', p 17.

made strides towards respectability and the conventions of the majority community, they were not personally close to settled people: 'no one has yet forgotten that they were once 'tinkers''.⁸⁸ Mullingar Travellers restricted 'their close relationships to other Travellers in the town'.⁸⁹ Dr Michael Flynn described how difficult it was for families to make the transition to permanent housing: 'it was the rare family who stayed in their first house'.⁹⁰ Many needed more than one opportunity to adjust to sedentary living and without a sympathetic local official securing another tenancy must have been difficult. Athlone, Tralee and Mullingar sought to accommodate Travellers who camped in the townland. Isolated example of Traveller settlement in public housing points to the importance of influential individuals at a local level. Michael Flynn commented 'The individual who had a high level job with some clout could achieve something...I found that where the county manager, secretary, engineer or medical officer wasn't interested, nothing happened'.⁹¹ The power of a committed and energetic individual to circumvent administrative niceties is constantly averred to by Dr James Deeny in his autobiography.⁹² Sustained or large scale Traveller settlement could occur if powerful figures in the local authority were supportive. Similarly, if a central government figure or department focused on the deviation of Travellers from the norms of the settled community, they could seek coercive powers to force conformity. Legislation penalising wandering and begging was long on the statute book and has been cited by some scholars as proof of the historical distinctiveness of Travellers.⁹³ Many statutes could have been used against the distinctive features of Traveller economy and society, if we presume that historically, such features were constant. Yet there is little proof that Travellers as a group were subject to close scrutiny by the machinery of the state. The small numbers of Traveller children committed to industrial schools are an example of their successful evasion of coercive state welfare.

⁸⁸ Cuffe and Gmelch, 'Housing as a factor in social integration', p 18.

⁸⁹ Cuffe and Gmelch, 'Housing as a factor in social integration', p 18.

⁹⁰ Interview, Dr Michael Flynn, 2 February 2001.

⁹¹ Interview, Dr Michael Flynn, 2 February 2001.

⁹² For example 'without any legal authority' he closed a home for unmarried mothers and their children because the infant mortality rate was unacceptable. James Deeny, *To Cure and to Care: the Memoirs of a Chief Medical Officer* (Dublin, 1989), p 85.

⁹³ George Gmelch and Sharon Bohn Gmelch, 'The Emergence of an Ethnic Group: the Irish Tinkers', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 49, 4 (1976), p 228.

Education

Educating children in institutional care away from the corrupting influence of their deviant parents was a strategy favoured by governments across the world when faced with an irreconcilably different minority group. The treatment of the Australian Aboriginal population is perhaps the best example. Closer to home, Swedish and Norwegian gypsy-travellers received similar treatment and contemporary Roma groups complain of children designated mentally retarded because of their slow progress in school. The experience of minorities in state-run education systems is crucial to maintaining cultural difference. Therefore an historical examination of Traveller contact with an education system run by the majority community is essential. As demonstrated in chapter 2, the class implications in the enforcement of school attendance were also significant. Industrial schools were detention and education centres for children established in the nineteenth century. Unlike reformatories, which detained as juvenile offenders, children were sent to industrial schools because their homes were found deficient in 'sufficient protection and care'.⁹⁴ Scholarship on institutional care in Ireland, the intentions of its administrators and the experience of its 'clients' remains embryonic.⁹⁵ Assessing the extent of Traveller contact with the industrial school system is attempted within a simple sketch on the nature of the system itself.

After the foundation of the state, the numbers of children sent to industrial schools began to rise. Though from 1914-22 numbers fell, by 1926 the numbers in care had risen to pre-war levels. A comparison by the Department of Education revealed that numbers in Irish industrial schools were significantly higher than in England and Wales. The Irish habit of using the schools as poor law institutions for the maintenance of the destitute largely explained this disparity. Out of 1,865 children committed to schools in Ireland in the 19 months ending 31 July 1926, 1,621 were committed for wandering or being destitute, whereas in the same period, of the 2,400 children committed in England and Wales only 280 were committed on these grounds.⁹⁶ County homes were being redefined as old age homes, so children, the mentally ill and unmarried mothers were

⁹⁴ *Report of the Department of Education 1925-27*, p 83.

⁹⁵ The twentieth century has been neglected in favour of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See Joseph Robins, *The Lost Children: A Study of Charity Children in Ireland 1700-1900* (Dublin, 1980) and *Fools and Mad: A History of the Insane in Ireland* (Dublin, 1986)

⁹⁶ *Report of the Department of Education 1925-27*, p 91.

reallocated to appropriate institutions.⁹⁷ Institutional care was not a cheap option: national school pupils cost public funds approximately £8 while an industrial school child cost more than £28.⁹⁸ Despite this financial disincentive, the numbers of children in industrial schools continued to rise.⁹⁹ The most common grounds for committal were 'begging' and 'wandering' as defined by the 1908 Children's Act and 'destitution' under the 1929 Children's Act (see glossary).

Fig. 1: Legislative grounds for the committal of children, 1928-31

Year	Begging	Wandering	Destitute
1928-9	21%	60%	*-
1929-30	9%	37%	37%
1930-31	9%	30%	43%

*Act of 1929 not operative in 1928-29

Source: *Report of the Department of Education 1930-31*, p 81.

The categories of begging and wandering would suggest that Traveller children were well represented among industrial school committals. However, nomadism allowed families to escape zealous enforcement of legislation. Also, District Justices were unwilling to commit Traveller children to industrial schools since families clearly had reasonable means of subsistence.¹⁰⁰ The cost of industrial school education was also a major factor. Local ratepayers paid for committed children and rising rates were deeply unpopular. Local authorities struggled to strike a low rate that would simultaneously keep voters happy and fund infrastructural improvements, sanitation schemes, road works and poor relief. Unsurprisingly, committal of Traveller children was 'stoutly opposed' by local authorities conscious of 'the burden on the ratepayers'.¹⁰¹ Even Traveller children with physical or mental handicap found it difficult to enter institutional care because local authorities would not sponsor them.¹⁰² Louth County Council in 1937 protested that Traveller children with no right to local funds were

⁹⁷ 4,163 children remained in poor law institutions in 1926, compared to 6,012 in industrial schools. *Report of the Department of Education 1925-27*, p 91. The reorganisation of the county homes took some time to effect but the post-independence trend was to send children to industrial schools rather than poor law institutions; this served to swell numbers annually.

⁹⁸ *Report of the Department of Education 1925-27* Appendix 1, pp. 98-99.

⁹⁹ *Report of the Department of Education 1930-31*, p 81.

¹⁰⁰ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 66.

¹⁰¹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 66.

¹⁰² One family needed the mediation of the St Vincent de Paul before a local authority would help them secure institutional care for a deaf and dumb child. *Report of the Council of Ireland*, p 77, SSVP.

chargeable on the rates. The Louth representative to the General Council of County Councils (GCCC) requested that the GCCC ask the Minister for Local Government and Public Health about 'the problem of children of the vagrant class wandering into a county and becoming a charge on the local rates by their being committed to Industrial Schools'.¹⁰³ The Council believed that 'as the children in question are not usually domiciled in any particular county it appears...that the chargeability in respect of them should fall on the general taxpayers and not on the ratepayers'.¹⁰⁴ What the Department of Local Government thought of this exception is not recorded, but figures from the Department of Education do not list any detained children paid for by central funds. By July 1940 there were 2,904 boys and 3,530 girls in industrial schools paid for by local authorities.¹⁰⁵ Cork Corporation supported 218 children in industrial schools; the County council funded 505.¹⁰⁶ With no fixed residence, Travellers were not entitled to locally funded welfare services. In the opinion of local representatives, rootless nomads did not qualify as deserving members of the local community. This official refusal to contemplate Traveller entitlement contrasts with popular recognition of Travellers connection's to a local area where they maintained winter headquarters, as outlined in Chapter 1. On an unofficial level, Travellers were seen as part of a geographically defined local community but their rights as citizens under the welfare system were rejected. However, in 1942 the Department of Education attempted to increase coercive powers over Travellers who successfully evaded primary schooling. This was 16 years after compulsory school attendance was introduced generally. Why were Travellers noticed by the Department of Education in the 1940s?

From 1934-37, an average of 6% of committals to industrial schools were under the terms of the 1926 school attendance act.¹⁰⁷ Travellers were not specifically targeted by this legislation although Mr G. Wolfe TD had hoped that the children of 'the travelling gypsies' would be compelled to attend school.¹⁰⁸ As Traveller children attended school sporadically and only for short periods, committal to institutional care

¹⁰³ Agenda, 27 July 1937, Box File Agendas, 15 September 1926 to 15 December 1949, GCCC.

¹⁰⁴ Agenda and Minutes, 7 December 1938, Box File Agendas, 15 September 1926 to 15 December 1949, GCCC.

¹⁰⁵ *Report of the Department of Education 1939-40*, p 87. Perhaps more girls were committed due to perceived female helplessness or vulnerability.

¹⁰⁶ *Report of the Department of Education 1939-40*, p 87.

¹⁰⁷ *Report of the Department of Education 1936-7*, p 118.

¹⁰⁸ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 13, col. 1209 (3 December 1925).

for non-attendance could have unduly affected them. But the gap between legislation and enforcement was considerable. District Justices did not consider failure to attend school sufficient reason to remove Traveller children from parental guardianship.¹⁰⁹ The drafting of a School Attendance Bill in 1942 to address the difficulties posed by 'vagrant children' suggests that Travellers successfully evaded the terms of the 1926 act.

The Minister for Education, Thomas Deirrg, presented the Bill to the Dáil in October 1942.¹¹⁰ The department felt legislation targeting 'vagrant children' was necessary since Travellers had successfully evaded conviction. Figures from 1938 estimated that there were 900 vagrant children of school-going age in Ireland.¹¹¹ Derrig believed that 700 of these children received no schooling at all.¹¹² Section 21 of the School Attendance Bill 1942 was designed to bring these children and their parents 'faoi'n smacht', under control.¹¹³ The measures outlined in the Bill represented a wide ranging attack upon the Traveller family. The powers envisaged for the Gardaí and the school attendance officer were extensive and aimed only at 'vagrants', singling out Travellers for particular attention. On 1st May each year, a vagrant was required to register in a Garda station the names, ages and educational particulars of his children. Failure to register or supplying inaccurate information was punishable by fines.¹¹⁴ Children of vagrants were required to take educational tests at the behest of the Minister and failure to do so was punishable by fines and/or imprisonment.¹¹⁵ A school attendance officer could question any vagrant he encountered¹¹⁶ while a Garda could arrest without warrant anyone 'who appeared to him to be a vagrant and whom he suspected of having committed an offence' under the school attendance acts.¹¹⁷ Any child between 6 and 14 years in the custody of the arrested vagrant could be taken into

¹⁰⁹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 66.

¹¹⁰ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 88, col. 1540-45 (28 October 1942).

¹¹¹ Rúnaí Aire Department of Education to Rúnaí Príobháideach Department of Taoiseach, 28 October 1958, DT S 12039 B, NAI.

¹¹² *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 88, col. 1543 (28 October 1942).

¹¹³ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 88, col. 1543 (28 October 1942). In these Dáil records, section 19 is cited. It later became section 21.

¹¹⁴ Rúnaí Aire Department of Education to Rúnaí Príobháideach Department of Taoiseach, 28 October 1958, DT S 12039 B, NAI.

¹¹⁵ Rúnaí Aire Department of Education to Rúnaí Príobháideach Department of Taoiseach, 28 October 1958, DT S 12039 B, NAI

¹¹⁶ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 88, col. 1543 (28 October 1942).

¹¹⁷ Rúnaí Aire Department of Education to Rúnaí Príobháideach Department of Taoiseach, 28 October 1958, DT S 12039 B, NAI

custody and removed 'to a suitable place of detention'.¹¹⁸ A vagrant who did not send his children to school could be fined or sent to prison while vagrant children were automatically removed to industrial school or the care of a relative after the first conviction for truancy.¹¹⁹ Derrig apparently envisaged Traveller children staying with settled relatives or friends while their parents continued to travel.¹²⁰ This suggests that the Bill was not conceived of to regulate the whole Travelling community or to end nomadism, although it would have had that consequence in practice. Naturally, Derrig did not declare his intention was to commit children to industrial schools, since legislation that increased local rates would have been criticised.

Some extra powers granted to enforcement authorities also applied to settled people. A school attendance officer could question any child found on the street during school hours and further question the parents if necessary.¹²¹ John Marcus O'Sullivan, who as minister had drafted the 1926 act, worried that the rights of parents guaranteed in Article 42 of the constitution¹²² were being infringed. He had no such scruples about the rights of vagrant parents who were certainly not 'ordinary parent[s], settled definitely in the town or country'. Vagrants neglected their duty as parents¹²³ and were thus unworthy of constitutional protection. James Dillon steadfastly defended the family in the face of bureaucratic regulation but he did not decry the specific attention paid to vagrants.¹²⁴ Deputy Linehan commended the legislation:

I am satisfied that, no matter what some people may think about the divine right of parents, it is a good thing that the State is now being given power to remove the children from the care of those vagrants if they are not treating them properly and giving to those children the opportunities which they should get in a State like this.¹²⁵

Linehan even suggested that the term 'no fixed abode' be removed from the definition of vagrant as many families owned or rented a house to which they returned for the

¹¹⁸ Rúnaf Aire Department of Education to Rúnaf Príobháideach Department of Taoiseach, 28 October 1958, DT S 12039 B, NAI

¹¹⁹ Rúnaf Aire Department of Education to Rúnaf Príobháideach Department of Taoiseach, 28 October 1958, DT S 12039 B, NAI

¹²⁰ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 88, col. 1543 (28 October 1942).

¹²¹ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 88, col. 1544 (28 October 1942).

¹²² Article 42 (1) states 'The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children.' See Michael Farry, *Education and the Constitution* (Dublin, 1996) for discussion on Article 42.

¹²³ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 88, col. 1560 (28 October 1942).

¹²⁴ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 88, cols. 1566-1570 (28 October 1942).

¹²⁵ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 88, col. 1594 (28 October 1942).

winter.¹²⁶ The Bill passed both Houses of the Oireachtas but was found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in April 1943.¹²⁷ Section 4 of the Bill¹²⁸ was found unconstitutional because it interfered with a parent's right to determine the provision of education for their children.¹²⁹ The Department privately conceded that the 1926 School Attendance Act was probably also repugnant to the constitution.¹³⁰ The finding of the Supreme Court protected Traveller (and to a lesser extent, settled) families from a state willing to make drastic interventions into its citizen's lives. Exactly why the Department of Education chose to target Traveller children in 1942 is not clear. Without access to Education files we can only speculate, but a possible reason could have been the increasing attention paid to Travellers by the government during the Emergency. Administrators rarely noticed Travellers as a group with particular needs or problems. For example, Traveller children escaped the expanding preventative remit of public health by not attending schools where medical examinations detected childhood illnesses. It was only when some Travellers threatened the public health of the general population in 1940 that the Department of Health noticed their existence.

Public Health

Of necessity, Travellers availed of the state medical services. Women in childbirth were assisted by midwives, the district nurse or the local doctor.¹³¹ With no fixed abode, families could not receive public health subventions such as free milk. Naturally, the state did not encourage Travellers to avail of their entitlements or change the application criteria to reach nomadic families. This should not be seen as deliberate exclusion since penny pinching local relief agencies even categorised charity from the St Vincent de Paul as 'means' when assessing eligibility for benefits.¹³² Application procedures were

¹²⁶ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 88, cols. 1595-6 (28 October 1942).

¹²⁷ Full text of judgement can be found in R.A. Harrison, *The Irish Digest 1939-48* (Dublin, 1952), pp. 94-5.

¹²⁸ 'A child shall not be deemed for the purposes of this act to be receiving suitable education in a manner other than by attending a national school, a suitable school, or a recognised school unless such education and the manner in which such child is receiving it have been certified under this section by the Minister to be suitable' Section 4, School Attendance Bill 1942.

¹²⁹ Farry, *Education and the Constitution*, p 68.

¹³⁰ Rúnaí Aire Department of Education to Rúnaí Príobháideach Department of Taoiseach, 28 October 1958, DT S 12039 B, NAI

¹³¹ Over 65% of Traveller births were in hospital. *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 48.

¹³² *Report of the Council of Ireland, 1934*, p 18, SSVP; *Report of Annual Meeting of Presidents 1936*, p 17, SSVP.

drafted to suit the needs of the administration and the less money paid out in benefits the better.

Vagrants were first blamed for the spread of typhus in the *Report of Department of Local Government and Public Health 1930-31*. The epidemiology of the disease proved difficult to trace so a medical inspector speculated that 'the disease is in some cases spread by vagrants who harbour infected lice'.¹³³ Yet public health officials were not unduly concerned with vagrants spreading typhus. The disease was an outcome of unsanitary, overcrowded conditions that were endemic to the poorer classes in Ireland. Improvements in housing were the foundation for the gradual elimination of typhus.¹³⁴ The Department noted with satisfaction the increasing attention devoted to sanitation schemes by local authorities who implemented expensive schemes due to 'a public health consciousness and a deeper knowledge of the questions at issue'.¹³⁵ Most public health professionals were sufficiently level headed to acknowledge the source of infectious disease lay in serious infrastructural deficiencies, poverty and bad living conditions rather than a handful of Travellers. Also notifiable infectious diseases included only a fraction of the deaths from communicable illnesses each year.¹³⁶ For example, infant mortality in 1936-37 increased because of non-notifiable respiratory and alimentary diseases, a situation caused by increased poverty and distress after a succession of strikes.¹³⁷

However, typhus known as 'the Irish ague' lingered on in the Irish population after its eradication in Europe.¹³⁸ Eight cases occurred in Cahirciveen County Kerry in 1937 but no blame was attached to Travellers.¹³⁹ In 1938, there were no cases of typhus recorded - the first time since records began that the disease had not occurred.¹⁴⁰ But

¹³³ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1930-31*, p 193. An outbreak in County Wicklow in 1930 was blamed on 'a band of itinerant tinkers', Brian Donnelly, *For the Betterment of the People: A History of Wicklow County Council* (Wicklow, 1999), p. 79.

¹³⁴ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1925-27*, p 61.

¹³⁵ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1930-31*, p 41.

¹³⁶ A doctor was legally obliged to report a notifiable disease such as small pox or typhus to the Department, but deaths from common infections such as measles were not compiled annually until the threat of long established epidemic diseases had receded.

¹³⁷ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1937-38*, p 55.

¹³⁸ 'Ireland was the last country in Western Europe with louse-borne typhus', Deeny, *To Cure and to Care*, p 77. Dr Robert C. Cummins believed that endemic rat typhus occasionally infected those humans who had not built up a resistance to it. See Cummins, 'The last reported case of typhus in Cork city' in *Unusual Medical Cases: A Cork Physician's Memories* (Cork, 1962), pp. 11-23.

¹³⁹ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1937-38* Appendix XII, p 171.

¹⁴⁰ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1939-40*, p 30.

this triumph was short lived and five cases occurred in 1939.¹⁴¹ Under the conditions of the Emergency, typhus represented a serious threat to the Irish population. Perhaps more importantly, the British administration knew that endemic typhus in Ireland was a grave threat to its war effort. From 1943 to 1947, 55,000 prospective emigrants to Britain were examined and deloused before travelling.¹⁴² With increased hardship due to restricted food and employment, a typhus epidemic would have had disastrous consequences. In August 1940, an outbreak of 12 cases in County Donegal was traced to 'a band of itinerant tinkers'.¹⁴³ Public health officials attempted to persuade the group to be deloused and isolated for a period in order to prevent further infection but 'before effective measures could be taken the itinerants had disappeared'.¹⁴⁴ After this case, the department sought additional powers of detention for individuals who represented possible sources of infection. Submitting his case to government, the Minister outlined how a 'crisis situation' would be rendered more serious for the military and civil authorities by an epidemic of typhus that could infect the army. Wartime conditions justified the extension of powers sought.

The minister is of the opinion that in the interests of public safety more drastic measures must be taken than can be justified under the present law and that persons who are dangerous sources of infection should if necessary be detained until themselves and their clothing are rendered innocuous¹⁴⁵

The Emergency Power (Number 46) Order made on 27 August 1940 empowered the minister to issue a warrant for the detention and isolation of persons likely to spread disease.¹⁴⁶ Medical Inspector Dr P. Ronan Fanning noted the considerable difficulties of dealing with the 'tinker class' and welcomed the new powers to help officials 'fight this menace'.¹⁴⁷ A typhus epidemic during World War II could have had serious consequences for Ireland and Britain, so 'drastic measures' could be justified by the exceptional circumstances.

¹⁴¹ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1939-40*, p 138.

¹⁴² Barrington, *Health, Medicine and Politics in Ireland*, p 139.

¹⁴³ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1940-41*, p 34. Oddly, the Donegal County Medical Officer reported only 1 case of typhus in August 1940. Monthly report of Dr M. J. Bastible, County Medical Officer for Health, August 1940, Minutes of Donegal County Council, August 1940. Thanks to the Donegal County Council Archivist for sending me this report.

¹⁴⁴ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1940-41*, p 35.

¹⁴⁵ Proposal for an emergency powers order providing for precautions against the spread of infectious disease 20 August 1940, DT S 12047 A, NAI.

¹⁴⁶ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1940-41*, p 35.

¹⁴⁷ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1940-41*, p 153.

It was in the context of wartime surveillance that Travellers and wanderers on Irish roads were discussed in August 1940 by the cabinet committee on emergency problems. The committee wished to ascertain if the numbers on the roads had increased during the Emergency and whether suspicious activity harmful to the war effort could go undetected. The Minister for Justice assured the committee the Gardaí had 'standing instructions' to question and monitor the movements of 'vagrants and campers'. Garda reports did not indicate 'anything abnormal about the number or character of the persons who are at present camping and 'caravanning' on the roads'. An increase in camping always occurred during the summer months and this was particularly so in 1940 because foreign holiday destinations were regrettably inaccessible.¹⁴⁸ During World War II government involvement in all levels of society increased. This was an inevitable consequence of disruption caused by the collapse of imports and efforts to create a self-sufficient economy and society. To maintain stability and distribute scarce resources, government was forced to monitor every aspect of Irish life. 'Total war' in combatant countries necessitated the mobilisation of all sections of the community in the service of the war effort. Though a neutral country, Ireland faced similar difficulties. The government managed issues of supply and demand, as well as exceptional circumstances such as typhus outbreaks with Emergency Powers legislation. In the case of the Emergency Power (Number 46) Order, it was retained after the war in section 38 of the Health Act 1947.¹⁴⁹ The exceptional circumstances no longer pertained but the civil service and politicians could not relinquish powers they had come to see as ordinary. Once the legal precedent was established under wartime circumstances, Irish legislators saw no need to roll back the powers of the state to pre-war levels.

The 1947 Health Act was a massive statute, covering infectious disease, institutional development, food safety and the infamous Mother and Child scheme. Although originally introduced in 1945, the Bill did not become law until 1947. Consequently the debate over its provisions covers a considerable time period. The powers of detention and isolation for carriers of infectious disease caused some comment among Dáil deputies wary of coercive measures. Compulsory examination of

¹⁴⁸ Rúnáí Aire Department of Justice to Rúnáí Priobhaideach do'n Taoiseach 10 August 1940, DT S 12039 A, NAI.

¹⁴⁹ 'This section will replace Emergency Powers (No 46) Order 1940 which gave similar power of compulsory detention and isolation in pursuance of an order made by the minister.' Health Bill 1947, Explanatory Memorandum, DT S 12047 A, NAI.

school children was decried by the opposition because it ended parental discretion over their children's medical treatment.¹⁵⁰ The Minister proposed to punish those with an infectious disease who did not take steps to prevent its spread to others.¹⁵¹ Infectious diseases ranged from typhus¹⁵² and venereal disease to whooping cough, scabies and mumps.¹⁵³ The 1945 Bill emphasised compulsion, a feature that distinguished it, according to Whyte, from comparative international legislation.¹⁵⁴ That people could be isolated at the discretion of county medical officers was described by Richard Mulcahy as 'an unprecedented attack on personal liberty'.¹⁵⁵ Other deputies worried about the image of Ireland abroad, since the Bill's enforcement of minimum hygiene standards clearly implied that the average citizen was less than spotless.¹⁵⁶ Deputy McGilligan questioned that an exceptional circumstance should justify a power for general application:

Is a wandering collection of tramps and tinkers, who caused trouble from the West up to Donegal, responsible for this? Are we really building up the public health provisions for this country in the future in a permanent way upon the vagaries of some group of tinkers operating in the most curious times of the last few years?.¹⁵⁷

The parliamentary secretary to the minister, Dr Ward, attempted to quell criticism by stating that compulsory powers in relation to infectious diseases were not a statutory innovation. Sections 148 and 149 of the Public Health (Ireland) Act, 1878 empowered the Minister for Local Government and Public health to make regulations for the treatment of persons affected with an infectious disease¹⁵⁸ (see glossary). Mulcahy then asked why, if typhus was attributed to Travellers, all citizens were targeted in the legislation.¹⁵⁹ Dr Ward addressed the fears of deputies that powers would be applied generally

This section is being debated as if it was going to be uniformly applied to everybody who contracted an infectious disease. I do not deny that it could be, and, if anybody says it could be, there is no use arguing with him because

¹⁵⁰ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 98, col. 1734 (12 December 1945).

¹⁵¹ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 98, col. 1716 (12 December 1945).

¹⁵² *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 98, col. 1716 (12 December 1945).

¹⁵³ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 98, col. 1715 (12 December 1945).

¹⁵⁴ J. H. Whyte, *The Church and State in Modern Ireland 1923-79 2nd edition* (Dublin, 1980), p 133.

¹⁵⁵ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 98, col. 1735 (12 December 1945).

¹⁵⁶ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 98, cols. 1864, 1880, 1900 (13 December 1945).

¹⁵⁷ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 98, col. 2025 (13 December 1945).

¹⁵⁸ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 98, col. 2078 (13 December 1945).

¹⁵⁹ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 100, col. 953 (2 April 1946).

undoubtedly it could. But it is as clear as noonday that unless you take statutory powers to cope with exceptionally difficult circumstances you cannot cope with the exceptionally difficult circumstances when they present themselves.¹⁶⁰

As Dr Ward mentioned the non-cooperation by Travellers in Donegal, he seemed to imply that the application of detention powers would be restricted to the exceptional case posed by Travellers. However, the extensive parliamentary debates on this statute are no guide to its eventual application. Despite this legislation, the administration seemed to consider Travellers a minor problem. Disease was not blamed on a reservoir of infection located in Traveller camps, for the department was aware that 'the incidence of the principal infectious diseases in a country may fairly be taken as an index of the sanitary circumstances of that country'.¹⁶¹ In the context of sanitary deficiencies in Ireland, the public health threat posed by Travellers was insignificant. James Deeny recognised that a typhus epidemic was most likely in poor 'villages and the isolated houses on the more remote part of the Atlantic seaboard'.¹⁶² The 1940 Donegal outbreak adhered to this pattern. Moreover, if Travellers spread typhus, why were outbreaks not more common and extensive? Theories on the spread of typhus were not always watertight; an outbreak in July 1924 was attributed to the sale of second hand clothing on market day.¹⁶³ Regional officials attributed endemic typhus infection to Travellers but prevailing official opinion was that sanitary improvements would eradicate the disease. The coercive 1940 Order and succeeding section 38 of the Health Act 1947 were formulated in response to Traveller non-compliance but were applicable to any citizen of the state. Yet, the powers of detention were only used once in the period 1947-57.¹⁶⁴ Available department of health records suggest women with venereal disease were more likely than Travellers to be detained under section 38.¹⁶⁵ Once again the target of the public official's interventionist zeal shifted to more vulnerable and accessible members of the settled community. The Department of Health did not consider infectious diseases spread by Travellers to be sufficiently problematic to merit sustained attention.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 100, col. 1268 (4 April 1946).

¹⁶¹ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1941-42*, p 37.

¹⁶² Deeny, *To Cure and to Care*, p 82.

¹⁶³ *Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1922-25*, p 28.

¹⁶⁴ Whyte, *Church and State*, p 294.

¹⁶⁵ See correspondence in file named 'Section 38 Health act 1947 - Detentions', DH B 135/30, NAI.

¹⁶⁶ '...there would not be any justification for a special general control of them or their movements on health grounds' *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, pp. 50-1.

Central government expanded from the foundation of the Irish state, often at the price of local institutions. The Department of Local Government and Public Health was mainly responsible for this increase in central control. According to Whyte, 'it showed a readiness to concentrate authority, a lack of interest in the maintenance of autonomous groups [and] a reluctance even to consult outside groups'.¹⁶⁷ But emergency conditions during World War II forced the expansion of state activity 'to a level that had previously been neither possible nor desired'. Breen et al believed that this state expansion was quickly abandoned after 1945.¹⁶⁸ However, the ethos of government intervention was not so easily relinquished. Having been forced to plan for every aspect of Irish life, the mandarins were not about to return to hands-off administration. The peremptory tone of government by order had not gone unnoticed; the *Cork Examiner* decried this 'virtual dictatorship, which issued whatever Orders it pleased'.

The country was expected to accept and obey these Orders without demur, on the ground that there was a war on. To an extent, this dictatorship of the Executive may have been necessary and advantageous to the State. But its accumulative effect must have been weakening to the authority of Parliament, the restoration of which will be necessary if Eire is to govern on democratic principles.¹⁶⁹

The *Cork Examiner* supported Fine Gael, the political opposition to Fianna Fail, but we should not dismiss this editorial as mere political posturing. The expansion of the state into economy and society occurred under many headings after World War II. Breen et al dismissed post war social policy,¹⁷⁰ but the welfare system evolved into a significant force in Irish politics and society long before the 'revolution'¹⁷¹ of 1958. What distinguished the years after the *First Programme for Economic Expansion* (1958) was not a comprehensive, easily accessible social welfare system but the persistence of means tested, categorical entitlements, which were the legacy of ad hoc, piecemeal additions to the benefits system.¹⁷² The Irish welfare system had evolved into a wide

¹⁶⁷ Whyte, *Church and State*, p 130.

¹⁶⁸ Richard Breen, Damian F. Hannan, David Rottman, Christopher T. Whelan, *Understanding Contemporary Ireland: State, Class and Development in the Republic of Ireland* (London and Dublin, 1990), p 4.

¹⁶⁹ *Cork Examiner*, 7 September 1944.

¹⁷⁰ 'All impetus toward social progress had foundered as early as 1951' with the failure of the Mother and Child scheme. Breen, Hannan, Rottman, and Whelan, *Understanding Contemporary Ireland*, p 4.

¹⁷¹ Breen, Hannan, Rottman, and Whelan, *Understanding Contemporary Ireland*, p 38.

¹⁷² For example, the failure of the Mother and Child scheme meant a 'tortuously complicated system' evolved to around the funding and provision of health services. Helen Burke, 'Foundation Stones of Irish

ranging and extremely complex structure, evidence of an unarticulated interventionist tendency in government circles. Before 1958, Irish politicians did not use the rhetoric of big government, but the civil servants who drafted legislation to regulate 'problems' implemented it. Centralised government planning began during the war years, with departments submitting regular updates to the Taoiseach's office. According to Breen et al, comprehensive planning during the Emergency gave a younger generation of civil servants the necessary experience to intervene in the Irish economy after 1958.¹⁷³ Department of Finance officials may not have intervened significantly until the 1960s, but social legislation in the 1950s showed no qualms about compelling citizens to avail of services.

Conclusion

This chapter reveals that voluntary organisations perceived Travellers to be worthy recipients of aid long before government officials considered them a social problem in need of a solution. Travellers secured access to religious education and help with bureaucratic details from the St Vincent de Paul Society. Neither the Legion of Mary nor the Society forced Travellers to abandon nomadism and even facilitated travelling by helping to purchase horses and wagons for needy families. The changing nature of charity and welfare provision will be fully addressed in chapter 6, which will outline the welfare context of the 1960s settlement initiative. The role of the voluntary sector in implementing the settlement programme will also be analysed in chapter 6.

The very real protection that the constitution afforded Irish people prevented the imposition of compulsory education on Travellers that would have destroyed family units. Local authorities who strove to keep rates low were glad to ignore non-compliance with school attendance by Travellers. Traveller access to public services was uneven and often depended upon powerful interested public officials. Central government faced a real difficulty in categorising Travellers since they presented problems under many headings. The Department of Education was responsible for administering school attendance; the Department of Local Government and Public Health, and later the Department of Health were responsible for the possible sanitary

Social Policy 1831-1951' in Gabriel Kiely, Anne O'Donnell, Patricia Kennedy and Suzanne Quin (eds), *Irish Social Policy in Context* (Dublin, 1999), p 29.

¹⁷³ Breen, Hannan, Rottman, and Whelan, *Understanding Contemporary Ireland*, p 36.

implications of unauthorised campsites; the Department of Local Government was responsible for determining land use policies and promoting town planning; Bord Fáilte and Local Government defined the landscape as an amenity. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the Department of Justice was seen by Dáil deputies as the overseeing department because complaints centred upon Traveller infringements of the law. In terms of administrative divisions of responsibility, Travellers were not exclusively part of any departmental remit. The nature of Traveller nomadism, accommodation patterns and lifestyle could be affected by many departments but this ensured that no department was willing to tackle them as a specific group. Even as the Department of Local Government and Public Health extended its compulsive powers over citizens, ostensibly including nomads, Travellers were ignored. Travellers successfully evaded government attention because various parts of the system from district justices to department officials, were unwilling or unable to view their existence as an urgent problem. Their escape from government intervention was perhaps unique when the institutionalisation of other problem groups such as unmarried mothers and destitute children is considered. How and when Travellers were finally categorised as the 'itinerant problem' by central government will be outlined in the next chapter, which will discuss the appointment and the *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*. The Report demonstrated the ambitions of government and interest groups who conceived of detailed plans to solve the 'itinerant problem'.

Chapter 4

The Commission on Itinerancy: Appointment, Procedures and Report

As chapter 3 illustrated, various aspects of the 'itinerant problem' had been considered by government departments, none of whom felt compelled to address the issue comprehensively. Aside from the difficulties of categorisation already outlined, there was a reluctance to make major changes to the legal system in order to target Travellers specifically. This chapter demonstrates that the government believed the legal implications for the whole population of anti-Traveller measures were not worth enduring. Ministers refused to outlaw trespassing animals or insanitary encampments despite the increasingly persistent complaints of TDs and local government organisations. This chapter will show the increasing frequency of these complaints. The 'itinerant problem' as defined by public representatives will be outlined in a review of material from the Dáil debates. When the government refused to tackle conflict between Travellers and settled people, local communities and authorities took extra-legal action to move Travellers on. Only after a number of Dublin representatives complained about Traveller camps did the government begin to formulate a policy. The importance of Dublin city to politicians and civil servants is outlined.

The government response to complaints about Travellers hardly varied until the Commission on Itinerancy was appointed in June 1960 by an Taoiseach, Seán Lemass. Yet the department responsible in all but name for the composition and appointment of the commission was the Department of Justice. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Justice, Charles Haughey, was even called the 'Parliamentary Secretary for tinkers' by James Dillon.¹ This chapter will analyse why the government decided to appoint a Commission to report on the position of Travellers in Irish society. This material has been analysed elsewhere as elite discourse;² here it will explain why government departments did not tackle conflict between Travellers and settled people before the 1960s. This chapter will also analyse the composition, methods and aims of the Commission on Itinerancy. How and where the Commission gathered information on Travellers will be detailed. The extent of Traveller participation in drafting the report

¹ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 198, col. 1458, (13 December 1962)

² See Helleiner, *Irish Travellers*, pp. 58-74.

will be addressed. The comprehensive report of the Commission contains valuable information on the relationship between Travellers and settled people, as it devotes much consideration to the attitude of the communities towards each other. It is particularly useful for analysing settled people's beliefs about Travellers, in official and popular terms. The records of the Commission did not survive, but the exhaustive report is a valuable source.

The Political Debate, 1949-60

Before examining the extensive report of the Commission, I will discuss the political debate preceding its appointment. From as early as 1931, Dáil deputies asked the government to 'do something' about vagrancy, trespass by animals and the public health risks posed by Traveller camp sites. If public representatives were vocal for so long, why was a report not commissioned earlier than 1960? The complaints by public representatives and government responses to them explains administrative inaction.

From 1925 to 1963, 31 parliamentary questions concerning Travellers were posed to different ministers. Only five of these questions preceded 1949, indeed the majority of references covered the period 1949-60. One feature in references to Travellers remained constant from 1925 to 1960: most deputies addressed their complaints to the Minister for Justice, demanding that his department draft legislation for dealing with wandering and trespassing animals, campsites, begging, public disorder and the generalised, almost indiscriminate, wrong doing Travellers were believed to be responsible for.³ While the Department of Justice maintained the police force - the enforcer of law and order - it was not the only department that drafted legislation criminalising behaviour, as the analysis of educational and environmental statutes in previous chapters has shown. Parliamentary members occasionally placed their concerns before the Ministers for Local Government or Agriculture but appealed most persistently to the Minister associated with law and order. This was despite the fact that the control of camping clearly lay with Local Government rather than Justice.

The Minister for Justice rarely responded to deputies' complaints made during the estimates debates, catch-all annual debates that could cover a vast range of topics

³ For a detailed analysis of this material see Helleiner, *Irish Travellers*, pp. 58-68 and Jane Helleiner, "'Menace to the Social Order": Anti-Traveller Discourse in the Irish Parliament 1939-59', *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 24, 1 (July 1998), pp. 75-91.

depending upon the fixations of the deputies who contributed. Parliamentary questions were more useful for extracting information from the minister although they were rigidly scripted and supplementary questions were restricted. When questioned about the problems created by Travellers, various Ministers undertook to ask the Gardaí to deal with the matter.⁴ Only in 1950 did the Minister for Justice, General Mac Eoin, explain his department's inaction. Neither the Minister nor his civil servants had introduced legislation because they believed no 'satisfactory solution' existed.⁵ Mac Eoin even pointed out to the House that there were '6,000 of these persons whose people have been on the roads for centuries and that they have a prescriptive right to be on the roads'. The failure of the Northern Ireland parliament to pass the Gypsies Bill in 1950 (see chapter 5) had been noted in Dublin, who were not anxious to repeat the mistake of their Stormont counterparts.⁶ In 1951, the Minister for Justice Gerry Boland, again told deputies that his department would not introduce legislation to control 'vagrants': 'The problem has been examined on a number of occasions with a view to the introduction of legislation, but, owing to the practical difficulties of enforcement, the proposal has had to be abandoned'.⁷ In 1956, an apparent increase in RUC activity targeting Northern Travellers worried Dáil deputies, who believed that the Traveller population south of the border was increasing. Deputy Kennedy told the House that 'Itinerants were more or less banished out of the Six Counties and they all came in here'. He believed that 'They have been unloaded onto us'.⁸

In 1958, the Minister for Justice, Oscar Traynor, explained to the Dáil that he had seriously considered the matter, which was, in the opinion of officials from the Departments of Justice, Health and Local Government, 'insoluble'. Traynor presented to his officials a scheme 'suggesting that every county should provide a certain acreage on the edge of towns of some importance and that the itinerants would be allowed to park only within the precincts of these enclosed areas'.⁹ To his surprise, he was told that

⁴ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 74, cols. 2108-9 (16 March 1939); *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 81, col. 40, (2 October, 1940); *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 97, cols. 1035-6 (29 May 1945); *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 114, col. 995 (9 March 1949).

⁵ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 123, cols. 1066-7 (22 November 1950).

⁶ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 123, cols. 1067 (22 November 1950).

⁷ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 126, col. 1830 (18 July 1951).

⁸ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 159, cols. 681-2, (11 July 1956). See also Captain Giles' contribution, col. 685.

⁹ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 167, col. 239 (16 April 1958).

this 'was an old remedy, that it had been suggested on a number of occasions, that there was nothing new about it'.¹⁰ Interestingly, it appears there was support within the department for 'the right of itinerants to operate as they have been operating in the country'.¹¹ The Minister believed that Travellers were 'a decent class of people' despite the 'considerable amount of dislocation' they caused on the roadsides of Ireland.¹² But deputies were not silenced; in 1959, Traynor once again addressed the House on 'the old annual complaint about tinkers'.¹³ He outlined the practical difficulties facing legislators and law enforcement agencies who sought to restrict camping by Travellers.

If we prohibit camping on the roads, we force them to camp on private property. If we restrict them to sites approved by the local authority - and can enforce such a restriction - we create, in the selected areas, permanent "colonies" of tinkers. What about the residents in the neighbourhood who will find themselves pestered day in, day out, and whose property will depreciate in value?¹⁴

Interestingly, publicly funded camping sites had been considered by government but the potential unpopularity of the proposal had deterred legislators and politicians. On the question of trespass, the Minister asked deputies to consider the only enforceable legal option - making trespass a crime.

How can we deal with trespass, which is a civil wrong only, when the owner of the trespassing animals is not a mark for damages? [sic] We could, of course, make trespass a criminal offence but this would be a major change in our law and would certainly have serious repercussions on the relations between neighbours in rural Ireland particularly. I cannot see any Minister proposing such a step and I cannot see the Oireachtas accepting it.¹⁵

Clearly, the disadvantages of changing the trespass law outweighed the advantages of solving the 'itinerant problem'. The general repercussions of laws intended to restrict Travellers alone had been considered and finally dismissed by government departments. Restricting the numbers of horses owned by Travellers would deprive them of 'one of their honest means of livelihood'. School attendance could be enforced only if children were removed from their parents. Traynor asked the house, 'Will any Deputy advocate that we do that, even if the Constitution would permit it?',¹⁶ perhaps forgetting that legislation outlining that course of action had already been advocated by his colleague,

¹⁰ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 167, col. 239 (16 April 1958).

¹¹ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 167, col. 239 (16 April 1958).

¹² *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 167, col. 239 (16 April 1958).

¹³ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 174, col. 783 (21 April 1959).

¹⁴ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 174, col. 783 (21 April 1959).

¹⁵ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 174, cols. 783-4 (21 April 1959).

¹⁶ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 174, col. 784 (21 April 1959).

Thomas Derrig, in 1942. Once again, the Minister explained that he had considered the problem. He had suggested compelling Travellers to camp in local authority campsites which would function as 'types of stations through which the tinkers would pass on their journeys through the country'.¹⁷

That was turned down as not being possible, because, first of all, I was told no county council or local authority would pay the money which would be involved and, secondly, the people contiguous to the fields to which I refer, would be very far from thankful for having these people as their neighbours as they would probably be the first to be robbed. The whole procedure would be abhorrent to the people who would have to live in close proximity to them. These are the sort of problems we are up against.¹⁸

In Traynor's opinion, the political risks of dealing with settled people's complaints in a manner that did not infringe constitutional rights or disproportionately penalise Travellers were not worth taking. Officials and politicians refused to implement a solution based on coercive legislation specifically targeting Travellers. The Department of Justice was unwilling to renounce a fundamental tenet of law, that legislation should target a crime and be general in application rather than targeting an individual or group. Also, politicians and local authority administrators were sensitive to the political unpopularity of the only workable solution: publicly funded camp sites. After surveying the various options, Traynor concluded that there was 'no solution' to conflict between settled and Travelling people over land usage and animals. He urged those deputies who complained to offer a workable solution, since his personal opinion was that 'The only hope is that they will move along, and keep moving, and not stay too long anywhere'.¹⁹

An important facet of the political debate was the increasing volume of complaints from urban representatives, particularly Dublin based TDs. Significantly, the 1956 census of Travellers included the county boroughs for the first time. Helleiner noted that after the election of the majority Fianna Fáil government in 1957, 'deputies representing urban areas took up the Traveller issue with unprecedented intensity'.²⁰ The increasing visibility of Traveller camps on the fringes of the capital city probably pushed central government to tackle the issue seriously. Although Travellers had camped in Dublin County Borough from as early as 1932, by the 1960s camps in

¹⁷ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 174, cols. 784-5 (21 April 1959).

¹⁸ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 174, col. 785 (21 April 1959).

¹⁹ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 174, col. 785 (21 April 1959).

²⁰ Helleiner, *Irish Travellers*, p 61.

Dublin city and county were much larger than in other parts of the country.²¹ Both Sean Lemass and Charles Haughey represented Dublin constituencies while civil servants resided in the suburbs of the city. A previously rural preoccupation with wandering horses and campsites was coming uncomfortably closer to home. The excessive centralisation of the Irish state had shaped the function and concerns of government in independent Ireland, as Joe Lee has described.²² If the perspective of government has been 'subtly distorted'²³ by the growth of Dublin city, the attitude of administrators to the Traveller issue, arguably, has been determined by their personal interest in the capital.

During the 1950s the government had decided that no action was preferable to the options they could foresee. Once central government refused to draft a policy to solve illegal sites and animal trespass, local authorities were left to cope as best they could. Thus Travellers were at the mercy of different local government bodies who used their powers according to the level of public complaint about encampments. Dáil deputies continued to raise the issue with ministers, especially the Minister for Justice while ad hoc, temporary solutions were adopted by local government. A local authority who wished to provide camping facilities did not have the legal power to do so. Under the Local Government (Sanitary Services) Act 1948, local authorities could grant licences to land owners who wished to develop facilities for campers.²⁴ No private land owner provided such a site for Travellers. By washing its hands of the matter, central government left the dispute firmly in the hands of local bodies who attempted to satisfy complaining ratepayers by eradicating Traveller encampments. As outlined in chapter 3, some authorities enacted the prohibitions against camping in the 1948 Act. Yet the persistent complaints at national level about Traveller encampments suggests that the 1948 Act was not a panacea for local politicians. Not all local authorities acted within the 1948 Act and their actions against Travellers were of dubious legal standing.²⁵

Gardaí often responded to complaints from settled residents of an area by moving Travellers on, often without recourse to legal niceties. Travellers camping on

²¹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 36.

²² Joseph Lee, 'Centralisation and Community' in Joseph Lee (ed.), *Ireland: Towards a Sense of Place* (Cork, 1985) pp. 84-102.

²³ Lee 'Centralisation and Community' in *Lee Ireland*, p 85.

²⁴ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 52.

²⁵ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 53.

road verges were not committing a crime, but their presence was crime enough for some residents. As an article in *Iris an Gharda* explained to members of the police force:

Parking byelaws are in force in the main centres of population throughout the country and unless caravans are parked contrary to the provisions of these byelaws, or in a manner which obstructs or is calculated to prevent or interrupt the free passage of any person or carriage, there is no offence committed.²⁶

In most cases, camping Travellers were not breaking any law. The persistent complaints from politicians illustrate that there was no law under which camping Travellers could be prosecuted. Since official policy had no answer to complaints about Travellers, unofficial, illegal action was taken by communities, Gardaí and local government to rid themselves of the 'itinerant problem'. Deputy Linehan freely admitted to the Dáil how he helped break up encampments: 'Time and again people have come to my office and asked me could I get in touch with the local superintendent and get him to authorise the local sergeant to send out four or five Guards to shift them out of a particular place'.²⁷ Helleiner asserts that a number of other politicians 'initiated police harassment of Travellers' but her reading of the material is too forceful; a deputy describing police activity is not necessarily admitting to directing it.²⁸ Nationally, the policy was to move Travellers on when settled people complained. This was, as Traynor understood, no solution.

Appointment of the Commission on Itinerancy

The Commission on Itinerancy was appointed in 1960 for a number of reasons. Public representatives complained about Travellers more frequently in the late 1950s, and Dublin city residents became more vocal in their complaints. Compulsory purchase, enclosure and legal prohibition were not eradicating campsites. Most significantly, the boundaries of the social welfare system were being extended. Most social issues since independence had been tackled in an ad hoc fashion; benefits were extended piecemeal to various categories of entitlement such as school going children, widows, unemployed men. Those outside such definitional categories of need were effectively ignored until the 1960s, when government expanded its social remit even further. Reports were

²⁶ D. Finucane, 'Parking of Caravans', *Iris an Gharda/Garda Review*, 57, 9 (August 1952), p 709.

²⁷ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 93, cols. 971-2 (18 April 1944).

²⁸ See Helleiner, *Irish Travellers*, pp. 73-4.

commissoned in 1960 and 1967 on those suffering from mental handicapp and illness.²⁹ Central government grew in size and complexity in the 1960s.³⁰ In addition to a more general shift in government, the reforming impulses of younger politicians like Charles Haughey provoked a re-examination of the Traveller problem specifically. Haughey's energy was channelled into Traveller-settled relations by the Taoiseach Seán Lemass, who asked him to tackle the issue. It is unclear exactly what prompted Lemass to ask the Department of Justice about the Traveller issue. Perhaps a representation from a constituent or a newspaper article drew his attention to the matter. With characteristic efficiency, the Taoiseach ensured that the question of Traveller campsites and wandering horses was finally considered seriously by central government.

Lemass first proposed a Commission to the Minister for Justice, Oscar Traynor, in March 1960. Receiving no reply from Traynor, Lemass suggested that the Parliamentary Secretary, Charles Haughey, assume responsibility for the Commission. Traynor's department was reluctant sponsor the Commission and reminded the Taoiseach that 'the primary problems of itinerancy were rehabilitation, health and education'.³¹ Haughey surveyed the problem and submitted a memorandum to government on 25 May 1960. The cabinet approved the appointment of a commission, 'to be appointed by the Taoiseach, in view of the differences of opinion as to ministerial responsibility and to avoid creating the impression that law-and-order was the paramount aspect'.³² The members were to represent a number of backgrounds and interest groups. The government recommended a former judge to the chair, with a sociologist, two people with local government experience, an educational official, a police officer, a clergyman and 'a person with a wide knowledge of farming' among the members.³³ These categories would accurately represent the various branches of administration which dealt with Travellers. Strangely, no representative from the Department of Social Welfare was suggested. No charitable organisations such as the St Vincent de Paul were represented, in contrast to the 1927 report on the poor law. Presumably, the clergyman was expected to articulate the importance of Christian

²⁹ *The Problem of the Mentally Handicapped* (1960); *The Report of the Commission on Mental Illness* (1967).

³⁰ Lee 'Centralisation and Community' in *Lee Ireland*, pp. 84-5.

³¹ Note 6 August 1963, DT S 17506 A/63, NAI.

³² Note 6 August 1963, DT S 17506 A/63, NAI. Cabinet decision in Meeting of cabinet, 27 May 1960, GC 9/70 p 221, DT CAB 2/20, NAI.

³³ Meeting of cabinet, 27 May 1960 GC 9/70 p 221, CAB 2/20, NAI.

charity and spiritual education, perhaps indicating that Travellers were perceived as God's poor. Justice Brian Walsh³⁴ chaired a Commission comprising of:

George Claxton, National Farmers' Association
Fr Thomas Fehily, Director of the Dublin Institute of Catholic Sociology
Chief Superintendent Thomas Mc Donagh
Proinsias Ó Tighearnigh, former Chief Inspector Department of Education
Matthew Macken, County Manager for Carlow and Kildare³⁵
Dr Maurice Mc Parland, County Medical Officer of Health for County Donegal
Dr John O'Regan, Chief Medical Officer, Dublin Health Authority
Cornelius Meaney, Chairman of General Council of the Committees on
Agriculture
Dr Angela Russell

The rationale behind the choice of particular individuals is largely unclear. Fr Fehily was associated with the Traveller issue since his defence of the travelling way of life before a meeting of public health inspectors in 1959. A motion to ban itinerancy had been tabled against which nobody, save Fr Fehily, was willing to speak.³⁶ This meeting was judged to have 'foreshadowed' the Commission's report.³⁷ He also combined the role of clergyman and sociologist. Other members clearly represented the categories suggested by Haughey to the cabinet; as individuals they may also have had a personal interest in Travellers.

Workings of the Commission on Itinerancy

Although ostensibly appointed by the Taoiseach, Charles Haughey was *de facto* responsible for the Commission.³⁸ Addressing the Commission members Haughey described the 'itinerant problem' as one which was present for a 'very long time and about which a great deal has been written and spoken'. The Commission was appointed because various departments, local authorities and the Gardaí had failed to put forward 'any practical suggestions as to what might be done to improve the position generally'. Government departments had analysed the issue from their own particular viewpoints and Haughey was anxious that the Commission 'examine the problem as a whole in all

³⁴ Justice Walsh was a High Court Judge, appointed to the Supreme Court in 1961. He had been a member of the Commission on Workmen's Compensation, 1955-59. See James O'Reilly (ed.), *Human Rights and Constitutional Law: Essays in Honour of Brian Walsh* (Dublin, 1992).

³⁵ The same Mathew Macken who was responsible for the illegal application of the Sanitary Services Act to Limerick County Borough. See chapter 2.

³⁶ Interview, Fr Fehily, 8 May 2001.

³⁷ *Irish Times*, 1 October 1964.

³⁸ Fr Fehily cited Haughey's personal support for the appointment of the Commission as crucial. Interview, Fr Thomas Fehily, 8 May 2001.

its aspects'.³⁹ The terms of reference, drafted in the Department of Justice, are worthy of extended quotation

1. to enquire into the problems arising from the presence in the country of itinerants in considerable numbers;
2. to examine the economic, education, health and social problems inherent in their way of life;
3. to consider what steps might be taken
 - a) to provide opportunities for a better way of life for itinerants,
 - b) to promote their absorption into the general community
 - c) pending such absorption, to reduce to a minimum the disadvantages to themselves and to the community resulting from their itinerant habits and
 - d) to improve the position generally; and
4. to make recommendations⁴⁰

The terms of reference clearly demonstrated the lack of information about Travellers available to government. However, this ignorance of the problem did not preclude Haughey from outlining a specific solution: absorption and assimilation. A significant part of the Commission's work was fact finding. To collect up to date information, the Commission directly contacted those bodies or individuals 'whose functions or activities in any way impinged upon the itinerants and their way of life'.⁴¹ Press and radio advertisements invited those not contacted, but with an interest in the matter, to submit memoranda of evidence to the Commission. Government departments were asked to furnish statistics and observations to the Commission. The Department of Justice was asked to contact Garda superintendents to ascertain the extent of the itinerant problem in their respective areas. Every local authority in Ireland was contacted and asked to indicate:

1. Their experience of applications of housing from itinerants;
2. whether they found it necessary to take action against itinerants under the Sanitary Services Acts;
3. whether itinerants in their respective areas were provided with health and welfare assistance.⁴²

All the religious congregations in Ireland were contacted and invited to submit memoranda or observations to the Commission. The response to the Commission's request was enthusiastic although not everyone who publicly expressed an opinion on

³⁹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, Appendix I, p 110.

⁴⁰ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 11.

⁴¹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 13.

⁴² *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 13.

Travellers contacted the Commission, which expressed its regret at this fact in the report.⁴³ Arguably, the Commission had a surfeit of information with which to assess Traveller-settled relations nationwide. The Departments of Agriculture, Education, Health, Justice and Local Government submitted evidence to the Commission. Every county council, county borough and UDC in the country provided information on their respective areas.⁴⁴ Many representative groups, charitable societies and semi-state bodies also contacted the Commission. They are listed below.

Ardagh Diocesan Branch of the Christus Rex Society
Bedding and Upholstery Manufacturers' Association
Bord Fáilte Éireann
Bord na Móna
Comhlucht Siúicre Éireann
General Council of County Councils
General Council of Committees of Agriculture
Golden Vale Co-Operative Mart Ltd.
Health Inspectors' Association of Ireland
Irish Hierarchy of the Catholic Church
Irish Medical Association
Irish Sugar Beet Growers' Association Ltd.
Kanturk Parish Council
Legion of Mary
National Farmers' Association
Pope Bros., Ltd., Longfordpass, County Tipperary
Scrap Metal Merchants Association of Ireland
Society of St Vincent de Paul
Standing Committee of the General Synod of the Church of Ireland

Evidence came from as far afield as two individuals living in Georgia and California respectively.⁴⁵ International nomadic populations were also carefully considered by the Commission, who asked Irish representatives abroad to report on the experiences of various governments.⁴⁶ Information from Northern Ireland and Britain was obtained directly from local and national authorities.⁴⁷ Apart from near universal prohibitive and restrictive measures, the Netherlands was the only country where significant steps had been taken to deal with the problem of itinerancy. Six Commission members decided to

⁴³ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 14.

⁴⁴ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, Appendix XLIII, p 158.

⁴⁵ For a full listing of contributors see *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, Appendix XLIII, pp. 158-9.

⁴⁶ Department of External Affairs representatives submitted reports on France, Spain, Western Germany, Portugal, Belgium, Italy and Turkey. *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 15.

⁴⁷ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 15.

visit the country to gather first-hand evidence: Justice Brian Walsh, Fr Fehily, Dr Mc Parland, Mr Macken, Mr Ó Tighearnigh and the Secretary, Mr Aidan Mac Donald spent 17-24 September 1961 in the Netherlands. They met central government officials, local authority members and toured encampments in different parts of the country. Members of itinerant groups were interviewed with the aid of interpreters.⁴⁸ Dutch nomads, the Woonwagenbewoners, are a nomadic group who do not identify themselves as Romanies, while the settled population views them as descendents of house dwellers who took to the road in the nineteenth century.⁴⁹ The parallels with Irish Travellers are obvious. The Commission members were impressed at the efforts of local and central government in the Netherlands. The visit undoubtedly influenced their deliberations especially as the delegation felt that the Dutch situation was 'in many respects similar to that in Ireland'.⁵⁰ They were particularly impressed by the attitude of the authorities, who were 'imbued with a sense of social justice and charity in their general approach to the problem rather than a desire to eradicate a nuisance to the settled community'.⁵¹ The Dutch experience in education and camp site provision provided a model for some of the Commission's recommendations, which are detailed in this chapter.

Unfortunately, the records of the Commission did not survive in either the files of the Departments of Justice or Local Government. Perhaps they were privately preserved by Commission members like Justice Brian Walsh, who retained an interest in Travellers after the report was completed in 1963. It seems likely that administrative divisions of responsibility over the settlement programme, explained in chapter 6, led to careless handling of archival material. If the records of the Commission had survived, they would provide a wealth of information about settled people's reaction to Travellers. But no matter how broad the source base of the Commission, the thrust of its inquiries were determined by its definition of an itinerant and the assumption that settlement was the only solution to conflict between Travellers and settled people. The Commission's definition of 'itinerant' was 'a person who had no fixed place of abode and habitually wandered from place to place, but excluding travelling show-people and travelling entertainers, who might otherwise be regarded as coming within the terms of

⁴⁸ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 21.

⁴⁹ Donald Kenrick, 'Irish Travellers – A Unique Phenomenon in Europe?' in McCann, Ó Síocháin and Ruane (eds), *Irish Travellers*, p 28.

⁵⁰ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 27.

⁵¹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 27.

reference'.⁵² Terms of reference which promoted settlement inevitably restricted the possible findings of the Commission, but its members did not challenge the settlement concept. Indeed, they wholeheartedly agreed that settlement was the long term solution both to poverty among Travellers and conflict with the settled community.

The second term of reference in particular - 'to examine the economic, education, health and social problems inherent in their way of life' - asserted the government's belief that Travellers, as a distinctive nomadic group, were a problem to be solved. Difficulties between Travellers and settled people were created by Travellers following traditional routes and practices. The only solution to the conflict was absorption into the settled community, where Travellers would adopt the values and lifestyle of the majority population. The Commission accepted the principle of settlement without dissent. It did not view Travellers as a separate ethnic group, although it acknowledged that the settled population were inclined to view them as 'a single homogenous group, tribe or community within the nation'.⁵³ For contemporary representative organisations promoting Traveller ethnicity, this denial invalidates the Commission's report. Also, its assimilationist goals, now ostensibly abandoned, have tarnished the 1963 report for many activists and social scientists. While Travellers now rightly criticise a report which portrays their community simply as a problem, the report and government intentions were not entirely mercenary. Haughey told the Commission members:

One over-riding consideration which dominates the entire background of this problem and is of paramount importance in relation to it is the simple fact that the humblest itinerant is entitled to a place in the sun and to a share in the benefits of our society. His fundamental rights as an individual and his religious beliefs are sacred and inalienable.⁵⁴

Contemporary scholars, in particular sociologists, would argue that the *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* is an ethnocentric justification of an absorption policy predicated on the eradication of cultural difference.⁵⁵ A sociological 'reading' of the Report contrasts considerably with an analysis of the historical context in which the

⁵² *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 13

⁵³ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 37.

⁵⁴ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, Appendix I, p 114.

⁵⁵ For criticism of its 'assimilationist' tone see Paul Noonan, 'Pathologisation and Resistance: Travellers, Nomadism and the State' in Paul Hainsworth (ed.), *Divided society: ethnic minorities and racism in Northern Ireland* (London, 1998), p 158.

document was written. A few points must be made in favour of the Report. It does not advocate compulsory settlement and it outlines facilities to be provided for nomadic Travellers. A whole range of accommodation provision is presented in the Report, from long term campsites to cater for families adjusting to settlement, to halting sites for transient, fully nomadic Travellers. If the balance between site provision and housing since the publication of the Report was poor, it cannot overshadow what is a finely balanced and subtle analysis of Travellers' position in Irish society. It contains some statements that are now considered objectionable but, in the context of the time, it was progressive.⁵⁶ It would be ahistorical to expect 1960s administrators to approach the issue as an ethnic one, especially since 'ethnicity' was a relatively recent concept – the term was first defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1953.⁵⁷ The zeal for a settlement policy was clearly founded on a sincere belief that many Travellers living in poverty should be allowed the same opportunities as economically deprived settled people. That Travellers would chose their apparently unstable and difficult way of life over the advantages of settled living could not have occurred to the Commission members. Arguably, the settlement policy - its successes and failures - was the catalyst for the development of cultural politics among Travellers that matured in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Just as slum dwellers were politicised by the status granted to them as public authority tenants, so Travellers being 'resettled' were forced to formulate accommodation preferences (see chapter 6).

The Commission's report is a unique document, presenting considerable detail on Irish Travellers in the early 1960s. Its value as a historical source is considerable, despite the now politically incorrect views on settlement it advocates. A total of 166 pages long, with 56 pages of appendices, it is a comprehensive consideration of Traveller-settled relations in twentieth-century Ireland. But the greatest criticism levelled at the report was that no Traveller was a member of the Commission. Even *The Dublin Opinion* noted this deficiency.

A poem. Personnel of Itinerants Commission
I have looked at each name.
It's a cause for shame
That should never be forgot.

⁵⁶ See *The Problem of the Mentally Handicapped* (1960) for outdated and now objectionable language.

⁵⁷ Elisabeth Tonkin, Maryon Mac Donald and Malcolm Chapman, 'History and Ethnicity' in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds), *Ethnicity* (Oxford and New York, 1996), p 22.

Someone's ears should tingle;
There isn't a single
Itinerant in the lot.⁵⁸

Given the formidable literacy barrier facing Travellers, their participation would have been surprising.⁵⁹ Similar problems were encountered by the Northern Ireland Committee on Gypsies and like Itinerants, when the Chair, Professor E. Estyn Evans, suggested a Traveller be asked to sit on the committee (see chapter 5). However, Travellers were not completely excluded from the Commission on Itinerancy. While members realised that Travellers were unlikely to approach the Commission directly, they believed that discussions with Travellers themselves were vital to the success of their study. Consequently, the Commission visited campsites in counties Carlow, Clare, Cork, Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Kildare, Kilkenny, Laois, Leitrim, Limerick, Mayo, Roscommon, Sligo, Tipperary, Waterford, and Wexford to interview Travellers.⁶⁰ Individual Commission members also interviewed Travellers as they encountered them in their daily work. Approximately 300 families were contacted to ascertain their opinions on travelling, occupations and settlement. In general, it was felt that these visits would more valuable if they were unannounced and unplanned. In Dublin city, an official whose duty it was to evict Travellers from Corporation property took Commission members to visit campsites. In spite of his job, Mr William Reynolds had apparently won the confidence of many families. Outside Dublin, Gardaí helped the Commission to locate campsites, but did not attend the interviews with Travellers.⁶¹ Only one meeting with Travellers camped in Ballyfermot, Dublin, was prearranged at which a spokesman, Mr Joseph O'Donoghue, addressed the Commission. However, this method of gathering evidence was not repeated 'as it was felt that the formality of the occasion tended to make them ill at ease and to leave most of their discussion to ... their spokesman'.⁶²

Interviews and meetings were supplemented by two censuses taken by the Gardaí on December 1960 and June 1961. The questions posed by the police are listed below.

⁵⁸ *The Dublin Opinion*, March 1964, p 12. Thanks to Eric Zuelow for this reference.

⁵⁹ In December 1960 just 783 Travellers, out of a total of 4,809 over the age of six years, were literate. *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 64.

⁶⁰ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 12.

⁶¹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 29.

⁶² *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 30.

Type of Abode	House
	Horse Caravan
	Motor Caravan
	Tent
	Flat
	Room

1. Full Name (write name of head of family first)
2. Sex
3. Relationship to head of family unit
4. Date of Birth
5. Place and County of Birth
6. Single/Married/Widowed
7. Religion
8. Age at Marriage
9. Able to read and write
10. Taught by (a) National School (b) Others (specify others e.g. Legion of Mary)
11. If taught at school how long did person attend
12. Ever suffered from 1. T.B., 2. Bronchitis, 3. Pneumonia, 4. Rheumatism, 5. Skin Disease
13. Particulars of present or last work of employment
14. Is he/she holder of a Social Welfare Insurance Card
15. Has he/she a craft or trade? What?
16. Would he/she like to learn a craft or trade? What?
17. If no craft or trade or work for payment, state means of livelihood
18. If a dealer, state commodities
19. Whether travelling all year
20. If not, for what months
21. Where they settled when not travelling: place, county
22. Abode during this period
23. Route usually followed on travels
24. Total number of children born alive to this marriage
25. Total number of children still alive whether with parents or not
26. Total number of children born in hospital

27. If not born in hospital, in how many cases was a doctor or midwife present at birth
28. Are/Were parents of head of family unit itinerants
29. Are/Were parents of mother of family unit itinerants
30. Would head of family prefer to settle in one place if means of livelihood available? If 'Yes' state County
31. Would mother of family unit prefer to settle in one place if means of livelihood available? If 'Yes' state County
32. Was a Council house or flat ever applied for?
33. If so, where?⁶³

Questions 30 and 31 were clearly designed to discern Travellers' attitude to permanent settlement. In keeping with the terms of reference, the Commission was attempting to find a method of promoting the absorption of Travellers. Since nomadism separated them from the majority community and provoked hostile reactions from settled people, an end to travelling seemed the best way to end problems attributed to Travellers. But before permanent settlement could be recommended, Traveller opinion had to be sought.

Conscious of the danger of unreliability in answers provided to the police, the Commission asked each enumerator to comment on the information provided. Thus Traveller's responses were weighted and possibly filtered by Gardai. The usefulness of the appendixes included in the report are somewhat compromised by the knowledge that the Commission allowed for a 'probable degree of unreliability' in assessing the census results.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, the instructions for enumerators are not reproduced as an appendix.

Findings of the Commission on Itinerancy

In order to gather information about Travellers, the Commission first had to discern how many Travellers lived in Ireland. There were three Garda counts prior to the establishment of the Commission. The category 'itinerant family' was included in the 1946 and 1956 censuses, but only the results for 1946 were tabulated.⁶⁵ This

⁶³ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, Appendices XL and XLI.

⁶⁴ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 33.

⁶⁵ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 161, cols. 675-6 (7 May 1957). The published reports on the census do not give figures for Travellers. The only reference found was in the Statutory Rules and Orders 1946 (No. 97). See *General Report of the Censuses of Population 1946 and 1951* (Dublin, 1958), Appendix B, p 251.

unwillingness to compile information on Traveller numbers perhaps reflects the administration's perception of the relative unimportance of the issue. Since the number of Travellers was consistently low and represented a fraction of the population, this refusal was understandable.

Fig. 1: Garda counts and census results, 1944-56

Year	Population
1944*	5,151
May 1946	5,554
1952*	6,275
1956	7,148
1960	6,591
1961	5,880

*figures do not include the county boroughs of Cork, Dublin, Dún Laoghaire and Limerick.

Source: *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy 1963*, Appendix II and *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 161, cols. 675-6 (7 May 1957).

The Traveller population was not increasing, despite claims from public representatives of an ever-growing problem.⁶⁶ It is useful to put the numbers in the context of the whole population. This illustrates just how numerically small the oft cited 'itinerant problem' actually was.

Fig. 2: Census of the Irish population, 1946-61

Year	Population
1946	2,955,107
1951	2,960,593
1956	2,898,264
1961	2,818,341

Source: Vaughan and Fitzpatrick (eds), *Irish Historical Statistics Population 1821-1971*, p 4.

Travellers were included in the national total for 1946 and 1956. Nonetheless, the recorded number of Travellers never represented even 1% of the population. Even if their numbers were grossly under-estimated, the Traveller population was a tiny proportion of the Irish population. As the table below shows, Travellers were also widely distributed in every county in Ireland. These figures showed considerable variation across counties and over time.

⁶⁶ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 81, cols. 39-40 (2 October 1940); *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 100, col. 1200 (3 April 1946); *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 152, col. 747 (13 July 1955).

Fig. 3: Traveller population by county, 1944-61

County	1944	1952	1956	1960	1961
Carlow	188	151	122	123	139
Cavan	194	152	151	215	100
Clare	201	344	150	171	255
Cork	315	604	430	574	477
Donegal	78	228	221	175	206
Dublin	38	158	340	418	258
Galway	485	855	966	822	814
Kerry	363	238	376	247	283
Kildare	-	216	260	107	206
Kilkenny	193	109	132	233	128
Laois	127	214	183	113	167
Leitrim	148	156	146	143	145
Limerick	211	309	426	397	265
Longford	179	134	131	144	143
Louth	172	150	216	146	132
Mayo	251	323	407	478	329
Meath	165	122	178	161	136
Monaghan	82	138	222	120	134
Offaly	169	141	414	219	180
Roscommon	257	356	325	288	164
Sligo	103	104	155	162	238
Tipperary	385	447	460	400	450
Waterford	180	69	165	75	31
Westmeath	247	179	180	279	131
Wexford	304	281	279	277	255
Wicklow	120	133	113	104	112

1. The figures for 1944 and 1952 do not include County Boroughs
2. No separate figures for Carlow and Kildare, which comprise a single Garda division, are available for 1944. The figures shown for Carlow for 1944 include those for Kildare.
3. The exact dates of the taking of each census are as follows:
6 September 1944, 30 April 1952 (except for Carlow and Kildare which was taken on 2 May 1952), 10 September 1956, 1 December 1960, 1 June 1961.

Source: *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy 1963*, Appendix II.

The object of scrutiny for the Commission on Itinerancy was numerically insignificant and unevenly distributed across the country. Arguably, never had a Commission investigated such a small group. The reluctance of government to address an issue which provoked heated discussion but pertained to so few people is perhaps understandable. TDs described large convoys of caravans, hordes of animals and

persistently complained about large, and increasing numbers of Travellers;⁶⁷ the reality was less menacing. Most Travellers were counted in Galway, a county with a population of 149,887 in 1961.⁶⁸ The 814 Travellers enumerated there in 1961 represented 0.5% of the county's population. For more populous counties with fewer Travellers, the proportions were even smaller. This did not prevent deputies from making sweeping, impressionistic statements. Mr O'Malley, representing Limerick, described the county as 'a happy hunting ground for tinkers' since Limerick Corporation had lost its case in the High Court⁶⁹ (see chapter 3). Even if all the 426 Travellers in the county in 1956 were concentrated in Limerick city, their numbers would hardly be noticed in an urban area of 50,886 people.⁷⁰ This stark contrast between the rhetoric of threat and menace, and the reality of tiny numbers merely serves to illustrate the hostility provoked by a statistically insignificant, but highly visible group of people. The numbers were so small that it is tempting to wonder whether many settled people had any contact with Travellers.

Attitude to settlement

Perhaps the most important finding of the Commission related to the attitude of Travellers to settlement. The responses to questions 30 and 31 in the census were overwhelmingly positive. In the 1960 census, approximately 78% of men and women questioned indicated a desire to settle if a means of livelihood was available.⁷¹ Commission members also posed the same question to those Travellers they interviewed personally. After collecting this oral evidence, the members were satisfied that 'a very substantial number of families, particularly those with young children, would settled down in houses if given the opportunity'.⁷² The evidence of Travellers applying for public authority housing or becoming private home owners further supported this conclusion.⁷³ It was a fortunate coincidence that the evidence collected coincided perfectly with terms of reference advocating the assimilation of Travellers.

⁶⁷ For a small sample of this rhetoric see *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 94, col. 1528 (19 September 1944); *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 93, col. 978 (18 April 1944); *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 100, col. 1200 (3 April 1946); *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 123, col. 1055 (22 November 1950); *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 123, cols. 1099-7 (22 November 1950).

⁶⁸ *Statistical Abstract of Ireland 1966*, p 21.

⁶⁹ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 151, col. 1080, (14 June 1955).

⁷⁰ *Statistical Abstract of Ireland 1966*, p 24.

⁷¹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 58.

⁷² *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 58.

⁷³ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 58.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the Commission was careful to ask Travellers about settlement before finally recommending it as a solution to problems caused by unauthorised encampments.

Structure of Traveller society

Despite occasional shortcomings in its methodology, the report gives a valuable insight into the structure of Traveller society. Travel patterns, trades and wealth differed among Travellers, and the Commission classified the economic circumstances of four distinct sub-groups. A small minority, numbering approximately 40 to 60 families, lived in motor trailers and travelled extensively to deal in linoleum, household goods, scrap, and rags on a large scale. Their living conditions were good, their incomes high. The Commission found that these Travellers owned valuable cars, vans and caravans and were 'never short of the necessities of life and have many of the comforts'. Even though well off, a number of families begged for food and milk.⁷⁴ Many also owned houses where women and children stayed during the winter months. Their conspicuous economic success proved that nomadism was not necessarily impoverishing. Indeed, their trading income depended on nomadism. The Commission judged this group to be clean and comfortably dressed, with modern and well kept caravans. Significantly, this group regarded themselves as 'superior to other classes of itinerants' and did not associate with poorer families.⁷⁵

A second group of Travellers also travelled widely though they were less economically successful. This group numbered 300 to 400 families who lived in horse drawn caravans. They traded horses and other animals and undertook contract labouring work such as beet or potato picking. Their living conditions were not as comfortable as their trailer counterparts, with tents supplementing the caravans. Nevertheless, their incomes were judged 'more than adequate for their needs'. The members of this group begged extensively, obtaining most of their food in this way. A third group only travelled in a small area and was further divided into families owning horse-drawn caravans and those who possessed only tents for shelter. These families travelled a regular route over a small area, remaining as long as they were able in each place. Caravan dwellers were better off than tent dwellers, trading on a small scale in scrap

⁷⁴ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* p 80.

⁷⁵ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 82.

and horse hair. Many claimed to be tinsmiths, chimney sweeps or makers of artificial flowers. They also migrated for seasonal farm labour opportunities. Without the proceeds from begging, the Commission believed that the 350 to 450 caravan dwelling families would starve. However, they were wealthier than the 300 to 400 families who lived in tents alone. Their incomes were estimated to be 'extremely low, below subsistence level and derived almost entirely from begging'.⁷⁶ The Commission described this group as 'largely unemployed and unemployable'.⁷⁷ Those Travellers who covered a limited area were 'not the same nuisance to the farmers because they are too well known in their particular areas'.⁷⁸ Apart from the motor trailer group, Travellers usually regarded 'all other itinerants fraternally as part of the community of travellers'.⁷⁹

Thus potent class divisions existed in the Traveller community as well as among the settled. MacDonagh has briefly outlined the class divisions in Irish Traveller society. One group of Travellers 'have a long nomadic tradition and are very confident about their identity as Travelling People'. Other Travellers had close ties with the settled community, often intermarrying. MacDonagh admits that in the 1930s, marriage to the latter was frowned on by the former. These distinctions are now less significant but were 'a lot clearer and more pronounced in the past'.⁸⁰ While MacDonagh emphasises contact with settled people as the dividing line in Traveller society, economic circumstances were also significant. Possibly, economically successful families who could sustain extensive nomadism drew a line between themselves and less mobile, less well-off Travellers.

Travellers perception of settled people was inferred by their lack of respect for property rights and law. The Commission noted that Travellers were not 'antagonistic' towards the settled population but that they held themselves 'aloof' from the majority population and showed 'no discernable inferiority complex'. As contact with settled people was confined to buying, selling and begging, Travellers rarely presented their real personality to members of the settled community. Their open and continuous

⁷⁶ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 80.

⁷⁷ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 79.

⁷⁸ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 83.

⁷⁹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 82.

⁸⁰ Michael MacDonagh in Murphy and MacDonagh (eds), *Travellers, Citizens of Ireland*, p 25.

begging was however considered evidence of a lack of social responsibility. Indeed, they were not concerned with the political process or their loss of franchise. The greatest source of complaint was Travellers disregard for property rights, particularly from the agricultural community. Next to trespass, begging was 'probably the greatest single cause of hostility on the part of the settled population'.⁸¹ The Commission considered it a 'source of considerable annoyance and irritation' and especially injurious to the tourist industry as tourists were 'more persistently importuned'.⁸² Begging was exclusively practised by women and children while men denied any knowledge of their activities. Unsurprisingly, women and children were more successful than men at soliciting charity. Public brawling fuelled by excessive drinking further added to settled people's fear of Travellers. The Commission acknowledged that 'the reputation of itinerants in this respect will be one of the major difficulties in making progress with any scheme of absorption'.⁸³ Feuding was felt to be the result of a dearth of pastimes and illiteracy, historically comparable to features of rural Irish life before the Famine.⁸⁴ However, physical violence among Travellers rarely affected the settled community, unless they intervened in a fight.⁸⁵ It was the apparent disregard among Travellers for the law that the Commission was anxious to eradicate. By proving to the settled community that Travellers were culpable for their actions, vigorous law enforcement would reassure the majority population while simultaneously educating Travellers about social conventions and responsibilities. The emphasis on law enforcement and prosecution is a striking feature of many of the Commission's recommendations. Convicting Travellers posed special problems, the most important being mobility and difficulties of identification. Gardaí were unwilling to serve warrants on Travellers because of the likelihood that they would not be executed, thereby reflecting badly on the force's apparent ability to solve crime.⁸⁶ The Commission observed that the courts often treated Travellers very leniently therefore not deterring them from further offences.⁸⁷

⁸¹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 90.

⁸² *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 90.

⁸³ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 86.

⁸⁴ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 87.

⁸⁵ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 94.

⁸⁶ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 95.

⁸⁷ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 95.

Although the Commission found Travellers were religious in sentiment, their Church attendance was poor. Catholic parents were careful to ensure their children received the Sacraments of Baptism, Penance, Holy Communion and Confirmation. The Gardaí allowed families who remain in one place to secure religious education.⁸⁸ Travellers were even more scrupulous about sexual morality and fidelity within marriage. Parents of young couples insisted upon marriage once courtship commenced and were unwilling to allow their children to emigrate before marriage.⁸⁹ Sexual morality was central to Traveller society and allegations of adultery were the cause of 'some of the most savage family feuds'.⁹⁰ It was feared these high standards would be 'imperilled' during absorption and the Commission hoped that Travellers would not be affected by 'the less desirable incidents of life in the settled community'.⁹¹ Understandably, the social and economic circumstances of the settled community were not examined by the Commission. Only when analysis touched on the extent of social distance between the two communities did the Commission refer to settled Irish society. The settlement programme was urgent precisely because of the continuing rise in living standards in the general population. (The same observation on living standards was made by the 1956 Northern Irish Committee report. See chapter 5.) The gap between Travellers and the settled was 'constantly widening'. Such 'an evergrowing disparity in relative social standards' would only provoke increasing hostility from settled people struggling to make 'the mental adjustment' necessary to tolerate Travellers.⁹²

Settled population: Perceptions of Travellers

The Commission did not devote much attention to the reasons behind hostility towards Travellers, accepting that bad experiences of trespass, begging, theft and drunkenness were the foundation of a certain amount of justifiable resentment among the settled population. Much of the recommendations were aimed at ameliorating these problems so as to protect the general population from these transgressions. Yet the Commission was unafraid to state the extent of prejudice that existed among the settled population.

...in nearly all areas, itinerants are despised as inferior beings and are regarded as the dregs of society. Many feel they would demean themselves by associating

⁸⁸ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 88.

⁸⁹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 89.

⁹⁰ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 90.

⁹¹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 90.

⁹² *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 106.

with them. Their presence is considered to lower the tone of a neighbourhood and those who live in that neighbourhood are seldom satisfied until the itinerants have been moved on. There have been actual and threatened rent strikes by local authority tenants to enforce action to have itinerants moved from the neighbourhood of their houses.⁹³

Employers refused work to Travellers and publicans refused to serve them, preferring to sell them off-licence alcohol. In the absence of effective legal redress for trespass, some farmers resorted to violent retaliation, including assaulting and attacking Travellers or their animals.⁹⁴ Horses were wounded or disfigured by slashing or cutting of tails and manes, and driven long distances.⁹⁵ While these were a minority of cases, the Gardaí recognised that retaliation was significantly under reported.⁹⁶ The Commission felt that any attempt to settle Travellers in rural areas would fail if the law did not provide adequate protection for farmers.⁹⁷ Outside of commercial transactions or hostile encounters, the majority of the settled population avoided contact with Travellers. Even those who regarded them 'kindly as 'God's poor' would not care to have them living permanently in their own district'.⁹⁸

However, not all Travellers provoked hostility. Those who moved in a comparatively small circuit were 'better known in the area and incur less dislike than their more travelled brethren'. "Local itinerants" were often regarded as 'decent inoffensive people'. Since these families were relatively poor, owning few if any animals, the lower levels of hostility were unsurprising.⁹⁹ Personal acquaintance also helped promote mutual understanding. The Commission was optimistic that closer contact would facilitate improved relations between Travellers and settled people.¹⁰⁰ But the plight of poor Travellers was a serious problem 'which has not troubled the public conscience to any degree'. People hoped that the nuisance to the settled community would be solved, without worrying about 'the lot of families living a primitive and harsh existence'.

⁹³ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 102.

⁹⁴ In 1956, four farmers from Bushy Park, County Galway were charged with attacking a Traveller encampment. *Cork Examiner*, 17 July 1956.

⁹⁵ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 96.

⁹⁶ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 96.

⁹⁷ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 96.

⁹⁸ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 102.

⁹⁹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 102.

¹⁰⁰ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 103.

There is so far little apparent desire on the part of the general public to act collectively for the betterment of the itinerants as they do in many ways for other poor sections of the community. In general, little serious consideration has been given either to the futility or the grave social injustice of a policy of just moving them on.¹⁰¹

The Commission rejected the popular belief that Travellers could settle down if they wished, pointing out that 'virtually insuperable difficulties' faced families who left the road. Even families who had settled were known scornfully as 'tinkers'.¹⁰² Since local authorities refused to house Travellers¹⁰³ and public housing tenants revolted at their presence, the obstacles to settlement were almost impossible to overcome. Despite the deep and long standing hostility felt by settled people, most submissions to the Commission advocated absorption as the only real solution to the problem. Astutely, the Commission noted that 'it is quite clear that many of the settled population will be very slow to accept this, particularly if it is to take place in their areas'.¹⁰⁴ The paradox of demanding settlement but refusing to countenance living near Travellers illustrated that many settled people advocating the eradication of cultural difference did not truly believe it could be achieved.

The Commission on Itinerancy investigated the relationship between two separate and distinct communities in Irish society. The findings of the Commission detail the structure and value system of Traveller society in the early 1960s. Although the Commission denied that Travellers were culturally separate, their findings undermine that assertion. The Commission rightly identified a deep antipathy towards Travellers among the settled population, a hatred it believed could be ameliorated. A spirit of Christian charity and goodwill was to be the basis of co-operation from settled people. The practical methods for fostering this spirit are outlined in full in the next section.

Report and recommendations

The Commission made a large number of recommendations, from more vigorous law enforcement to the provision of housing and halting sites for Travellers. All policies

¹⁰¹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 103.

¹⁰² *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 103.

¹⁰³ Helleiner, *Irish Travellers*, p 56; Mr Corish told the Dáil, 'I know tinkers, itinerants, or whatever you like to call them, who have tried to stay put, who have got themselves jobs in factories or on building sites and who for years have been refused houses by local authorities', *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 182, col. 512 (1 June 1960).

¹⁰⁴ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 103.

aiming to help Travellers or deal with problems they caused 'should always have as their aim the eventual absorption of the itinerants into the general community'.¹⁰⁵ The Commission believed absorption could not be based on compulsion: 'It is not considered that any worth-while progress could be made by a policy of compulsory settlement, even if it were legally possible'.¹⁰⁶ The most salient proposals are outlined below.

Camp sites and halting places

The Commission believed that 'The first major step towards a solution of many of the problems arising from the itinerant way of life will be taken when the itinerant family can be settled or permitted to settle in a house or on a camping site where they can stay indefinitely if they so desire'.¹⁰⁷ Approved camping sites would be established when there was difficulty providing houses immediately for large numbers of Travellers or for families who did not want to live in a house. The Commission suggested a design template for public authority camp sites:

- Hard topped surfaces
- Piped water
- Sanitary arrangements
- Electricity supply
- A fenced area for horses
- Separate storage areas for scrap collection¹⁰⁸
- A small hall or community centre on large sites
- That a site be 'convenient to the urban area, to churches, schools and shopping centres to overcome any danger of isolation and the creation of a separate community'.¹⁰⁹

Similar to public housing schemes, central government subsidies were advocated to help local authorities fund camp sites. Camping in the radius of an official site was to be prohibited.¹¹⁰ Thus settlement would be encouraged with a carrot and stick policy. If local authorities took the time and trouble to provide facilities for some Travellers, they

¹⁰⁵ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 106.

¹⁰⁶ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 106.

¹⁰⁷ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 54.

¹⁰⁸ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 54.

¹⁰⁹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 55.

¹¹⁰ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 56.

would earn additional punitive powers over the remainder. Sites were 'only the first step of stabilisation in a policy aimed at eventual housing of the families using the sites. The sites might also serve as clearing stations for the housing of itinerants where the overall demand for houses necessitates a waiting list'.¹¹¹ Camp sites were not intended to offer permanent residency for Travellers, as the eventual aim of the absorption programme was settlement in houses.

Authorised halting places were recommended for short stays by families who continued to be nomadic: 'The main purpose of the halts is to provide itinerant families depending upon horse drawn vehicles with a camping place upon which they will be allowed to park without fear of ejection'.¹¹² By recommending halting sites, the Commission acknowledged that not all Travellers were able or willing to relinquish nomadism. These recommendations were founded on a belief that nomadism would last longest among the poorest families, despite its own findings on the relationship between extensive travel and wealth in the Travelling community. Travellers, as targeted by official public policy, were poor. If the 'itinerant problem' was defined as a matter of raising living standards among poor Travellers, this approach was understandable. But since the Commission was also attempting to end tension over illegal encampments between Travellers and settled people, ignoring the commercial success of the most mobile Travellers was a serious error. Families who travelled widely were among the wealthiest in Traveller society and owned large numbers of animals, whose grazing alienated the settled population. If the greatest hostility was provoked by the lifestyle of well-off families with no economic incentive to settle, limiting the solution to poorer Travellers was short sighted.

Housing

But campsites were not considered the permanent solution to Traveller accommodation: 'The immediate objective should be to provide dwellings as soon as possible for all itinerant families who desire to settle.' The Commission made a number of recommendations on how local authorities should approach Traveller settlement:

- As itinerant families are living in totally unfit and overcrowded conditions, applications from itinerant families for housing should be

¹¹¹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 55-6.

¹¹² *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 57.

given priority and, if required, new legislation for this purpose should be considered.¹¹³

- The requirements of itinerant families...should be taken into consideration by housing authorities in assessing housing needs and devising housing programmes.
- It would be undesirable that dwellings for itinerant families should be isolated from those of the rest of the community.
- Itinerants should be sought out regularly for the purpose of ascertaining their housing desires...
- Housing authorities should recognise that itinerant families to whom they let dwellings will have difficulty adapting themselves to the new way of life. Regular contact should be maintained with each family housed so as to take whatever steps are necessary to assist in the integration process.
- Housing authorities dealing with problems which arise in connection with itinerant tenants should not permit themselves to be easily discouraged by the difficulties they will certainly experience in the early years. The problems that local authorities will have to face in this task should not be insuperably greater than those so successfully faced by many local authorities in slum clearance.
- Letting agreements between local authorities and itinerant tenants should include a provision giving the local authority a right of entry to abate all nuisances created or permitted by the tenants ...
- ...tenants who are itinerants should not be housed together in groups of more than two or three families. Itinerant families...should be free from any feeling that they are being placed on a reservation. At the same time the other tenants should not feel that they cannot cope with the number of itinerants settled among them or feel oppressed by their numbers.¹¹⁴

The Commission considered, but rejected, a suggestion that substandard dwellings should be provided for Travellers for a probationary period: 'Singly or collectively, the deliberate provision of substandard dwellings for itinerants would stigmatise those persons as inferior beings and could only widen the gap already existing between them and the settled population.'¹¹⁵ While the Commission was anxious to balance the needs and fears of both communities, its recommendations demonstrate the positive aspect to the settlement concept. As the aim of settlement was to eradicate difference between Travellers and settled people, the programme itself would have to treat Travellers as ordinary citizens. Special measures acknowledging their different attitude to housing

¹¹³ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 61.

¹¹⁴ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 62.

¹¹⁵ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 63.

could be taken, but policies which penalised Travellers as a group were rejected. In the case of education policy, however, the special needs of nomadic children with no experience of permanent schooling and the Netherlands example determined the Commission's recommendations.

Education

The education of children was deemed urgent. Children settled in houses could attend mainstream schools, but older children would require individual attention. If there were large numbers of children requiring special tuition, a qualified teacher could be recruited solely for the purpose of teaching them: 'The progress of the teaching and tuition of these children should be treated as a matter for special concern by the Department of Education.'¹¹⁶ Camp schools would be established if there were large numbers of children living on a halting site. The Commission recommended the adoption of the system of education established in the Netherlands. That programme attempted to preserve continuity of education for children moving from camp to camp. If more than twelve children attended a mainstream school, a separate class would be established.¹¹⁷ The curriculum proposed for Traveller children was to be substantially different to that taught in national schools. If necessary, teaching in reading, writing and arithmetic could be curtailed to facilitate manual training. Boys would learn woodwork and elementary metalwork, while girls would be taught knitting, needlework, simple cookery and domestic training.¹¹⁸ Interestingly, given the sacrosanct status of the Irish language, it was recommended that teaching of Irish be 'restricted to half an hour each day, and confined to oral work'.¹¹⁹

The Commission was aware that remaining static to secure education for children was, for most families, 'economically impossible'.¹²⁰ Nomadic families were not to be punished for evading school: 'compulsory school attendance should only be enforced when their economic condition has been ameliorated to the extent that there remains no sufficient excuse for their not remaining in one area in which suitable

¹¹⁶ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 67.

¹¹⁷ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 68.

¹¹⁸ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 68.

¹¹⁹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 69.

¹²⁰ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 69.

education is available for them.’¹²¹ Institutional care for all Traveller children was suggested to the Commission. This suggestion was not made with a view to better education, but based on the belief that the break up of Traveller families would end their nomadic lifestyle and that ‘in one generation the itinerants as a class would disappear’. The Commission rejected this policy because the ‘evil social consequences’ and ‘suffering’ caused by it ‘would far outweigh the ‘advantages’ of an education imposed in such conditions with its lasting legacy of bitterness’.¹²² The Commission members did not share the hysterical fears they encountered in the settled population. While the Commission outlined detailed plans for the education of Traveller children, it believed that little could be done about adult illiteracy. It was hoped that local voluntary organisations would organise vocational classes for adults.¹²³

Employment

On employment, the Commission stated: ‘It will be of the utmost importance if absorption into the general community is to succeed that as many itinerants as possible should be encouraged, and where necessary, assisted, to adapt themselves to the employment patterns of the ordinary population.’¹²⁴ Once again, local voluntary organisations were expected to play a key role in informing Travellers about employment opportunities.¹²⁵ To facilitate self employment by families dependent upon scrap metal collection, the Commission suggested legislation to regulate the trade. This regulation would improve conditions for some families, while giving them an incentive to settle in one area.

- ...collection and purchase of scrap and waste material should be permitted only under licence and that each licence would only permit collection in a clearly defined area.¹²⁶
- Travellers should be preferred when licences are issued.
- Camp sites should be designed with scrap metal storage and collection in mind.¹²⁷

¹²¹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 69.

¹²² *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 69.

¹²³ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 70.

¹²⁴ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 73.

¹²⁵ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 72.

¹²⁶ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 74.

¹²⁷ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 74.

All the Commission recommendations on employment were directed at absorption. Thus opportunities open to settled people, such as employment on schemes for the relief of unemployment, were to be extended to Travellers.¹²⁸ A similar attempt to widen Traveller access to freely available services motivated the recommendations on welfare benefits. However, the Commission's belief that Travellers as a group suffered from certain, distinct social ills influenced their recommendations.

Welfare benefits

- The Commission consider it essential that any special difficulties...in the way of itinerant families obtaining any of the State or local authority allowances for which they are eligible should be eliminated...as a means of inducing them to settle by providing them with means of livelihood pending their adaptation to the employment patterns of settled life and in particular by replacing...the substantial part of their income which will be cut off...by a successful effort to curtail or eliminate begging.¹²⁹
- More frequent registration for unemployment benefit advocated for persons of no fixed abode.
- Travellers who were not housed or living on an approved camping site should receive welfare benefits in voucher form, 'so as to overcome abuse by dissipation on intoxicating liquor'.¹³⁰

The key liaison between Travellers and the labyrinthine bureaucracy of benefit provision would be local voluntary organisations.¹³¹ Charitably inclined settled people would aid illiterate Travellers unfamiliar with the benefits system to successfully apply for income support.

Religion

The role of the most important sponsor of voluntary charity, the Roman Catholic Church, was not ignored. The Hierarchy was asked to consider the appointment of a national chaplain for the spiritual care of Travellers, as was done in France and the Netherlands.¹³²

¹²⁸ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 73.

¹²⁹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 75.

¹³⁰ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 76.

¹³¹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 76.

¹³² *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 88.

Law Enforcement

Improved law enforcement was crucial to the success of a policy of settlement and absorption. The Commission believed that if Travellers were more diligently pursued by the police, they would learn the concept of social responsibility. Settled people would also feel more secure if they felt that Travellers did not evade the law.

- ...a sustained effort must be made to overcome any special difficulties which arise in dealing with itinerant wrong-doers and to bring home to them the necessity of being law-abiding.
- Considerations of cost should not determine whether to proceed with the investigation of, or to follow up, criminal offences by itinerants.
- Excessive tolerance and leniency by the Courts should be discouraged.
- Citizens should be encouraged to report offences to the Garda.
- In cases of conviction of persons of no fixed abode, any fines imposed should be payable forthwith.¹³³

Some radical changes were recommended to the trespass law to prevent Travellers evading the legal consequences of camping on private land or grazing their animals in farmers fields. The Commission felt that any attempt to settle Travellers in rural areas would be frustrated if the law did not provide adequate protection for farmers.¹³⁴ The Commission recommended that

- The law should be amended to heavily penalise 'a person of no fixed abode' who camped, placed any animals on or interfered with the fences of another's land without his permission.
- Proving he had permission to camp lay with the person of no fixed abode; the owner of a vehicle or animal would be deemed to have trespassed unless the contrary could be proved.¹³⁵
- Any member of the Garda Síochána could seize an animal wandering the public highway if he had 'reasonable grounds' for believing it to be in the custody of a person of no fixed abode.¹³⁶

The Commission was suggesting that trespass be a criminal offence, but only if committed by a person of no fixed abode. The tenet of innocent until proven guilty was also set aside in these proposals, as the burden of proof now lay with the accused rather than the accuser. Such recommendations would enable Gardaí to confiscate wandering animals on the suspicion that they belonged to Travellers. Parts of trespass law would

¹³³ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 100.

¹³⁴ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 96.

¹³⁵ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 97.

¹³⁶ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 97.

apply only to persons of no fixed abode, therefore surmounting the problems of general application that Traynor anticipated in 1959. Such changes were not made to the trespass law however.

The Commission's recommendations on begging did not similarly target persons of no abode because, by the 1960s, begging was rare outside Traveller society. Increasing welfare benefits and a rising standard of living among the poorest had ended the need for begging by settled people. Travellers rarely availed of unemployment benefits, since 'signing on' at the dole office was incompatible with a nomadic lifestyle. Children's allowances and pensions were almost universally applied for, as the cheques could be picked up at prearranged locations along a route.¹³⁷ Consequently, the welfare state had not replaced charity in the subsistence economy of the majority of Travellers. The Commission advised that assistance be available for Travellers who would lose income derived from begging.¹³⁸ Begging could be discouraged 'if the settled community were less indiscriminate in their almsgiving',¹³⁹ implying that despite resentment of the practice, refusal was rare. Various amendments to existing legislation were proposed by the Commission, which also recommended more vigorous enforcement of laws prohibiting begging. A significant change was proposed to the Children Act 1908, which would make it easier to convict the parents of children found begging (see glossary). The amendment would force parents to prove they did not send their children to beg, rather than the authorities proving the children were asked to beg by their parents.¹⁴⁰ Another suggested amendment to the criminal law would further shift the burden of proof from the police to the individual charged with the offence. The Commission proposed the creation of a new offence by which a person previously convicted of begging would, if charged with loitering or importuning be deemed guilty 'unless the contrary is proved'.¹⁴¹ Where a member of the Garda Síochána observed an alleged offence, he could arrest the alleged offender without a warrant.¹⁴² Such radical amendments to criminal law and process could have had significant implications for all

¹³⁷ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 75.

¹³⁸ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 75.

¹³⁹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 92.

¹⁴⁰ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 92.

¹⁴¹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 92.

¹⁴² *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 93.

citizens, although their clear purpose was to target Travellers. These proposals were not accepted by the Department of Justice.

However restrictive some of the proposals advocated by the Commission may appear, it spurned a number of draconian suggestions. Proposals for identity cards to overcome difficulties in identification were advocated, but rejected as undesirable since cards would single out Travellers for 'special treatment for police purposes'. (Though the proposals on law enforcement were directed specifically at Travellers.) Such a system would have 'damaging effects on any process of absorption' as well as being an administrative nightmare and open to abuse.¹⁴³ It was also suggested that Peace Commissioners, rather than District Justices, be authorised to deal with certain offences such as vagrancy and drunkenness. This would solve problems of remand, bail and non appearance at court. However, this was considered to conflict with the constitution and was thus rejected.¹⁴⁴ A similar proposal was passed into law in Northern Ireland following the 1956 Report of the Committee on Gypsies and like Itinerants (see chapter 5). Ireland's written constitution, which protected its citizens' right to trial in court, afforded valuable protection to unpopular minorities like Travellers.

Attitude of the settled population

Arguably, it was the hostility of the settled community, which had plagued previous efforts to provide housing for Travellers, that was the most intractable problem. Devising measures to alleviate this was the most challenging aspect of the Commission's remit.

- Steps should be taken to inform the minds of the settled population on the whole problem of itinerancy and to educate them to the fact that not only do the dictates of charity and common humanity require that steps should be taken to rescue the itinerant population from its present plight but that the material and social interests of the settled population itself will be advanced by a just solution of the itinerant problem.¹⁴⁵
- If immediate steps are taken to protect the settled population by preventing or restraining the more injurious activities of the itinerants and a positive policy of social reclamation is formulated...the Commission feel confident that the legitimate grievances of the settled population could be met and an improved climate of public opinion

¹⁴³ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 101.

¹⁴⁴ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 101.

¹⁴⁵ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 104.

created which is essential to obtaining the co-operation of the general public.¹⁴⁶

- ...there can be no better basis upon which to procure and maintain the co-operation of the public than that of Christian charity and brotherly love.¹⁴⁷

Most of the Commission's recommendations were indirectly addressing the attitude of the settled population. The very concept of absorption and assimilation was a response to members of the settled community who wished that Travellers, as a recognisable group, would simply vanish. Legislation to prevent begging, and provide redress for trespass were attempts to address 'the legitimate grievances of the settled population'. Educating the general population about the need to extend charity and material resources to Travellers would be a difficult task: fostering brotherly love was not a government responsibility. The Commission foresaw a significant role for voluntary organisation. Indeed, the report advocates a synthesis of voluntary charity and state support to implement rehabilitation and settlement policies.

Implementation: Coordination of effort

Since responsibilities for education, campsites, housing and law enforcement lay with a number of government departments, the Commission recommended that one Minister be given overall coordinating responsibility for all issues relating to Travellers. It was proposed that the minister would establish an unpaid central body whose members would represent all concerned government departments and 'the principal voluntary social and charitable organisations in the country'.¹⁴⁸ The central body would promote the rehabilitation and absorption of Travellers. The body would:

- ...avail of all existing machinery of central and local government...and be empowered to establish whatever subsidiary organisations, whether specialised or local, as may prove desirable.
- ...foster, encourage and sustain all local voluntary effort directed towards the absorption of itinerants.
- ...endeavour to create a favourable public opinion in support of the policy of absorption and encourage the active co-operation of members of the public in that policy.

¹⁴⁶ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 104.

¹⁴⁷ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 105.

¹⁴⁸ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 107.

- ...formulate or devise methods by which the implementation of the policy might be improved.¹⁴⁹

Voluntary effort at local level would play a central role in attempting to bridge the gap between Travellers and settled community. Local committees interested in Traveller settlement would be formed from branches of existing charitable organisations (the Legion of Mary or the St Vincent de Paul) or from parish committees including representatives of farmers' organisations, trade unions and ICA (Irish Countrywoman's Association) guilds. Committee members would visit newly settled families to encourage them to persist with the experiment. Such visitation would help overcome problems encountered by Travellers adapting to unfamiliar surroundings and habits.¹⁵⁰ These committees would minister to Travellers as charity cases, so their participation was not envisaged. Local groups would also take on a more onerous task: promoting good relations between Travellers and settled people. The Commission acknowledged that this work would not be easy and would depend upon 'dedicated personnel and sustained effort'.¹⁵¹ It was hoped that these voluntary organisations would be supported by 'trained welfare officers whose services would be made available to them by the Minister or the local authority'.¹⁵² Thus the Commission recommended voluntary committees as bridges between the two communities, helping Travellers to negotiate bureaucracy and the social mores of settled society, while countering hostility from settled people.

Conclusion

Rehabilitation and the importance of Christian charity were emphasised in the Commission's report. A 'spirit of Christian charity and goodwill' was seen to be the solution to resistance from settled people.¹⁵³ Reassuring settled people 'by preventing or restraining the more injurious activities of the itinerants'¹⁵⁴ would also encourage a change in attitudes. The Commission held a belief, which was widespread until recently, about the innate lack of prejudice among Irish people.

¹⁴⁹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 107.

¹⁵⁰ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 108.

¹⁵¹ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 108.

¹⁵² *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 108.

¹⁵³ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 104.

¹⁵⁴ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 104.

Hostility to a class or group as now exists in relation to the itinerants is uncharacteristic of our people and its existence is indicative of the extremity to which the settled community or a large portion of it feels it has been driven. The normal kindly feelings of the people...will once again predominate when the immediate pressure of the itinerant's wrongdoings has been relieved or, at least, substantially reduced.¹⁵⁵

Once Travellers ceased to trouble settled people, hostility would vanish. Little did the optimistic Commission realise that settled or nomadic, the existence of Travellers would continue to bother many settled people. Changing attitudes to marginal land among the settled community, facilitated by the Derelict Sites Act 1961 did not augur well for the settlement programme (see glossary). Improvement grants were made available by the Department of Local Government to improve derelict sites in 1961. Private individuals were a majority of applicants in the first year; 607 compared to 62 applications from local authorities.¹⁵⁶ Local development associations could also avail of these grants to reclaim unsightly or hazardous sites in their area.¹⁵⁷ Grants for works of public amenity were also introduced in 1961. Local authorities and local development organisations were eligible for grants covering 50% of works which cost less than £100.¹⁵⁸ From 1962-3, 137 applications were made to the Department.¹⁵⁹ As definitions of appropriate land usage and appearance were codified in Irish society, the Commission's report recommended that tolerance towards a group whose land usage patterns seemed at odds with the majority community. It was not an auspicious context for a successful accommodation programme.

The *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* sought to understand the values of Traveller and settled societies and how they could be harmonised. Ultimately, only Travellers were expected to make substantive changes. Travellers were asked to surrender nomadism, family economy, self employment, flexible work patterns, horses and their own homes for the dubious pleasures of public housing, full-time school attendance, subsistence on welfare benefits and organised charity. In return, they would gain sanitation, more secure income, access to employment and a more regulated existence. Many working-class families had already traded underemployment, privately rented accommodation and family economies for the comforts of public housing and the

¹⁵⁵ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 104.

¹⁵⁶ *Report of the Department of Local Government 1961-62*, p 19.

¹⁵⁷ *Report of the Department of Local Government 1961-62*, p 19.

¹⁵⁸ *Report of the Department of Local Government 1961-62*, p 20.

¹⁵⁹ *Report of the Department of Local Government 1962-63*, p 16.

stability of the dole. There was no reason to believe that Travellers would refuse the opportunity to improve their living standards. Yet the Commission was astute enough to note that few Travellers were unhappy with their lifestyle: 'One of the greatest problems is the fact that most itinerants are neither sufficiently conscious of nor sufficiently dissatisfied with their present way of life and its standards to do anything about it.'¹⁶⁰ This did not bode well for a settlement programme which could not succeed without the cooperation of Travellers.

Whatever its flaws, the report provides a comprehensive and balanced exposition of the relationship between Travellers and settled people, as well as providing considerable detail on Traveller economy and society in the early 1960s. The Commission on Itinerancy marked the first government effort to document the 'itinerant problem' as Traveller issues were then termed. The reasons for the appointment of the Commission include the dynamism of Charles Haughey and the size and prominence of Traveller camps on Dublin city's fringes. The Commission was one of many in the 1960s examining areas of Irish social policy such as the health and education services.¹⁶¹ Administrators in the 1960s were self consciously aware of the need for planning and coordinated responses to problems. Governments had been wary of Commissions and not afraid to dismiss their conclusions outright, as de Valera did when the Commission on Vocational Organisation reported in 1944.¹⁶² In the 1960s there was a new desire for independent experts to collaborate with the state in drafting social policy.

Many of the Commission's proposals depended heavily on the contribution of local voluntary organisations. Catholic teaching had long encouraged governments to leave social work to charitable organisations that would not interfere in the family. The government's influence was thought to be dangerous, pernicious and potentially communistic in the limitations it placed upon individuals. Welfare benefits that provided income security 'at the expense of personal independence and initiative' were

¹⁶⁰ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 87.

¹⁶¹ For example, *Select Committee, Interim Report on the Health Services* (Dublin, 1962); *Health Services and their Future Development* (Dublin, 1963); *Investment in Education: Report of the Survey Team appointed by the Minister for Education in October 1962* (Dublin, 1965).

¹⁶² Keogh, *Twentieth-Century Ireland*, p 147.

opposed by the Catholic Church.¹⁶³ The powerful influence of Catholic social thought in twentieth-century Ireland is believed to have stunted the ideological development of welfarism.¹⁶⁴ The Commission's report marks a new approach to voluntary organisations and state welfare support. Two previously separate approaches are envisaged as working closely together. The Traveller settlement policy would marry the flexibility and humanity of charity with the funding resources and legal machinery of the state. This was not an idea taken from the Netherlands, but an innovation arising from the considerations of the Commission. Whether this arrangement worked will be discussed in chapter 6, which will outline the implementation of the Commission's recommendations.

The progressive nature of the Commission's proposals and the forthright demand that Travellers be facilitated in availing of welfare benefits contrasts sharply with the attitude taken by two committees appointed in Northern Ireland. The 1949 and 1956 reports on controlling Travellers in Northern Ireland demonstrate the repressive potential of the state which the Commission on Itinerancy chose not to exploit. The Northern Irish example, and the failure of punitive legislative measures no doubt influenced the Commission.

¹⁶³ Con Lucey, 'The Beveridge Report and Éire', *Studies*, 33, (March 1943), p 36.

¹⁶⁴ Bryan Fanning, 'The Mixed Economy of Welfare' in Kiely, O'Donnell, Kennedy and Quinn (eds), *Irish Social Policy*, pp. 53-5.

Chapter 5

Controlling Irish Travellers in Northern Ireland

An outline of the historical position of Irish Travellers in Northern Ireland must be included in any study of Travellers, since many families regularly crossed the border. The political significance of the border was largely ignored by Travellers, although the existence of two separate jurisdictions affected their lives. This chapter will outline the reaction of the Northern state to Travellers and attempts made to monitor and control their movements. The actions of Northern politicians and administrators in the 1950s contrasts with the inertia of Southern government when faced with the same problem. The desire of local government bodies to prevent Travellers entering Northern Ireland from the South contrasts with central government's refusal to repatriate Travellers *en masse*. Civil servants and legislators struggled to reconcile complaints about all Travellers with the fair application of law to crimes rather than groups of people. The complaints of parliamentary representatives exposed the sectarian foundations of the Northern Ireland state. Many MPs believed that Travellers originated in Southern Ireland, travelling to the North to avail of generous welfare benefits. Although the government would not enact a law to evict Travellers from Northern Ireland, the continuous decline in their numbers throughout the 1950s and 1960s suggests that extra powers granted to the police and local authorities may have had that effect.

Report of the Committee on the Gypsies and like Itinerants, 1948

Unlike his Justice counterpart in Dublin, the Minister of Home Affairs was not regularly questioned about Travellers and Gypsies by parliamentary representatives. In 1944, Mr Elliot (South Tyrone) asked the minister if the government intended to do anything

to protect the farming community from the ravages of gipsies [sic] and other travelling merchants, and whether he is aware of the fact that, although the farming community have made many protests about this annoyance, their protests have so far achieved nothing and the annoyance continues.¹

The Minister assured Mr Elliot that the police attempted to control wandering people and that legislation would be enacted if necessary. This answer satisfied Elliot and it was another year before Travellers were complained of again. Although parliamentary

¹ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 27, col. 1962 (24 October 1944).

representations on the problem were sparse, the Minister received many complaints directly.² Mrs Dinah McNabb, who represented North Armagh, complained about the law breaking activities of 'so called gypsies' who hailed from the other side of the border; 'Are they not largely engaged in contraband traffic and are they not a source of annoyance and trouble to the RUC?'³ Two members of parliament exposed the sectarian basis of Northern Ireland's voting system by expressing worries about Southern Travellers acquiring voting rights.⁴ Travellers' Southern origins were of particular concern to Stormont members because 'natives of Éire'⁵ were equated with Catholicism and nationalism, anathema to the Protestant, Unionist ruling elite.⁶ No doubt this reflected a need to portray the Catholic, nationalist southern state as the root of all evil, while Northern Ireland epitomised decent, respectable civilised values.⁷ Interestingly, the only person to assert the Northern Irish citizenship of Travellers was Cahir Healy, a Nationalist representative.⁸ The Minister acted quickly to examine complaints about Travellers, establishing an informal Committee composed of civil servants from the Ministries of Home Affairs, Health and Commerce.⁹

The Minister of Home Affairs received the Report of the Committee on Gypsies and like Itinerants in February 1948, three years after its establishment. The Committee had been established to consider 'representations received from local authorities and from other sources as to injury and annoyance caused to the community by itinerant gypsies and persons who have adopted a like mode of life'. Contrary to Unionist parliamentary opinion, the report found that most Travellers were natives of Northern Ireland though those of 'Éire nationality' frequently crossed the Border by approved and unapproved routes. In the course of its deliberations, the Committee heard representations from the Ulster Association of County Councils; the Association of Rural District Councils of Northern Ireland; the County Down Commission of

² *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 29, col. 236 (31 July 1945).

³ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 29, col. 236 (31 July 1945).

⁴ Mr Lyons (North Tyrone) and Mr Minford (Antrim). *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, Vol. 29, cols. 236-7 (31 July 1945).

⁵ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 29, col. 236 (31 July 1945).

⁶ See contributions on Éire origins of gypsies in *Northern Ireland Commons Debate*, vol. 32, cols. 1525-7 (19 May 1948)

⁷ For a scathing analysis of Ulster Protestant perceptions of Catholics see Lee, *Ireland 1912-85*, especially pp. 2-6.

⁸ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 33, col. 1486 (12 October 1949).

⁹ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 29, col. 236 (31 July 1945). The names of the Committee members are not listed. Indecipherable signatures are appended to the final report.

Agriculture; the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC); the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) and the Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (USPCA). The problems caused by nomadic families were considered under four main headings: sanitation, road offences, trespass and theft, and intimidation.¹⁰ The year the Committee submitted its report, there were 1,012 Travellers in Northern Ireland.¹¹

The bodies who submitted evidence to the Committee believed that the sanitation problem was 'the most grievous of all, with potential wide-spread consequences of disease that cannot be ignored'.¹² The UFU described Travellers as 'a real and ever present danger to the health of the country'. This complaint mirrors similar public health concerns in the South, but the Department of Local Government and Public Health never categorically stated that Travellers were a serious risk to health. The qualifications of the UFU to make this assertion were apparently accepted without comment by the Committee, which recommended that legislation controlling moveable dwellings similar to Section 269 of the Westminster Public Health Act 1936 be enacted (see glossary). This legislation would give the Ministry of Health and Local Government the power to prohibit camping on specific areas of land. Local authorities would be able to control the letting of sites or the use of common land and impose conditions of use and mandatory facilities. Any nuisance found near a caravan would be deemed to have been caused by the inhabitants of that caravan if they were in the vicinity for twenty four hours. This proposal would have considerably increased local authority control over land used by Travellers.

The Committee recommended a substantial increase in fines imposed for road offences under the Summary Jurisdiction Act (Ireland) 1851 (see glossary). Police representatives told the Committee that granting the RUC the power of summary arrest over Travellers would be desirable.¹³ Members of the 'gypsy class' summarily arrested could then be brought before a Magistrate sitting outside Petty Sessions. The police could then apply vagrancy laws to people whose clear means of subsistence allowed

¹⁰ Report of the Committee on Gypsies and like Itinerants February 1948, p 1, HA 8/1099 Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI).

¹¹ This figure does not appear in the report, suggesting the census was taken after February 1948. This number appears in the Committee to Terence O'Neill, Minister of Home Affairs, 17 April 1956, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

¹² Report of the Committee on Gypsies and like Itinerants February 1948, p 1, HA 8/1099 PRONI.

¹³ Report of the Committee on Gypsies and like Itinerants February 1948, p 2, HA 8/1099 PRONI.

them to evade legislation penalising people of no fixed abode.¹⁴ To punish trespass and damage to crops and fences, the Committee proposed amending Section 20 of the Summary Jurisdiction (Ireland) Act 1851 to allow a farmer or property owner to seize and detain animals causing damage until compensated by the animal owner. Farmers were reluctant to confront 'travelling bands of gypsies' but the Committee felt the agricultural community would appreciate the 'fortifying' of the law.¹⁵ In relation to theft and intimidation, the Committee found 'no widespread evidence' of this occurring. The UFU however, had stated that Travellers intimidated 'the wives of farmers and their families by the "evil eye" or some such psychological device'.¹⁶ Yet the Committee believed that the existing law adequately covered theft and intimidation. The main weakness was bringing accused Travellers to justice because of identification problems and mobility. The ability to circumvent the law by leaving a police district or the jurisdiction of Northern Ireland was the crux of the problem for administrators.¹⁷ To solve identification problems, the Committee proposed compulsory registration and reporting to police barracks by Travellers. Caravans crossing the border would be subject to a customs check, a 'watertight' recording system and compulsory enlistment at the nearest police station. The Committee was not in favour of imposing a heavy duty on caravan dwellers crossing the border since the purpose of registration was identification rather than the raising of revenue. The registration system was designed to 'compel the occupiers of the caravans to be reasonably good citizens, whom it would not be desirable to penalize merely for their mode of life by the imposition of a drastic annual duty'.¹⁸ The effect of these proposals would be that 'a very close eye' could be kept on all Travellers in Northern Ireland.¹⁹

The Committee considered the education of Traveller children to be 'one of the most important problems' they examined and the one 'probably the least susceptible to solution'.

The "running wild" of these children appears to be inherent in the nomadic life, and until the people concerned can be compelled, or induced, to adopt a more

¹⁴ Report of the Committee on Gypsies and like Itinerants February 1948, p 4, HA 8/1099 PRONI.

¹⁵ Report of the Committee on Gypsies and like Itinerants February 1948, p 3, HA 8/1099 PRONI.

¹⁶ Report of the Committee on Gypsies and like Itinerants February 1948, p 3, HA 8/1099 PRONI.

¹⁷ Report of the Committee on Gypsies and like Itinerants February 1948, p 3, HA 8/1099 PRONI.

¹⁸ Report of the Committee on Gypsies and like Itinerants February 1948, p 4, HA 8/1099 PRONI.

¹⁹ Report of the Committee on Gypsies and like Itinerants February 1948, p 4, HA 8/1099 PRONI.

civilised way of life, their offspring will be without the benefit of modern education.²⁰

The Ministry of Education was not aware how many Traveller children avoided the education system in Northern Ireland. Local Education Authorities were responsible for school attendance but their duties were hampered by the nomadic habits of Traveller families.²¹ Inspectors from the USPCA reported to the Committee on the treatment of Traveller animals. Several inspectors distinguished between the treatment accorded 'by gypsies proper and that accorded by "drunken, lazy tinkers", the former being admirable, the latter reprehensible'.²² The hierarchy of authentic gypsies and degenerate wanderers continued to influence settled people's perceptions of Travellers. According to the report, a pamphlet severely criticising 'the tinker classes' for their treatment of animals had been recently published, presumably by the USPCA. It also referred to their alleged wrongdoings - theft and intimidation - and proposed establishing concentration camps for male Travellers in which they would work to support their families who would live outside the camp. Although this had apparently been implemented in Czechoslovakia, the Committee believed that it would 'hardly commend itself as a solution to the people of Northern Ireland'.²³

The Committee endeavoured in its recommendations to avoid 'the mere passing of the evil from one district to another and to deal with the problem in a realistic way'.²⁴ Travellers affected by the proposals were intended to be 'those itinerants who have no permanent abode in Northern Ireland',²⁵ indicating the Committee aimed to excessively penalise Southern Travellers. The Committee was confident that following the implementation of its proposals Travellers would eventually

disappear or settle down to a more civilised way of life, to the lasting benefit of themselves, their children and, it would be hoped, the community in general.²⁶

It was anticipated, no doubt, that Southern Travellers would avoid Northern Ireland, while those with permanent homes would settle down. Yet inducements to permanent settlement were not proposed; the Committee did not declare a settlement policy as a

²⁰ Report of the Committee on Gypsies and like Itinerants February 1948, p 4, HA 8/1099 PRONI.

²¹ Report of the Committee on Gypsies and like Itinerants February 1948, p 4, HA 8/1099 PRONI.

²² Report of the Committee on Gypsies and like Itinerants February 1948, p 4, HA 8/1099 PRONI.

²³ Report of the Committee on Gypsies and like Itinerants February 1948, p 5, HA 8/1099 PRONI.

²⁴ Report of the Committee on Gypsies and like Itinerants February 1948, p 5, HA 8/1099 PRONI.

²⁵ Report of the Committee on Gypsies and like Itinerants February 1948, p 1, HA 8/1099 PRONI.

²⁶ Report of the Committee on Gypsies and like Itinerants February 1948, p 5, HA 8/1099 PRONI.

solution to the problem. The representative of the Department of Commerce appended one reservation to the report. He objected to the system of caravan registration since it would not include those Travellers who owned only light carts. Since the police gave evidence that 'the names of owners are painted on almost if not all itinerants' vehicles', the means for identifying vehicles already existed. The registration system would not surmount the problem of identifying individual gypsies, 'who, according to report, greatly resemble each other'.²⁷

The Gypsy Bill, 1950

Londonderry County Council asked the Minister of Home Affairs to implement the Committee's recommendations 'as soon as ever possible'.²⁸ Within the administration there appeared to be some debate on the nature of the recommendations made by the Committee. The Minister, Edmond Warnock, objected to the Committee's proposals since it presumed that Travellers should be allowed to continue their lifestyle 'subject to certain modern conditions'.²⁹ This was not the preferred course of action for Warnock who suggested 'that we should try by fairly stringent regulation, to make Northern Ireland so uncomfortable for these people that they won't want to come at all'.³⁰ His analysis was predicated upon the belief that all dirty, disreputable tinkers came from Éire, unlike 'the old type of real gypsy' whose origins were presumably British.³¹ However, his civil servants considered that the changes in the law enabling summary arrest and greater police supervision of Travellers would 'certainly not make life very easy or simple for these people!'.³² The memorandum on the 'Control and Supervision of Gypsies and like Itinerants' was circulated to the Cabinet on 1 September 1948. The Minister of Home Affairs supported the recommendations on sanitation, trespass and the powers of the police, but he was careful to stress that none of the measures would apply to 'individuals who may use caravans for their summer residence and who have

²⁷ Report of the Committee on Gypsies and like Itinerants February 1948, p 5, HA 8/1099 PRONI.

²⁸ Secretary, Londonderry County Council to Secretary, Minister for Home Affairs, 23 July 1948, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

²⁹ Note to Secretary, undated, HA 8/1099, PRONI. Though unsigned, it can be deduced that this is from the Minister. The 9 August 1948 cover note to the Minister on a draft of the cabinet memorandum refers to this handwritten note as being from the Minister and O'Neill's reply minute of 4 August 1948.

³⁰ Note to Secretary, undated, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

³¹ Note to Secretary, undated, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

³² Note, O'Neill to Secretary, 4 August 1948, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

permanent addresses in Northern Ireland'.³³ The Minister was aware that the amendments to existing law covered a wide departmental remit, but he felt that 'it would be much more satisfactory for the Government to introduce one ad hoc measure to deal with the problem'.³⁴ The Memorandum was considered by the Cabinet on 8 September 1948. The Minister of Agriculture, Rev. R. Moore, thought the obligation to report to police stations 'might be rather onerous in districts where barracks are widely separated' and the Minister of Labour and National Insurance, W.B. Maginess, 'expressed uneasiness about granting to the police additional powers of summary arrest'. Warnock emphasised that these provisions were necessary because Travellers could effectively disappear before the police could act. He undertook to consider his colleagues reservations and was given approval to draft a Bill to implement his proposals.³⁵

The Bill requested from the parliamentary draftsman by the Minister of Home Affairs differed little from the main recommendations of the Committee's report, except in one important respect. Following the Cabinet discussion, the Minister decided to drop the proposal to oblige Travellers to report to police stations upon arrival in a new area.³⁶ The Gypsy Bill dealt directly with nomadic groups in Northern Ireland because the parliamentary draftsman had found it 'practically impossible to draft a measure in more general terms'.³⁷ The Assistant Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs, J.B. O'Neill, found the Bill 'simple and concise' and was convinced that it would 'act as a deterrent to any of this class of nomads who are a menace to the community'.³⁸ O'Neill anticipated objections from the Ministry of Commerce to the system of registration since the Commerce representative on the Committee had opposed this proposal. O'Neill hoped the Bill would solve the problem by bringing Traveller offenders to justice more effectively.³⁹ However, the Minister suddenly changed his mind about

³³ Memorandum for the Cabinet submitted by the Minister of Home Affairs in regard to the control and supervision of Gypsies and like Itinerants, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

³⁴ Memorandum for the Cabinet submitted by the Minister of Home Affairs in regard to the control and supervision of Gypsies and like Itinerants, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

³⁵ Extract from conclusions of Cabinet meeting held on 8 September 1948, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

³⁶ J.B. O'Neill, Assistant Secretary to Secretary Ministry of Finance, 21 September 1948, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

³⁷ J.B. O'Neill to Secretary and Minister, 18 July 1949, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

³⁸ J.B. O'Neill to Secretary and Minister, 18 July 1949, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

³⁹ J.B. O'Neill to Secretary and Minister, 18 July 1949, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

implementing the recommendations of the Committee in statutory form. In the Commons he told members that

The main recommendations of the Committee appear to me to be rather too drastic to meet a situation which is really more of an annoyance to individuals than a permanent threat to the well being of the community generally. I am not satisfied moreover that the recommendations as to registration and as to reporting on entering a new Registering Authorities district are in practice workable. In the meantime, I do not propose to introduce legislation.⁴⁰

Like Oscar Traynor in Dublin, Warnock was wary of legislative solutions to problems caused by a tiny proportion of the population. The depth of feeling among some public representatives may have convinced the minister to reassess the situation. Alderman S. Wallace Kennedy of Londonderry County Council sent two strident complaints to a civil servant in the Ministry of Home Affairs, William Wellwood. Wallace Kennedy bemoaned the behaviour of the 'so-called gipsies who really are the scum of the Free State', asking Wellwood, 'What about the B's being put on their track?'⁴¹ Wellwood placated Wallace Kennedy, telling him legislation would be introduced in 1950 and asking him to

hold your horses and don't take the law into your own hands by getting your gestapo to deal with the boys, as it would place you and us in a very awkward situation.⁴²

It is not known whether Wallace Kennedy heeded this advice, but this correspondence illustrates the nature of extra-legal policing in Northern Ireland. Public reaction to his inaction finally convinced Warnock to address the issue. His decision not to legislate was 'not well received' and he believed that he had underestimated the strength of feeling on the issue – 'there have been so many protests at my failure to implement the recommendations that I must think again'.⁴³ A week later, he told the Commons that he intended to introduce proposals which were 'fair, reasonable, just, suitable and adequate'.⁴⁴ A new Minister of Home Affairs, Brian Maginness, placed the draft Bill before Cabinet on 7 March 1950. The Gypsy Bill provided for the control and

⁴⁰ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 33, col. 1410 (11 August 1949).

⁴¹ Ald. S. Wallace Kennedy to William Wellwood, 27 August 1949, HA 8/1099, PRONI. 'The B's' were the B-Specials, a volunteer, part-time Protestant police force.

⁴² William Wellwood to S. Wallace Kennedy, 23 September 1949, HA 8/1099, PRONI. That a Stormont official would call the B Specials – enforcers of Protestant supremacy – the gestapo is breathtaking.

⁴³ Edmond Warnock to Dame Dehra Parker, 6 October 1949, HA 8/1099.

⁴⁴ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 33, cols. 1486-7 (12 October 1949).

supervision of 'gypsies and others who have adopted a nomadic way of life'.⁴⁵ The most important change from the earlier drafts was the obligation upon local authorities to provide camping grounds for Travellers. If authorised campsites were not established, local authorities could not prosecute Travellers for illegal camping. The Minister felt this provision was essential 'as these people cannot be made to disappear underground, and if the County Councils wish them controlled, they must make some contribution towards that end'.⁴⁶ The vehicle registration system had also been omitted since it was considered of dubious efficacy and 'well-nigh impossible to administer'.⁴⁷ The Committee's recommendations on sanitation, trespass and summary arrest remained in the draft Bill. The Minister proposed that the Bill have a first reading before being circulated to the County Councils and the Ulster Farmers Union for their observations.⁴⁸

The Bill was approved by the Cabinet and read in the Senate in June 1950. Sir Roland Nugent outlined the government's reasons for introducing the Gypsy Bill.

The Government are introducing this Bill with a certain amount of reluctance, because it singles out a particular class of the community for special treatment. The justification for this is, of course, that the ordinary citizen, who has a fixed place of abode, can readily be made amenable to the ordinary processes of the law, whereas the gypsy and like itinerant is not similarly amenable.⁴⁹

The government hoped that the restriction of camping on public or common land would be compensated for by 'reasonable number' of designated local authority campsites. The government would regret a situation where a person charged with illegal camping could successfully plead that the county council or borough had failed to designate a sufficient number of sites.⁵⁰ The government admitted it was a 'very difficult Bill' since it tried to reconcile the interests of two apparently opposed communities. The legislation was designed to control 'the undesirable element' of the Traveller population without placing 'an intolerable burden' on all Travellers.⁵¹ The government perhaps suspected that the control measures would not placate those who objected to the existence of

⁴⁵ Memorandum for submission to the Cabinet by the Minister of Home Affairs on the Bill for control of Gypsies, 7 March 1950, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

⁴⁶ Memorandum for submission to the Cabinet by the Minister of Home Affairs on the Bill for control of Gypsies, 7 March 1950, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

⁴⁷ Memorandum for submission to the Cabinet by the Minister of Home Affairs on the Bill for control of Gypsies, 7 March 1950, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

⁴⁸ Memorandum for submission to the Cabinet by the Minister of Home Affairs on the Bill for control of Gypsies, 7 March 1950, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

⁴⁹ *Northern Ireland Senate Debates*, vol. 34, col. 223 (6 June 1950).

⁵⁰ *Northern Ireland Senate Debates*, vol. 34, col. 225 (6 June 1950).

⁵¹ *Northern Ireland Senate Debates*, vol. 34, col. 226 (6 June 1950).

Travellers, whether camping legally or not. Some local authorities had already objected to the obligation to provide designated campsites.⁵² Not all Senate members supported the Bill. Mr O'Hare objected to plans that would deprive freedom of movement from the one section of the population 'whom until now we could look upon with a little envy as not being bound by the stiff-necked conventions and Regulations that harness and harass the rest the community'.⁵³ Mr Wilton worried that the law could also apply to camping and caravanning tourists.⁵⁴ The Bill passed the Senate on 27 June 1950.

Even before it had passed the upper house, local authorities were making their dissatisfaction with the Bill known to the Minister of Home Affairs. Their chief objection was with the obligation placed upon local government to create official camp sites. County and municipal authorities alike felt that suitable campsites could not be created because there was no available land, residents would object and gypsies did not pay rates.⁵⁵ When the Minister attempted to address the complaints of Londonderry County Council, he revealed much about the contrasting intentions of his Ministry and local authorities. Londonderry County Council objected because the Bill recognised the existence of Travellers, applied certain public health laws to them, leaving 'the problem otherwise unsolved'.⁵⁶ The Council protested that the Bill was not framed 'with the object of reducing or controlling the number of gypsies'.⁵⁷ The Minister observed that the government did not have the power to prevent a person living a nomadic life; 'We can point out the desirability of a settled occupation, but I am afraid we cannot compel people to adopt our suggestions'.⁵⁸ Maginess reminded the Council that his department had neither the power nor the desire to exclude Travellers from Northern Ireland, especially as a large number were citizens of the Northern state.⁵⁹ The Minister hoped the Bill would address the anxieties of settled people while preserving the rights of Travellers. Camp sites would have to be provided as otherwise Travellers would be

⁵² *Northern Ireland Senate Debates*, vol. 34, col. 226 (6 June 1950).

⁵³ *Northern Ireland Senate Debates*, vol. 34, col. 226 (6 June 1950).

⁵⁴ *Northern Ireland Senate Debates*, vol. 34, col. 228 (6 June 1950).

⁵⁵ Antrim RDC to Secretary Minister of Finance 15 June 1950; County Londonderry Committee of Agriculture to Minister of Home Affairs 15 June 1950; Armagh County Council to Minister of Home Affairs 12 June 1950; Town Solicitor Belfast City Council to Secretary Ministry of Home Affairs, 7 June 1950, Fermanagh County Council to Secretary Ministry of Home Affairs, 22 June 1950; Down County Council to Secretary Ministry of Home Affairs, 27 June 1950 HA 8/1099, PRONI.

⁵⁶ Londonderry County Council to Minister of Home Affairs, 19 July 1950, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

⁵⁷ Londonderry County Council to Minister of Home Affairs, 19 July 1950, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

⁵⁸ Brian Maginess to J.J. Rankin, 21 July 1950, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

⁵⁹ Brian Maginess to J.J. Rankin, 21 July 1950, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

'continually on the move without rest'.⁶⁰ Punitive powers that could be exercised only after the provision of official camp sites did not satisfy local government representatives. The Association of RDCs of Northern Ireland asked that the Bill be withdrawn and replaced 'by a Bill with powers adequate to curb any unreasonable actions on the part of this particular class of the community'.⁶¹ Faced with opposition from the very people it was designed to help, the Minister withdrew the Bill on 5 October 1950.

Almost immediately local authorities began to lobby for new legislation which would control Travellers but not oblige local government to provide camp sites.⁶² On the second letter from the Association of RDC's seeking new legislation, a frustrated civil servant scribbled,

Yes. Its alright for some people to demand a Bill and then reject the Bill as being all wrong but no one yet has made any sensible or constructive suggestions. So they have rejected our Bill its only right they should now be asked to say what do they want.⁶³ (emphasis in original)

Previously sympathetic administrators were losing their patience with local bodies who demanded action from central government, but would not accept any responsibility for Traveller accommodation. No suggestions were forthcoming and the department abandoned the problem of gypsies until 1952, when the issue was revived. Following the 'annual resolution' on the topic at the Unionist conference, officials in the Ministry of Home Affairs re-examined the question of legislation.⁶⁴ A new statute without any reference to camp site provision was suggested. Local authorities would gain no new punitive powers under this suggested Bill, but neither would they be burdened with onerous and unpopular responsibilities. It was noted 'it will obviously not please those who regard themselves as the scourge of the heathen but it might attract those of a saner outlook'.⁶⁵ However, a new Gypsy Bill was not drafted, although the recommendations of the 1948 Committee on the powers of summary arrest were partly implemented in Section 28 of the Summary Jurisdiction (Northern Ireland) Act 1953. The Act granted

⁶⁰ Brian Maginess to J.J. Rankin, 21 July 1950, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

⁶¹ Association of RDC's of Northern Ireland to Secretary Ministry of Home Affairs, 3 July 1950, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

⁶² Ulster Association of County Councils to Secretary Ministry of Home Affairs, 25 October 1950, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

⁶³ Comment dated 1 May 1951 on Association of RDCs to Secretary Ministry of Home Affairs, 21 April 1951, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

⁶⁴ B.M. to Secretary, 28 March 1952, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

⁶⁵ B.M. to Secretary, 28 March 1952, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

police the power of summary arrest of a person guilty of a nuisance on a public road or street where the offender had no fixed place of abode. But this measure was not considered sufficient and the government continued to receive complaints from bodies such as the Association of RDCs and the Grand Orange Lodge.⁶⁶ One official in the Ministry of Home Affairs considered the 'Gypsy problem' to be 'the most difficult I have encountered in my official career'.⁶⁷ Once again, the idea that the government could expel Travellers from Northern Ireland was rejected as *ultra vires*. Consultation with local authorities and the police was recommended although not with any great optimism about potential suggestions. While it was acknowledged that no country had ever solved the problem, given the feeling in rural areas, officials felt bound to do something. This official concluded by remarking that despite the 'unpleasant qualities' of Travellers, especially their low hygiene standards, he had 'a sneaking regard for their mode of life. At least, as a badge of civilisation, they are not engaged in the manufacture of the hydrogen or atomic bomb'.⁶⁸ J.B. O'Neill gloomily concluded that the problem of controlling Travellers was 'insoluble'.⁶⁹

Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 1954-56

Nevertheless, the Minister of Home Affairs, George B. Hanna, believed that a new approach to the problem was needed and asked the Cabinet to approve to appointment of a committee, whose terms of reference would be 'wide'. Hanna proposed that the committee's membership should include

- Three members of Parliament from rural constituencies
- Two representatives of the Association of County Councils
- Two representatives of the Association of RDCs
- One representative of Belfast Corporation
- One representative of the Ulster Farmers' Union
- One representative of the Ministry of Health and Local Government
- One representative of the Royal Ulster Constabulary

⁶⁶ J.E.H. to A.S.C., 6 May 1954, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁶⁷ J.E.H. to A.S.C., 6 May 1954, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁶⁸ J.E.H. to A.S.C., 6 May 1954, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁶⁹ J.B. O'Neill to Secretary and Minister, 7 May 1954, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

One representative of the Ministry of Home Affairs⁷⁰

Hanna hoped that a 'broad-based' Committee would make recommendations on legal change which would have the support 'at least of the community affected by the activities of these people'.⁷¹ The Cabinet approved of the appointment of a Committee but asked for some changes to its composition. No members of parliament were to be appointed, the chairman was to be independent, and a representative of the Ministry of Labour and National Insurance was to be included. The UFU was to contribute two representatives rather than one.⁷² The rural bias of representatives on the Committee suggests that Travellers were perceived as primarily a countryside phenomenon. Unlike the Commission on Itinerancy, appointed partly because of the growing numbers of Travellers camping in and around Dublin city, the Itinerant Gypsies Committee was appointed in response to rural concerns about trespass and wandering animals. The attitude of the Dublin government suggests that Travellers situated in the countryside were perceived as an irritant rather than a serious problem. In the South, the government apparently easily dismissed complaints about Travellers from rural areas, while the Northern government could not ignore country constituencies. The uniquely intimate nature of the Ulster Unionist Party, and its desperate need for unity in the face of a common Catholic nationalist enemy probably ensured the government had to be seen to address all complaints. English and Walker have observed that 'unionist politics in the 1921-70 devolution period were shaped less by a coherent political philosophy than by reactions to pressures concerned with the defence of position, territory and pan-Protestant unity'.⁷³ Also, in Northern Ireland there was a stronger prescriptive sense of convention and acceptability, bolstered by the hegemonic standard of Protestant Unionism. Travellers did not fit into the civic conception of the Northern state.

The recently retired Professor of Geography at Queens' University Belfast, E. Estyn Evans, was asked to chair the Committee. He accepted, but worried that the proposed Committee was 'heavily weighted against the itinerants'. Evans asked the

⁷⁰ Cabinet Memorandum by the Minister of Home Affairs on the Problems caused by Gypsies and like Itinerants, 27 May 1954, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

⁷¹ Cabinet Memorandum by the Minister of Home Affairs on the Problems caused by Gypsies and like Itinerants, 27 May 1954, HA 8/1099, PRONI.

⁷² Extract from conclusions of a Cabinet meeting held on 27 July 1954, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁷³ Richard English and Graham Walker (eds), *Unionism in Modern Ireland: New Perspectives on Politics and Culture* (London and New York, 1996), x.

Ministry of Home Affairs whether a 'nomad'⁷⁴ could also be included but the Ministry were unable to suggest a suitable representative.⁷⁵ Evans was aware of the difficulties in finding a Traveller to sit on the Committee and suggested a compromise candidate; Mr Sam Girvan of the Youth Hostel Association of Northern Ireland was suggested 'as a kind of nomad who has had contacts with the true nomads.'⁷⁶ The Committee, which first met on 14 December 1954, was composed of the following people:

Professor E. Estyn Evans, Queens University Belfast (Chairman)
Mr W.J. Hyndman, Association of County Councils
Mr Moses Busby, County Tyrone, Association of County Councils
Mr R.A. Brown, Moneymone, Association of RDCs
Mr Charles A. Beattie, Omagh, Association of RDCs
Councillor R.G.C. Kinahan, Belfast Corporation
Dr Samuel Hayes, Down County Medical Officer
Mr Robert Allen, Ballymena, Ulster Farmer's Union
Mr J.H. Barbour, Comber, Ulster Farmer's Union
County Inspector A.H. Kennedy, RUC
Mr J. G. Hill, Ministry of Home Affairs
Mr J.K. McDonald, Ministry of Health and Local Government
Mr A. W. Smith, Ministry of Commerce
Mr J.I. Hamilton, Ministry of Labour and National Insurance
Mr Sam Girvan, Youth Hostel Association of Northern Ireland
Mr Richard Hayward, affiliation unknown⁷⁷

Mr W.H. Elliott, representing the Ministry of Agriculture, was later added to the Committee.⁷⁸ Mr J.K. Mc Donald was later replaced by Mr A.P. Fitzgerald.⁷⁹ Interestingly, a Committee asked to examine 'itinerant gypsies' persisted in referring to 'tinkers' during meetings and in its final report. Nomenclature used to describe Travellers remained remarkably fluid. At its first meeting, the Committee agreed that it was important to hear from Travellers themselves and agreed to send a small informal

⁷⁴ E. Estyn Evans to A. Robinson, 1 October 1954, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁷⁵ A. Robinson to E. Estyn Evans, 5 October 1954, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁷⁶ Evans to Hill, 18 October 1954, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁷⁷ See minute of appointment, George B. Hanna Minister of Home Affairs, 24 November 1954, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁷⁸ Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 18 January 1955, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁷⁹ Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 29 March 1955, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

sub-committee to ascertain their views.⁸⁰ Subsequently, three members of the Committee contacted Travellers: Evans, Girvan and Hayward independently visited campsites to talk to the people who were the subject of their investigations. They found that most young people had 'given up the nomadic way of life' and moved to England to secure employment.⁸¹ This appeared to be the only information gained from personal liaison with Travellers.

The minutes of Committee meetings reveal a significant difference of opinion between the local representatives and professional civil servants. The UFU representative conceded that the numbers of Travellers was small, but the problems they created were significant.⁸² Professor Evans was careful to stress that Travellers were more a 'nuisance' than a threat and responsible for only petty crimes.⁸³ Administrators, no doubt mindful of their first legislative failure, were anxious to minimise the problems attributed to Travellers. The reluctance of bureaucrats to contemplate targeting Travellers contrasted with the bitter complaints of local politicians. The sanitary danger posed by illegal campsites was downplayed by Dr Hayes and Mr Mac Donald, while Hyndman, representing the Association of County Councils, was adamant that settled people were at risk if Travellers camped in close proximity to their homes. The officials took the more pragmatic view that Travellers themselves were more likely to suffer from their immediate surroundings than settled people.⁸⁴ There was very little evidence of any transfer of disease from Travellers to settled people, apart from a small number of cases of typhus fever in July 1948 when Travellers were suspected of spreading the disease.⁸⁵ The Ministry of Health and Local Government did not believe that new legislation targeting caravans and tents was required as sufficient powers existed under the Housing of the Working Classes Act 1885⁸⁶ (see glossary). In common with their Southern counterparts, Northern health officials did not believe that Travellers posed real dangers to public health. However, the issue of sanitation was vital to the 'gypsy problem'. A sanitary officer from the Ministry of Health and Local

⁸⁰ Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 18 January 1955, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁸¹ Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 29 March 1955, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁸² Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 6 December 1955, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁸³ Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 14 December 1954, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁸⁴ Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 14 December 1954, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁸⁵ Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 29 March 1955, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁸⁶ Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 18 January 1955, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

Government believed that the disparity in living conditions between Travellers and the settled population would become more marked as sanitation became universal.⁸⁷ The provision of sanitation facilities and rising standards of living were responsible North and South for the growing gulf between Travellers and settled people.

Mr Barbour, representing the UFU, told the Committee that few farmers were willing to impound animals found in their fields 'because of the fear of physical violence from the tinkers'.⁸⁸ He also highlighted the problem of intimidation, particularly of women alone on farms. He believed that land owners who rented camping sites to Travellers should be compelled to provide basic sanitation. Mr Hyndman, of the Association of County Councils, believed this would reduce the number of camp sites available since few farmers would pay for basic facilities.⁸⁹ This suggests that opposition in the farming community to Travellers was not as monolithic as complaints from representative bodies suggested. Some farmers at least were willing to rent their land to Travellers. The Medical Officer of Health of Belfast supported the view of the Farmers' Union that Traveller campsites constituted a danger to public health.⁹⁰ The contrast between local authorities and central administrators perceptions of the scale of the 'Traveller problem' was clearly illustrated when two representatives from Ballymena RDC (County Antrim) spoke to the Committee on the problem as they experienced it. Messrs Anderson and Houston considered Travellers to be a 'complete nuisance'. They were 'inclined to create disturbances when the worse for drink' a particularly grievous sin for a Protestant community with strong religious temperance beliefs. Ballymena RDC believed that the situation was worsening and suggested that camping on the county roads be made illegal. Furthermore, the Council was strongly opposed to the establishment of permanent campsites 'because of the resentment which would be aroused among the people living in the vicinity of such camps'.⁹¹ Mr Allen, of the UFU, also opposed campsites, suggesting coercive measures that would force Travellers 'to conform to the code of conduct of the rest of the community'.⁹² In order to assess the Ballymena complaint, the Committee examined the offences committed by

⁸⁷ Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 29 March 1955, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁸⁸ Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 14 December 1954, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁸⁹ Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 14 December 1954, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁹⁰ Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 18 January 1955, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁹¹ Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 29 March 1955, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁹² Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 29 March 1955, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

Travellers in County Antrim for the year ended 30 June 1954. There were 243 offences committed by Travellers, mainly trespass, general nuisance and damage to crops. According to the census taken in September 1954, there were 159 Travellers in County Antrim. County Inspector Kennedy suggested that the problem in Antrim 'while difficult, was not of large extent'.⁹³ Despite their vigorous protests, the representatives of Ballymena RDC had not stirred the indignation of Committee members. The lack of support from the RUC particularly undermined their assertions of widespread lawlessness among Travellers. At no point in the surviving Committee minutes did Inspector Kennedy propose greater law enforcement as a solution. Indeed, the police opposed a suggestion that certain grades of the police force be empowered to impose fines on Travellers for road offences.⁹⁴ Calls for punitive action from local authorities and rural representative bodies were influencing official attitudes to the problem.

Education was also examined by the Committee. Many members felt that the only satisfactory solution to the problem lay in the education of the children. Since school going children could not travel, families would have to become static; the unpalatable issue of permanent camp sites and local opposition to them was again raised.⁹⁵ The Committee heard representatives of the Ministry of Education and the Northern Ireland Association of County and County Borough Welfare Committees. The Ministry of Education explained it was local education authorities who enforced school attendance using the powers contained in the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 1947, and the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1950 (see glossary). However, Traveller mobility hindered enforcement, as families evaded prosecution by moving to another area. Although Section 20 of the 1950 Act referred specifically to vagrant parents preventing their children from accessing education, it was not enforced because public opinion objected to the cost, which would fall on ratepayers. Ratepayers, north and south of the Border, refused to bear the financial burden of enforcing strict school attendance on Traveller children. The Welfare Committees representative was not optimistic about suggestions of rehabilitation and absorption made by the Committee. Mr Williamson believed that teachers would not accept Traveller children in their classes until they had been rehabilitated. This would be 'very difficult and

⁹³ Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 29 March 1955, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁹⁴ Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 6 December 1955, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁹⁵ Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 29 March 1955, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

expensive' and the welfare authorities considered that they already had sufficient 'problem families' from the settled community to deal with.⁹⁶ Public housing for Travellers was ruled out by Williamson, who was supported by the representative of Belfast Corporation. Kinahan expressed the view that 'so far as Belfast was concerned the problem of housing was difficult enough as it is and there was little use in considering providing houses for gypsies'.⁹⁷ The allocation of public housing in Northern Ireland was influenced by religious affiliation: Catholic Travellers would not be readily extended official hospitality, no matter how unsanitary their living conditions. Voluntary organisations were not asked to appear before the Committee, but their perspective on settlement and absorption was offered by the welfare authorities. Williamson did not believe any voluntary organisation would be willing to rehabilitate Travellers, sourly remarking that such organisations did not accept 'difficult cases', which were always left to the local welfare authorities.⁹⁸

The difficulties outlined in the 1948 report of prosecuting Travellers for road offences were considered. The Committee agreed that speedier prosecution would result if cases concerning 'offenders of the tinker class' were the responsibility of justices of the peace rather than resident magistrates.⁹⁹ The Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs was opposed to the restoration of powers to justices of the peace. In Northern Ireland, these unpaid, lay magistrates lost their judicial powers to the professional judiciary in 1935.¹⁰⁰ Yet, the powers of summary arrest granted under the Summary Jurisdiction Act (Northern Ireland) 1953 were difficult to effect since many offenders were remanded in custody until court sittings.¹⁰¹ Long term remand was expensive and also deprived families of wage earners. Since the powers of summary arrest alone were not sufficiently punitive, additional legal reform was advocated by local politicians. However, the impossibility of reaching a solution that was not *ultra vires* was demonstrated by the attitude of Mr Allen, who neatly summarised the position of various representative bodies:

⁹⁶ Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 6 December 1955, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁹⁷ Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 6 December 1955, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁹⁸ Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 6 December 1955, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

⁹⁹ Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 14 December 1954, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

¹⁰⁰ The office was also abolished in the Irish Free State, though the concept continued in the offices of district justices and peace commissioners. See S.J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 280-1.

¹⁰¹ Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 29 March 1955, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

The problem was not impressive numerically but the gypsies had been causing a great deal of annoyance in the country areas where the general feeling was that these people were not law-abiding. He felt that most of them were beyond rehabilitation and should not be thrust on any section of the community. There was no doubt that the problem was very complicated and could not be solved in a short time but he was convinced that the itinerants should be made to conform to the law, or else life should be made so uncomfortable for them that they would be forced to give up their present way of living.¹⁰²

The police and civil servants on the Committee showed little enthusiasm for this attitude, demonstrating the widening gap between organisations such as the UFU and the Ministry of Home Affairs. Simply put, the Ministry was not prepared to ban nomadism, while local authorities sought exactly that policy. Any legislation drafted by central government would not meet the demands of farmers groups and local representative bodies. Absorption and settlement were considered impossible because of the financial and political costs. Travellers could not be banned from existing but, unlike the Commission on Itinerancy, the Committee would not advocate absorption.

Report of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 1956

Given the lack of agreement among the Committee members, it is not surprising that the final report, dated 17 April 1956, is inconclusive.¹⁰³ The Committee adopted the standard line of a decaying crafts tradition, noting that some may 'deplore the passing of an ancient and picturesque element in our population', but that nomadism had become an anachronism. Yet, 'the most stubborn offenders' – criminals by virtue of nomadism alone – were expected to cling to their way of life in spite of its hardships.¹⁰⁴ The difficulty for the government was to frame legislation that did not target only a small section of the community. The Committee reviewed the implementation of the 1948 recommendations, most of which had been ignored. The Ministry of Health and Local Government felt that legislative control of moveable dwellings was adequate. An amendment modelled on implementation of Section 269 of the Public Health Act (1936) would not constitute an improvement on existing Northern Ireland law. The suggestions of the 1956 Committee could be divided into two categories: those which aimed at harrising Travellers and those that advocated settlement and absorption. The Committee reiterated the earlier recommendation for the extension of the Summary Jurisdiction

¹⁰² Minutes of the Itinerant Gypsies Committee, 6 December 1955, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

¹⁰³ The committee to Terence O'Neill, Minister of Home Affairs, 17 April 1956, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

¹⁰⁴ The committee to Terence O'Neill, Minister of Home Affairs, 17 April 1956, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

(Ireland) Act 1851, to enable farmers to take prosecutions for trespass and consequential damage. However, in relation to theft and intimidation, the Committee agreed that the existing law was adequate. Legislation could not address intimidation since 'superstitious beliefs' were partly responsible for such complaints. On one proposal the Committee were unanimous: the restoration of powers to deal summarily with offences under the Vagrancy Acts to Justices of the Peace.

The Committee was doubtful if repressive legislation would be effective. There already existed a substantial body of laws governing roadside encampments, which were enforced sporadically. Consistent enforcement would create extra work for the police 'at a cost out of all proportion to the probable gains'.¹⁰⁵ Pursuing Travellers for road offences would only alienate them without surmounting the obstacle that mobility posed to law enforcement. Only if roadside camping was prohibited would the establishment of camp sites be required. The Committee considered recommending the establishment of an experimental site but could not choose a suitable location. The expense and control of a site would be problematic and there were fears that 'rival groups of itinerants' would be attracted to a site. Permanent camps, which would allow a transitional phase between nomadism and settlement, were also suggested. However, the Committee felt that 'the cost would not be justified by the present extent of the problem in Northern Ireland'.¹⁰⁶ Also, static Travellers could lose their livelihoods and become dependent upon state welfare. The provision of camps could also 'concentrate problems which are now diffused'.¹⁰⁷ Complete absorption into settled society was advocated by the Committee, but without the determination evidenced in the Report of the Commission on Itinerancy. Settlement was considered 'a positive approach to the solution of the problem'.¹⁰⁸ However, newly erected houses were not recommended for Traveller families, who could be accommodated in older, existing housing stock. The Committee expected religious bodies, official welfare officers and housing authorities to offer 'sympathetic guidance' to Travellers during the difficult period of transition from nomadism to settled life. Given the distinctly unaccommodating attitude of the welfare

¹⁰⁵ The committee to Terence O'Neill, Minister of Home Affairs, 17 April 1956, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

¹⁰⁶ The committee to Terence O'Neill, Minister of Home Affairs, 17 April 1956, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

¹⁰⁷ The committee to Terence O'Neill, Minister of Home Affairs, 17 April 1956, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

¹⁰⁸ The committee to Terence O'Neill, Minister of Home Affairs, 17 April 1956, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

authorities presented to the Committee, this recommendation would appear to be an exercise in hope rather than expectation.

Thus the main recommendations by the 1956 Committee were as follows:

1. Powers should be restored to Justices of the Peace to deal summarily with people charged with offences against the Vagrancy Acts and the Summary Jurisdiction (Ireland) Act 1851
2. Section 20 of the Summary Jurisdiction (Ireland) Act 1851 should be extended to enable the owners of damaged property to seize and detain animals found causing damage on his property until such damage is paid for by the owner of the animals
3. The attention of sanitary authorities should be drawn to the advisability of exercising their powers of making bye laws under Section 9 of the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1885.
4. Where a Traveller family express the desire to be housed and settled, the local authority shall consider the desirability of providing suitable housing accommodation for that family
5. Police censuses should be carried out periodically. The censuses should be kept under review by a standing committee of the Ministry of Home Affairs.¹⁰⁹

However, the overall conclusion reached was that the problems caused by Travellers did not warrant 'major legislative action or a large expenditure of public money'.¹¹⁰ Indeed, Travellers were not costing the state significant amounts of money as they did not claim excessive welfare benefits. Figures from the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance showed that just 49 families, with 198 children, received family allowances in 1955. No new claims were submitted in 1955. The Committee found no evidence that 'the welfare state is attracting itinerants from the Republic'.¹¹¹ Thus a common political complaint was found to be baseless. The Committee's recommendations sought 'to bring speedier justice to wrongdoers' and to encourage Travellers to seek permanent homes. In general, however, the Committee absolved the government from any action by stating 'There appears to be reason to hope that in the long run the problems will solve themselves.'¹¹² Any police attention appeared to have 'a salutary effect'. The frequent censuses in 1955 seemed to lead to a reduction in complaints from settled people and the Committee recommended they be continued. The Committee's report was distinctly unadventurous in suggesting solutions to disputes between Travellers and settled people

¹⁰⁹ The committee to Terence O'Neill, Minister of Home Affairs, 17 April 1956, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

¹¹⁰ The committee to Terence O'Neill, Minister of Home Affairs, 17 April 1956, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

¹¹¹ The committee to Terence O'Neill, Minister of Home Affairs, 17 April 1956, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

¹¹² The committee to Terence O'Neill, Minister of Home Affairs, 17 April 1956, HA 8/1415, PRONI.

over access to camp sites and grazing land for animals. Faced with a complaining public, the Northern government attempted to discern the extent of the problem. It is clear from the 1956 report that the problem was more perception than reality. The final conclusion of the Committee that nothing need be done because Traveller numbers were small and declining illustrated the ephemeral nature of the problem. The poor reputation Travellers had among the settled community for theft or the spread of disease could not be substantiated as a serious threat. Once serious attention was devoted to the problems Travellers caused, evidence other than hearsay could not be found. Thus the Committee succeeded in documenting fears about Travellers rather than crimes committed by them. Their final report was unimpressive because they were chasing a cliché of 'dirty, thieving tinkers' that existed in the minds of settled people.

Interestingly, the overall number of Travellers, whether Northern Irish or not, declined consistently, suggesting the situation in Northern Ireland was unfavourable for nomadic families.

Fig. 1: Numbers of Travellers in Northern Ireland, 1954-55

Date of Census	Total Number	Number known to cross the border	Place of Birth		
			Éire	Great Britain	Northern Ireland
30 September 1954	583	-	344	26	201
				(12 unknown)	
17 January 1955	483	235	244	33	206
14 March 1955	462	243	231	28	203
16 May 1955	352	74	151	31	170
18 July 1955	395	132	181	28	186
19 September 1955	377	135	186	18	173
4 November 1955	379	121	180	24	175
19 November 1955	412	173	191	26	195

Source: *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, Appendix XLVI, p 164.

Changes to the administration of the vagrancy acts and regular police counts probably convinced many to leave, but economic factors or emigration to Britain cannot be discounted. The Traveller population in Rathkeale County Limerick experienced a hiatus from 1941-60 when economic difficulties forced many away from their home town.¹¹³ The figures of bi-annual censuses indicate a decline in the numbers of Travellers of Southern origin present in Northern Ireland. There is a noticeable drop from 344 in September 1954 to 186 in September 1955. The position of Travellers could also have been affected by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) border campaign which began in December 1956. Increased security measures and the mobilisation of 13,000 B Specials¹¹⁴ could have adversely affected Travellers freedom of movement, especially those of Southern origin. One MP believed that the number of Travellers in Northern Ireland was declining 'possibly due to the fact that they cannot cross backwards and forwards across the Border as they used to, or as easily as they used to'.¹¹⁵ As the IRA launched their attacks from the South, cross-border travel was closely monitored.¹¹⁶ At a local level, police and B Specials may have harassed Travellers who, as Catholic and nomadic, were particularly vulnerable. Yet the most dramatic change in the number of Travellers in Northern Ireland occurred between 1948 and 1954, when the population dropped from 1,012 to 583. Perhaps the RUC had taken full advantage of the powers of summary arrest granted them in 1953, convincing Travellers that Northern Ireland was best avoided.

When asked in the Commons about the report, Captain Terence O'Neill, the Minister of Home Affairs, indicated that he was willing to implement the first two recommendations.¹¹⁷ However, only the restoration of power to justices of the peace was included in a Bill presented to the Commons in January 1958. The Summary Jurisdiction and Criminal Justice Bill was designed to 'simplify and improve the administration of criminal justice by our courts of summary jurisdiction'.¹¹⁸ In this 'technical' Bill, section five implemented the proposals of the Committee on the

¹¹³ O'Connor, *Rathkeale*, p 139.

¹¹⁴ Keogh, *Twentieth-century Ireland*, p 229.

¹¹⁵ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 41, cols. 2904 (28 January 1958).

¹¹⁶ See Rev. John Faris's memories of cross border travel in the 1950s and 1960s, Stephen Hunter (ed), *Life Journeys: Living Folklore in Ireland Today* (Cork, 1999), p. 20.

¹¹⁷ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 40, col. 2040 (19 June 1956).

¹¹⁸ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 41, col. 2891 (28 January 1958).

Control of Gypsies and like Itinerants. Offenders against the vagrancy acts would no longer appear before a resident magistrate: their cases would be heard summarily by justices of the peace, but only if the person charged consented to the procedure.¹¹⁹ This legislation targeted a tiny minority of Northern Irish society. The Northern Ireland 1951 census put the population of the country at 1,370,921;¹²⁰ at less than 1% of the population, Travellers hardly merited legislative scrutiny. A number of MPs disputed the need for the amendment. Mr Diamond (Belfast Falls) noted that clause five was 'a departure from the existing trend...which was to remove as far as possible any executive power from justices of the peace'.¹²¹ He objected to the deliberate targeting of Traveller, a 'weak and inarticulate and defenceless section of the community'. Diamond pointed out that Travellers were entitled to justice: 'they should not be left to the mercy of a lay magistrate in a district where he may not only be prejudiced but seriously influenced against them by feeling among local farmers'.¹²² Problems of bias among volunteer magistrates was part of the reason for the introduction of a professional judiciary and centralised police force during the nineteenth century.¹²³ This Bill reversed a general trend in the administration of justice in Britain and Ireland in order to target Travellers. Mr O'Connor (West Tyrone) worried that Travellers in custody would not understand their right to refuse trial by a justice of the peace, in favour of an appearance before a resident magistrate.¹²⁴ However, the Bill became law in 1958, placing the power of trial and conviction for offences committed by Travellers in the hands of representatives of local communities rather than the judiciary.

In common with so many Committee reports, the ruminations of the 1956 Committee were largely ignored. The Ministry of Home Affairs outlined the fate of the Committee's proposals to the Commission on Itinerancy. Section 20 of the Summary Jurisdiction Act was not amended because the Ministry believed that 'a great many complications' would result.¹²⁵ Instead, the Ministry of Health and Local Government drew the attention of local authorities to their bye law powers and housing

¹¹⁹ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 41, col. 2891 (28 January 1958).

¹²⁰ Vaughan and Fitzpatrick (eds), *Irish Historical Statistics Population 1821-1971*, p 4.

¹²¹ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 41, cols. 2895-6 (28 January 1958).

¹²² *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 41, cols. 2896 (28 January 1958).

¹²³ Connolly, *Oxford Companion*, pp. 280-1.

¹²⁴ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 41, cols. 2899 (28 January 1958).

¹²⁵ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 19.

responsibilities.¹²⁶ Given the hostility of local councils to the provision of camp sites, it cannot be assumed that this recommendation was implemented. Furthermore, the sectarian politics of service provision in Northern Ireland would have placed them at a distinct disadvantage. No doubt local authorities enthusiastically availed of any bye law that limited camping by Travellers. After the 1954 report, police censuses were carried out twice a year, every year. The only outcome of the second official consideration of the 'itinerant problem' in Northern Ireland was increased police surveillance and additional powers of prosecution at a local level. Despite the considerable drop in the numbers of southern Travellers discussed earlier, this did not signal an end to cross border travel. The figures below indicate significant annual variations in numbers of Travellers in Northern Ireland who claimed Éire nationality; it would be difficult to discern a pattern in the movement of Travellers between the two jurisdictions.

¹²⁶ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 19.

Fig. 2: Numbers of Travellers in Northern Ireland, 1957-63

Date of Census	Total Number	Number known to cross the border	Place of Birth		
			Éire	Great Britain	Northern Ireland
20 May 1957	235	76	128	11	95
				(1 unknown)	
18 November 1957	224	73	100	22	102
19 May 1958	206	40	81	18	107
17 November 1958	248	55	103	18	127
18 May 1959	299	72	98	21	170
				(10 unknown)	
16 November 1959	308	68	120	22	165
				(1 France)	
16 May 1960	299	145	151	12	136
21 November 1960	303	57	144	15	144
15 May 1961	178	39	80	16	82
20 November 1961	247	78	89	19	139
21 May 1962	242	92	131	10	101
19 November 1962	298	51	134	7	157
20 May 1963	270	36	108	20	140
				(2 unknown)	

Source: *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, Appendix XLVI, p 164.

It must be pointed out that, even if the figures under-represent the numbers of Travellers in Northern Ireland, the problems caused by less than 400 people cannot have been substantial.

Complaints about Travellers continued to surface after the amendment to the Summary Jurisdiction Act in 1958. That Southern Travellers should 'go home' to Éire remained a concern for some MPs.¹²⁷ Parliamentary questions were directed at the Minister of Home Affairs, who refused to accept responsibility for accommodating or

¹²⁷ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 41, col. 1048 (2 December 1958); vol. 47, col. 1051 (13 December 1960).

settling Travellers.¹²⁸ It was only after the introduction of the Caravan (Northern Ireland) Act 1963 that MPs began to address their concerns to the Minister of Health and Local Government. This Act was modelled on the Westminster Caravan Act 1960, a statute drafted in response to planning and health problems caused by unregulated caravan sites. In the summer of 1959 there was a typhoid outbreak attributed to camping holiday makers at Portstewart, a popular seaside resort. Local authorities possessed by law powers to control camping, but as these were directed at 'the gypsy type of caravanner', new legislation dealing with holiday caravanning was deemed necessary.¹²⁹ The Minister of Health and Local Government, Mr Morgan, told the Commons that his policy was that 'caravanning should not become a permanent all-the-year round feature of housing in the province'.¹³⁰ Under this government policy official halting sites for Travellers would not be established even if local authorities accepted the task. Under section 21 of the Caravan Act (Northern Ireland) 1963, local authorities could provide camp sites, but holiday makers, not Travellers, were offered these public facilities (see glossary). Departmental policy did not encourage the use of this section for the provision of Traveller accommodation.¹³¹ Official camp sites were deemed undesirable for public order reasons, since the police believed that 'the provision of such sites might well create more difficulties than it would solve'.¹³² In response to questions from Miss Murnaghan (Queens University Belfast), the government expressed mild interest in the idea of permanent campsites or housing without committing itself to any action.¹³³ Miss Murnaghan pointed out that it was 'almost impossible' for a Traveller family to be placed on a local authority housing list.¹³⁴ Enniskillen RDC had been accused of refusing to house eligible Travellers who had waited for several years.¹³⁵ Illiteracy made access to public housing difficult for all Travellers, but in Northern Ireland, where housing was a sensitive political issue, they faced more obstacles.

¹²⁸ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 48, col. 822 (9 March 1961).

¹²⁹ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 53, col. 304 (24 January 1963).

¹³⁰ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 53, col. 306 (24 January 1963).

¹³¹ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 55, col. 1399 (4 December 1963); vol. 57, col. 196 (21 April 1964).

¹³² *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 58, col. 800 (24 November 1964).

¹³³ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 59, cols. 1015-18 (23 February 1965); vol. 61, cols. 45-108 (26 May 1965).

¹³⁴ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 61, col. 45 (26 May 1965).

¹³⁵ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 47, col. 1051 (13 December 1960).

In 1966, Miss Maconachie (QUB) placed a private members motion before the Commons: 'That this House is of the opinion that the Government should review the problem of itinerants and introduce measures both for their own benefit and that of the community.'¹³⁶ Maconachie referred to a report on Travellers by the Assisi Fellowship, a body composed of representatives of the churches, voluntary organisations and charitably minded individuals. In 1966, there were only 165 Travellers counted in Northern Ireland, the majority of whom resided in Belfast and County Tyrone. The numbers of Travellers had continued to drop from 270 in May 1963. As the population declined, those who remained were concentrated in Belfast city. A dramatic shift in the distribution of Travellers in the six counties had occurred since 1954.

Fig. 3: Itinerant Gypsies encamped in Northern Ireland on 30 September 1954

County	Numbers
County Antrim	159
County Armagh	110
Belfast	16
County Down	55
County Fermanagh	45
County Londonderry	100
County Tyrone	98
Total	583

Source: Undated and unattributed, HA 8/1451, PRONI

In September 1954, the majority of Travellers were counted in Counties Antrim,¹³⁷ Armagh and Londonderry. Only 16 Travellers were found in Belfast. By 1966, the distribution of the Traveller population was radically different. The reasons for the collapse of the Traveller population in certain counties cannot be ascertained, but it is likely that local government policy and police activity were significant factors.

Maconachie pointed out that traditional camp sites were vanishing as 'more and more land is acquired for building',¹³⁸ suggesting that processes of urban expansion and planning similar to those documented in the South also influenced the position of Travellers in the North. Two camps in Belfast once occupied by Traveller were on the Ormeau Embankment and on the Old Hollywood Road. These had now been

¹³⁶ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 64, col. 34 (7 June 1966).

¹³⁷ Even in County Antrim, where they were most numerous, Travellers represented just 0.07% of the county's population as enumerated in the 1951 census. For county population figures see, *Northern Ireland Census 1951, Preliminary Report* (Belfast, 1951), p 9.

¹³⁸ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 64, col. 37 (7 June 1966).

redeveloped so that Travellers were forced to seek accommodation elsewhere.¹³⁹ The motion was carried by the house because the government accepted it in principle 'without making any specific guarantee or promise of any action' especially since Traveller numbers were diminishing.¹⁴⁰ The government did not intend to force or even advise local authorities to provide facilities for Travellers. The conclusion of the 1956 Committee remained a bedrock of government policy: the hope that Travellers, and the problems they caused, would simply vanish over time. Travellers evicted by Belfast Corporation were expected to do just that – disappear. The Corporation voted against providing a site by the casting vote, but the government did not intend to force it to take action.¹⁴¹ Another motion was placed before the Commons by Mr Minford (Antrim) which called on the government 'to take immediate steps to control itinerants in Northern Ireland, to ensure their integration into normal ways of living and their disappearance from our highways and streets'. Minford asked the government to wipe out 'this nuisance' which plagued Northern society.¹⁴² Unsurprisingly, because of its call for immediate government action, the motion failed. In a contrast to earlier debates in the 1950s, only one MP insisted upon citing the Southern origin of Travellers, believing they were not 'our own people', but canny citizens of Éire exploiting the Northern welfare state.¹⁴³ However, since five years' residency were required to secure National Assistance,¹⁴⁴ 'Éire' Travellers were unlikely to get welfare benefits. The question of providing official accommodation for Travellers was increasingly urgent due to urbanisation, according to Miss Murnaghan (QUB): 'It used to be that when itinerants were moved on there was always somewhere else to which they could go for the time being. That situation no longer obtains.'¹⁴⁵ In spite of the persistence of Miss Murnaghan in raising her 'personal subject',¹⁴⁶ the government refused to take any action to force local authorities to provide campsites or facilities.

Northern Irish society had more serious problems to address before Travellers entitlement to basic facilities would be recognised. Sectarian discrimination in the

¹³⁹ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 64, col. 37 (7 June 1966).

¹⁴⁰ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 64, col. 59 (7 June 1966).

¹⁴¹ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 65, col. 1200-2 (15 February 1967).

¹⁴² *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 66, col. 1412 (11 May 1967).

¹⁴³ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 67, col. 1292 (1 November 1967); see also vol. 66, col. 1195 (11 May 1967).

¹⁴⁴ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 67, col. 1300 (1 November 1967).

¹⁴⁵ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 67, col. 1296-7 (1 November 1967).

¹⁴⁶ *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 68, col. 809 (6 February 1968).

allocation of state resources between Catholics and Protestants gave birth to the civil rights movement. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was founded in Belfast in 1967. It hoped to secure an end to religious discrimination in public employment and housing allocation. As political and social upheaval gripped Northern Ireland in the late 1960s, concerns about Travellers were understandably marginalised. When the Troubles took hold, social reform was secondary to attempts to restore law and order in a bitterly divided society. The rhetoric of politicians in the 1950s about the Éire origins and possible voting preferences of Travellers underscores how deeply religious prejudice was embedded in Northern Ireland society. Interestingly, only Nationalist MPs representing the Catholic population pointed out that, as Northern Irish citizens, Travellers were entitled to housing and welfare. Neither the relationship between Travellers and the Catholic population, nor Traveller participation in the IRA has been explored fully here, but important issues remain to be addressed. Politicians representing different religious populations who contributed to debates on Travellers reflected the all pervasive nature of the Catholic/Nationalist, Protestant/Unionist divide. The small, nomadic minority exposed the central injustice in Northern Ireland that eventually brought war to civil society and the collapse of the Stormont government.

In common with the Dublin administration, the government of Northern Ireland faced complaints from local authorities and individuals about Travellers, ranging from trespassing animals to unsightly campsites and begging. Both governments considered establishing public camp sites for Travellers, but both decided that the public opposition would be more damaging than leaving the problem unsolved. Perhaps staff in the Department of Justice shared the frustration of civil servants in the Ministry of Home Affairs with complainants who refused to listen to lawful solutions. The greatest difference between the two jurisdictions was that the South did not seek to relocate Travellers to their home counties across the border. Northern Ireland never passed a law to eject Southern Travellers, but it seems that the powers of summary arrest and trial by justice of the peace directed at Travellers convinced many to leave. How Travellers adapted to the increasingly repressive actions of police and local authorities in Northern Ireland is not known. Whether they left the North for Britain or Southern Ireland is impossible to judge.

Conclusion

Northern Irish society experienced the 1960s as a decade of change in significantly different ways to the South. While the Commission on Itinerancy proposed extending the welfare state to Travellers who had been excluded, the Stormont government fought to retain Protestant control over state resources. The co-operation between voluntary organisations, mostly Catholic, and the state envisaged in the Commission report was simply unthinkable in Northern Ireland. During the 1950s, the Northern government publicly examined the issue, while consultation in Dublin remained behind the closed doors of the Department of Justice. The Stormont government decided upon repressive measures, but Dublin administrators chose to do nothing. In both jurisdictions, unofficial, extra-legal policing became the norm.

From the 1960s, the significance of the Border in Travellers' lives increased. As local and national government in the South tackled the issue of Traveller accommodation, the Northern state refused to take any action. The decisions taken by the Stormont government contrast sharply with its Dublin counterpart and illustrates the importance of historical context in assessing the position of nomadic minorities. The marked differences between North and South highlights the importance of specific national contexts. The reformatory social policies proposed by the Commission on Itinerancy and outlined in the next chapter had a considerable impact of Travellers' lives south of the Border.

Chapter 6

The Settlement Programme, 1963-70

This chapter deals with the reaction of Irish government and society to the recommendations of the Commission on Itinerancy. The report was well received by local and national government because it foresaw an end to unauthorised encampments and, if settlement led to assimilation, the disappearance of Travellers as a distinctive, nomadic community. The principle of settlement was accepted wholeheartedly by the public and politicians alike, though the provision of Traveller accommodation was as politically fraught as Oscar Traynor had anticipated it to be in 1958 (see chapter 4). Cork city provides a useful study of the implementation of the Commission's recommendations by one local authority. The public outcry over halting sites in Cork city was found in every area and appeared to be insurmountable. The prospect of Traveller accommodation provoked outrage in the city's middle-class suburbs in 1968. Faced with political and administrative paralysis, charitable organisations and interested individuals organised themselves to provide basic facilities for Traveller families without even the right to live in one place. The importance of catholic charity will be outlined and the symbolic importance of the Pope in highlighting the plight of European Gypsies will also be discussed. Embryonic Traveller politicisation was mobilised by Grattan Puxon, an English activist. The role of the settlement committees in persuading local residents to accept Traveller accommodation will be assessed. Of crucial importance in countering objections was the constant use of the word 'resettlement', which implied that Travellers were merely temporarily displaced rather than truly nomadic. What this chapter reveals is that agreement on settlement did not imply an acceptance of accommodation in settled people's local areas.

The Reaction of Central Government

Justice Brian Walsh met the Taoiseach in early August 1963 to present the Commission's finished report.¹ The Commission's key recommendation on settlement and housing for Travellers was accepted apparently without question by the government. Unusually for a report outlining a radical change in policy, very few of the

¹ Note, 6 August 1963, DT S 17506 A/63, NAI.

Commission's suggestions were dismissed.² The government took the report as a blueprint for Traveller-settled relations in the immediate future. Lemass lost no time in presenting the Cabinet with the most important governmental aspect of the report; the allocation of departmental responsibility.

The implementation of the Commission's recommendations could not proceed without an end to the confusion over which department was responsible for Travellers as a group. As chapter 3 demonstrated, Travellers avoided governmental scrutiny precisely because the problems they posed the settled community did not fall within the remit of any one department. A central recommendation of the Commission, that a minister be given overall responsibility for Travellers as a group, had to be addressed before settlement could be adopted as a policy. The Commission on Itinerancy had not suggested a suitable department however. Lemass informed the cabinet that the department nominated would have complete responsibility for Travellers.³ Other departments would furnish their observations on the Commission's report for the preparation of a draft White Paper embodying the government's response to the Commission's report.⁴ The co-ordinating department would also supervise the implementation of the policy contained in the White Paper.⁵ When the Commission's recommendations were assigned to the relevant departments, Justice was responsible for six, compared to three each for Local Government and Social Welfare, and two for the Departments of Health and Education.⁶

The Department of Health maintained that Travellers could access the health services available to the rest of the population, and that low life expectancy could be attributed to their living conditions rather than availability of health care. As the responsibility for improving living standards lay with the Department of local government, the Department of Health could claim it had fulfilled its duties to Travellers.⁷ The Department of Education built a school in Ballyfermot Dublin to

² The most famous example of a failed report with ostensibly impeccable credentials was the report of the Commission on Vocational Organisation chaired by Bishop Michael Browne. See Keogh, *Twentieth-Century Ireland*, pp. 147-9.

³ Oifig an Taoisigh, memorandum presented to government 16 August 1963, DT S 17506 A/63, NAI.

⁴ Oifig an Taoisigh, memorandum presented to government 16 August 1963, DT S 17506 A/63, NAI.

⁵ Oifig an Taoisigh, memorandum presented to government 16 August 1963, DT S 17506 A/63, NAI.

⁶ Oifig an Taoisigh, memorandum presented to government 16 August 1963, DT S 17506 A/63, NAI.

⁷ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 242, cols. 1703-5 (25 November 1969).

educate Traveller children.⁸ However, in 1970 the Department decided that no more special schools would be provided since it hindered the absorption of Traveller children into mainstream classes.⁹ The Department of Education believed that the education of Traveller children was 'one case where ad hoc arrangements will just have to be made to suit local circumstances'.¹⁰ This suited the nature of the National School system, in which schools were managed by the Churches, but paid for by the state. The delicate balance of the educational partnership between the Churches and the state precluded grander gestures. The Department of Social Welfare acted in 1967 to make access to unemployment assistance by Travellers easier. The Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1967 removed the provision which had, since 1940, restricted the payment of unemployment assistance to people moving from rural to urban areas unless they could satisfy a special residence or employment test. Section 14 of the act abolished the residency and employment test to remove any obstacles faced by Travellers living in urban areas¹¹ (see glossary). However, the overwhelming importance of the recommendations on settlement dictated that the department responsible for housing would be selected as the co-ordinating body. Accordingly, the Department of Local Government was assigned coordinating responsibility in August 1963.¹²

The Department of Local Government pondered the implications of the Commission's report for a year. During this time, deputies in Dáil Éireann continued to raise the issue of Traveller encampments with the Minister, Neil Blaney. Blaney repeatedly told deputies that his department was considering the report and that a solution to unauthorised encampments would have to wait until a policy decision had been made.¹³ While the department reflected on how best to implement the Commission's recommendations on housing and campsites, local authorities continued

⁸ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 242, col. 892 (13 November 1969).

⁹ Áine Hyland and Kenneth Milne (eds), *Irish Education Documents Volume II: A Selection of Extracts of Documents Relating to the History of Education from 1922 to 1991 in the Irish Free State and the Republic of Ireland* (Dublin, 1992), p 472.

¹⁰ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 232, col. 760 (8 February 1968).

¹¹ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 229, col. 1202 (4 July 1967).

¹² N.S. Ó Nualláin to Private Secretary Department of Local Government, 16 August 1963, D/T S 17506 A/63, 1994 release, NAI.

¹³ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 206, col. 1272 (12 December 1963); *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 207, cols. 268-9, (30 January 1964); *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 207, cols. 1791-2 (27 February 1964); *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 208, col. 949 (12 March 1964); *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 209, col. 1910 (21 May 1964); *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 211, cols. 511-2 (18 June 1964).

to break up Traveller encampments. The large camp on Dublin Corporation property on the Ring Road in Ballyfermot was targeted in December 1963. Dr Noel Browne asked the minister whether any accommodation would be provided for families displaced by Dublin Corporation, but there were no plans to provide a permanent campsite for Travellers as the Corporation had 'no express statutory authority to do so at the present time'.¹⁴ The question of conferring such powers was under consideration by the Department. Publicly, no truce was declared while a permanent solution was being sought. Privately however, the Department was worried about the tactics of Dublin Corporation. This concern was due in part to the activities of Grattan Puxon, an Englishman who was to the forefront of a movement called the Itinerant Action Campaign.

A pacifist and peace campaigner, Puxon had fled to Ireland in 1960 to avoid being drafted by the British army which was engaged in Cyprus.¹⁵ He bought and lived in a barrel topped caravan and soon began to protest over the conditions Travellers lived in as well as the constant round of evictions they endured. In 1963, a group of Travellers led by John MacDonald, Kevin Keenan and Grattan Puxon marched from Ballyfermot, where many were camped, to Dublin City Hall, carrying banners saying 'No more Eviction' and 'Education for our Children'.¹⁶ Sinn Féin were attracted by Puxon's radical politics and participated in a protest march to Landsdowne Park. An IRA 'flying column' on bicycles rode ahead of the wagons to demolish concrete bollards blocking a gate. These allies were not necessarily advantageous as Special Branch officers subsequently kept Puxon and other prominent figures under surveillance.¹⁷ In February 1964, Grattan Puxon was arrested on a charge of possessing explosives. Fr Fehily believed that Puxon had encouraged Travellers to smuggle weapons across the border¹⁸ while Acton explains the arrest thus;

Some extremist Republican bodies had been amongst the supporters of the Travellers' movement, and demanded reciprocal help; when Grattan Puxon

¹⁴ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 206, col. 1272 (12 December 1963).

¹⁵ Thomas Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change: the Development of Ethnic Ideology and Pressure Politics among British Gypsies from Victorian Reformism to Romany Nationalism* (London and Boston, 1974), p 155; Grattan Puxon, 'The Romani Movement: Rebirth and the 1st Romani Congress in Retrospect' in Thomas Acton (ed.), *Scholarship and the Gypsy Struggle: Commitment in Romani Studies* (Hertfordshire, 2000), p 94.

¹⁶ MacDonald and Keenan were themselves Travellers. Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, p 156.

¹⁷ Puxon, 'The Romani Movement' in Acton (ed.), *Scholarship*, p 95.

¹⁸ Interview, Fr Thomas Fehily, 8 May 2001.

refused to support some of their activities, they probably informed the police of explosives which had been hidden in the back garden of a house still under Puxon's ownership.¹⁹

Puxon was given bail but the charges were not dropped for 16 months.

The numbers camping at the Ballyfermot site had increased since 1960, when Joseph Donohue had pleaded with members of the Commission on Itinerancy for an end to evictions.²⁰ In December 1963, Travellers established a camp school, Naomh Cristóir (St Christopher, the patron saint of travellers), that was opened by the grand old man of Irish radical politics, Peadar O'Donnell. To applause from gathered families, O'Donnell said, 'This building is a pathetic gesture by the poor to help the children of the poor'.²¹ As Dublin Corporation intended to clear the campsite in early January, the school was a gesture of defiance. Puxon was making skilful use of the politics of passive resistance and succeeded in raising public interest in the issue. The Department of Local Government tried to persuade Dublin Corporation to leave the campsite undisturbed until St Patrick's Day, when it was believed that Travellers would move of their own volition.

The Local Government view is that the itinerants will move of their own accord and that stern measures by the Corporation, in addition to being unnecessary in the long run, will undoubtedly give rise to publicity and to allegation of inhuman behaviour, especially as the papers and TV appear to be poised for any story emerging from the situation.²²

Despite the intervention of central government, the Corporation evicted approximately 150 Travellers on 7 January 1964. A cavalcade of caravans and carts left peacefully and settled on another site a few miles away. Joseph Donohue told the gathered reporters 'We will not resist but we will camp on one site after another until the Government do something about the Itinerant's Commission'.²³ That the Corporation intended to use the Ballyfermot site for housing purposes further increased the poignancy of the eviction.²⁴ Dublin Corporation officials pointed out that they possessed no power to

¹⁹ Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, p 156.

²⁰ Puxon, 'The Romani Movement' in Acton (ed), *Scholarship*, p 94. Puxon remembers Donohue's meeting as 1963 but the Commission's report gives the date as 1960. *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 30.

²¹ *Irish Independent*, 31 December 1963.

²² Note, Ó Nualláin to Taoiseach, 1 January 1964, DT S 17506 A/63, 1994 release, NAI.

²³ *Irish Times*, 8 January 1964. The new camp was broken up a few days later, *Irish Times*, 15 January 1964.

²⁴ *Irish Independent*, 31 December 1963. In the Dáil, the Minister said the land was reserved for industrial use. *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 206, col. 1272 (12 December 1963).

allocate land for Traveller campsites. The Corporation 'could not make this move until the report of the commission on itinerancy had been adopted by the Dáil and Order had been made by the Minister for Local Government authorising local councils to set up camping sites for itinerants'.²⁵ The attitude of the Department of Local Government suggested that major statutory changes were needed before sanitary authorities could provide campsites for Travellers. Yet, as Noel Browne pointed out, campsites could be built using public funds when Dublin slum dwellers needed emergency accommodation and campsites for holiday makers had been provided across the country. Browne asked the House and the Government to examine their conscience.

How is it that we can take these views that are extraordinarily partisan, and at the time closely related to the racism and the evil of apartheid? The difference between us and them is they do not need the amenities we need. Their children do not need education or the old people do not need care when they grow old.²⁶

When the minister made his long awaited announcement on the implementation of the Commission's report, he recommended no statutory changes. The circular issued to all local authorities drew their attention to the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act which had been on the statute books since 7 August 1963, the month the Commission submitted its report.

In November 1964, the Department of Local Government issued a circular to all local authorities, outlining its policy and intentions as follows:

(a) An unpaid Advisory Committee to advise Government Departments on measures to promote the rehabilitation and absorption of itinerants will be established by the Minister for Local Government.

(b) Encouragement will be given to the setting up of local voluntary committees which will help in the resettlement of itinerant families and to the employment of professional social workers by local authorities. The Minister for Local Government will give financial assistance to such committees and to local authorities for these purposes.

(c) Pending the solution of the difficulties associated with the housing of itinerants, local authorities will be advised to provide fully serviced camping sites for the accommodation of itinerants. State subsidy will be given to local authorities at a rate not exceeding two-thirds of the loan charges on capital costs of such sites and subsidy of the normal rate for the provision of sanitary services will be payable in respect of halting places with minimum facilities for the accommodation of small numbers of caravans

²⁵ *Irish Independent*, 31 December 1963.

²⁶ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 210, col. 394 (2 June 1964).

(d) Local authorities will be exhorted to acquaint itinerants of the health services available to them, to encourage them to avail of these services as much as possible and to arrange for regular visiting of encampments by health personnel.

(e) Provision will be made for giving special educational facilities both primary and vocational to the children of itinerants and for the erection of special camp schools where necessary.

(f) Any difficulties which may arise in the way of payment of social welfare allowances to itinerants will as far as possible be eliminated.²⁷

Local authorities were reminded that Section 77 (2) of the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act 1963 gave them powers to establish camp sites. Section 16 of the Act provided the basis for combined action for local authorities. The management of the sites would be a matter for each responsible authority but the memorandum suggested the recommendations of the Commission on Itinerancy be followed as far as possible. Noticeably, no White Paper on the Commission's observations was ever issued. Neither was new legislation enabling local authorities to develop Traveller accommodation facilities drafted. Since 1963, local authorities had possessed the powers to provide publicly owned facilities for camping Travellers. Yet while the government considered its response to the Commission's report, local authorities refused to provide facilities for Travellers because they claimed they were not empowered to do so. The Department of Local Government never contradicted this, and indeed, the minister expressly supported this claim. That legislation enabling local authorities to provide campsites had been available - but not used - suggests a reluctance in the coordinating department to wholeheartedly accept the Commission's recommendations on accommodation. Their long consideration of the report and the damp squib that was the implementation policy did not bode well. Despite the Taoiseach's ready acceptance of the Commission's report in 1963, the Department of Local Government had allowed the settlement issue to recede. Local authorities were even more reluctant than central government to tackle the issue, as the response of the General Council of County Councils (GCCC) demonstrated.

The opinions expressed by the GCCC, a local authority representative body, can be taken as indicative of nationwide political response. After the circulation of the above recommendations, the GCCC wrote to the Taoiseach. GCCC members believed that the 'problem of itinerancy is not one for the Department of Local Government and

²⁷ Secretary to each Sanitary Authority, Circular No. L.14/64, 4 November 1964, GCCC files.

the Local Authorities alone, but that other Government Departments are also involved, particularly, Health, Justice and Education'. Clearly anxious to evade responsibility for decisions which were unpopular, local authorities considered 'itinerancy a national rather than a local problem'.²⁸ The Minister for Local Government reassured the GCCC that Travellers were not the sole responsibility of the local authorities. He reiterated the importance of voluntary organisations to the process of rehabilitation.²⁹ On the point of coordination of effort, the Minister pointed out the importance of the Advisory Committee on Itinerancy,³⁰ which held its first meeting in May 1965.

Advisory Committee on Itinerancy

The Commission had proposed the appointment of an advisory committee to liaise between all the departments concerned with aspects of Traveller life. The Committee would also provide a point of contact between voluntary groups helping Travellers and all branches of government. Its members were appointed to advise on the implementation of policy and 'to assist in gaining the support of the public generally for rehabilitation measures'.³¹ Justice Brian Walsh chaired a committee comprising of:

Fr Thomas Fehily, Member of the Commission on Itinerancy

Mr Jeremiah Buttimer, County Cork

Dr Anthony Eustace, County Medical Officer, County Meath

Dr Patrick J. Fleming, Dublin

Mrs G.O. Simms, Dublin

Mrs Desmond Foley, Carlow

Mr Dermot P. Honan, Ennis, County Clare

Mr Thomas King, County Galway

Mr Thomas Mc Donagh, County Louth

Mr Thomas J. McManus, City Manager, County Sligo

Miss Mary O'Connor, Department of Local Government

Miss Eileen McArdle, Department of Local Government.³²

Those members whose affiliation is not listed represented voluntary organisations and local authorities. The voluntary groups represented were the Legion of Mary, the

²⁸ Rúnáí GCCC to Private Secretary to an Taoiseach, 8 June 1965, GCCC files.

²⁹ Rúnáí GCCC to Private Secretary to an Taoiseach, 8 June 1965, GCCC files.

³⁰ Rúnáí GCCC to Private Secretary to an Taoiseach, 8 June 1965, GCCC files.

³¹ Rúnáí GCCC to Private Secretary to an Taoiseach, 8 June 1965, GCCC files.

³² *Irish Press*, 22 May 1965 and *Report of the Department of Local Government 1965-6*, p 34.

Society of St Vincent de Paul, Muintir na Tíre and the Irish Countrywomen's Association. The Departments of Health, Social Welfare, Justice and Education appointed liaison officers to the committee.³³

Mr Paudge Brennan stressed that Travellers would not be compelled to abandon the travelling way of life. Authorised camp sites would enable Traveller children to attend school while remedying 'to some extent the features of the itinerants way of life which was a real cause of irritation and annoyance to the settled population'.³⁴ Forced settlement was never advocated by the Commission, but some of its recommendations would have made nomadism more difficult. Proposals on penalising camping within the radius of an official halting site or camp site formed part of a carrot and stick approach to Traveller accommodation. Local authorities who provided facilities for some Travellers were rewarded with punitive powers to punish those who persisted in travelling and camping. Yet even a safeguard against accommodating all Travellers could not induce local authorities to provide facilities.

Travellers' Voices

Contacts with the Advisory Committee on Itinerancy had given important legitimacy to Puxon's Dublin Committee of the Itinerant Action Campaign. The publicity surrounding this Traveller-led committee had made it impossible to ignore. Those charged with solving the 'itinerant problem' believed this agitation was damaging and sought to end it by means of a 'frank bargain'.

In exchange for giving us an interview at the next session of the Advisory Committee to hear our plan for organising Itinerants' Committees and possibly following this with close cooperation in which we would arrange direct meetings between the Itinerants' Committee and the Advisory Committee, they ask us to stop our propaganda both in Ireland and in other countries.³⁵

Puxon was not enthusiastic about the bargain but concluded 'if we are to penetrate the Establishment and make the travellers' voice heard we must make this bargain'.³⁶ With advice from international bodies such as the International Evangelical Gypsy Mission and the Communauté Mondiale Gitane (CMG - World Gypsy Community), Puxon and his associates sought to turn their *ad hoc* attack on Dublin Corporation into a national

³³ Department of Local Government to Rúnaf GCCC, 3 August 1965, GCCC files.

³⁴ *Irish Press*, 22 May 1965.

³⁵ Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, p 158.

³⁶ Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, p 158.

campaign and organisation'.³⁷ Puxon felt that as a non-Catholic Englishman and a pacifist, he was particularly unpopular with the government and church.

But my disclosure of the appalling conditions and plight of the Travelling people, while making me almost 'Enemy Number One' has caused the Establishment to tackle the problem and do something substantial to assist the families, and in effect, grant them their rights.³⁸

Here, Puxon was crediting himself with forcing the government to tackle the issue of Traveller accommodation when the Commission had been appointed before he established the Itinerant Action Campaign. His activities had kept the issue in the public eye and forced people to notice that Travellers had rights, but he was not solely responsible for drawing official attention to the plight of Travellers. In July 1965, Puxon campaigned in the West of Ireland with Lawrence Ward,³⁹ 'last of the bare fist pugilists to carry the title King of the Tinkers'.⁴⁰ (Ward's crowning is described in chapter 1) Puxon hoped to camouflage his mobilisation activities, conducting the First National Convention of the Irish Travellers' Community in secret. It was to be held at the Ballinasloe Horse Fair, an annual event that attracted Travellers from all over Ireland and Britain. There, 'responsible and leading' Traveller men from all over Ireland would meet with Lawrence Ward and John Connors, the Dublin Chairman, to discuss a plan of action. They would meet Vanko Rouda, a prominent Romani activist who would outline 'how the fight for rights is progressing in other countries'.⁴¹ Puxon hoped those attending the meeting would become trained leaders in each region in Ireland, reporting trouble to the Dublin Committee that would then liaise with the government Advisory Committee. In addition, the same men would become members of the official Itinerants' Committee which he hoped would be established by the Advisory Committee. Puxon's strategy is best explained with an extended quotation:

In this way, without announcing that we have set up the Irish Travellers' Community and thus, at this delicate stage upsetting the Establishment, we gain effective control ... we will be only one step away from establishing an officially recognised Irish Travellers' Committee instead of the present 'rebel Irish Travellers' Community' which is not recognised.

The value of having official recognition is that the Travellers' own suggestions about the solving of their problems will be heard and probably largely accepted,

³⁷ Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, p 157.

³⁸ Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, p 158.

³⁹ Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, p 157.

⁴⁰ Puxon, 'The Romani Movement' in Acton (ed.), *Scholarship*, p 97.

⁴¹ Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, p 159.

instead of a bureaucratic 'solution' being imposed from above as an act of charity. Also if the Government and Church plans come to a stop, we can re-open our attack with far more strength and get them moving again.⁴²

Puxon had even more ambitious aims for Traveller action. He was anxious to formalise ties between Romani and Traveller activists. The presence of Vanko Raudo would demonstrate that Irish Travellers were affiliated with the international Romani community and capable of mobilising effective support from other countries. This support raised the threat of bad publicity abroad which Puxon believed was potentially damaging to Ireland's image as a UN member state and a tourist destination.⁴³ Since this contact could not be formally announced, the union between Romani and Traveller would be symbolically expressed in the adoption by Raudo of two of Ward's grandchildren.

The Advisory Committee opposed the holding of the meeting but finally agreed to send Fr Fehily as a representative.⁴⁴ The Ballinasloe convention was not a harmonious event, bringing about a 'permanent personal estrangement' between Fr Fehily and Grattan Puxon.⁴⁵ The adoption ceremony did not proceed after Fr Fehily warned the Wards that participation in a Romany ritual would break Roman Catholic baptismal vows.⁴⁶ A militant 'Travellers' Committee' was set up after the Ballinasloe convention but it could not implement Puxon's ambitious programme. Acton's analysis places the blame with the 'Establishment' which frustrated action 'partly by a policy of judicious co-option of a very few selected Travellers and well-wishers onto Government-sponsored bodies, and partly by harassment of individual agitators like Puxon and Connors.'⁴⁷ Some Travellers cooperated with officialdom but they were not the individuals favoured by Puxon and his group. The extent to which Puxon represented all Travellers is difficult to discern, but his Dublin base would have distanced him from a significant portion of the community. The failure of the Itinerant Action Campaign to spread beyond Dublin could be reflective of the limits of his political agenda. Even within Dublin, Joseph Donohue in the Cherry Orchard camp

⁴² Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, p 159.

⁴³ Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, p 160.

⁴⁴ Acton claims that there was a diplomatic effort to prevent the international representatives from attending; Department of Foreign Affairs' files might contain some information on this. Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, p 160.

⁴⁵ Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, p 160.

⁴⁶ Puxon, 'The Romani Movement' in Acton (ed.), *Scholarship*, p 97.

⁴⁷ Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, p 160.

refuted Puxon's right to speak on behalf of Travellers saying 'You can't have people speaking for the tinkers who aren't tinkers. They don't know what kind of a life it is'.⁴⁸ Disregarding the importance of Roman Catholicism and the respect in which priests were held by Travellers was almost certainly a fatal mistake. Puxon was told that 'he personally, was the major obstacle to fruitful co-operation between the Government, the Church and the Travellers'.⁴⁹ In early 1966, he left Ireland to pursue his policy of Romani activism in Britain. Joseph Donohue and John Connors also emigrated to Britain. Puxon remembers it thus

Charity, albeit on a scale unseen before was still the Tinker's portion. They would remain politically impoverished for a decade to come...In some vital respects I had failed, defeated by the outdated paternalism of the Catholic Church.⁵⁰

This short-lived episode of political mobilisation in Traveller society is not mentioned by Irish scholars, who have ignored Acton's and Puxon's writings. Since both men have worked together in Romany organisations in Britain, they understandably present a partial and biased version of events.⁵¹ Nevertheless, the significance of Traveller activism in the Itinerant Action Campaign should not be dismissed. Though it foundered after the leading figures left Ireland, other politicised Travellers later took their place. The settlement policy also forced increasing numbers of Travellers to interact with local and central government to obtain suitable facilities. Like slum dwellers who became local authority tenants, Travellers were politicised by the intervention of local government.

After the dissolution of the embryonic Traveller's rights movement, the government and voluntary organisations began to implement a settlement policy without any official input from the Travelling community. The following section will outline the response of local authorities and groups to the Report of the Commission on Itinerancy. Exactly what settlement meant divided those concerned as some believed in housing and others in halting sites as a step towards final settlement in houses. Firstly, I will outline the response of a specific council, Cork Corporation. According to the

⁴⁸ Signs outside the camp denied Puxon's authority to represent the camp residents. *Irish Times*, 10 January 1966.

⁴⁹ Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, p 161.

⁵⁰ Puxon, 'The Romani Movement' in Acton (ed.), *Scholarship*, p 97.

⁵¹ Acton also dominates the academic discourse on Travellers and Gypsies, being Professor of Romani Studies at the University of Greenwich.

Commission report, an unusually small number of Travellers camped in and around Cork city and, unlike Limerick, the numbers did not increase markedly during the winter months.⁵² The failure of the Corporation to accommodate even a proportionately small number of Traveller is instructive. Local authorities with smaller budgets and larger numbers faced a more difficult task.

Cork city: the Implementation of the Settlement Policy

While the Commission on Itinerancy gathered information and analysed the position of Travellers in Irish society, local government continued to break up encampments when settled people complained. The remedies used were similar to earlier decades: compulsory purchase, redevelopment or landscaping and court orders. In Cork, campsites adjoining Corporation property on the north side of the city were cleared by court order.⁵³ To prevent Travellers returning, the Corporation erected concrete posts on the edges of the footpath. This did not prove effective and a number of caravans returned. The City Engineer proposed developing the open spaces in the area under the Employment and Emergency Scheme Vote, a scheme intended to provide employment for men on the dole. The redevelopment consisted of placing a tubular steel rail around each area to prevent trespass by Travellers and dumping by other citizens. This was intended to be a short term solution; a compulsory purchase order to bring private land under the Corporation's control was to be drafted. In order to completely eradicate camping by Travellers, the Corporation intended to 'erect houses where trespass by itinerants occurs'.⁵⁴ One councillor asked whether the Manager could report on the provision of a designated campsite with water and sanitation facilities for Travellers. The Lord Mayor (Gus Healy of Fianna Fáil) replied that the Corporation had 'no such area available'.⁵⁵ The open spaces about to be purchased by the authority for the express purpose of ending illegal camping would have been the obvious choice. In common with Dublin Corporation, the Cork authorities were not going to provide campsites until told by the Department of Local Government to do so.

⁵² *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 36.

⁵³ Minutes of the Quarterly meeting of the County Borough Council, 13 October 1964, p 420, CP/C/A 22, CAI.

⁵⁴ Minutes of the Quarterly meeting of the County Borough Council, 13 October 1964, p 420, CP/C/A 22, CAI.

⁵⁵ Minutes of the Quarterly meeting of the County Borough Council, 13 October 1964, p 422, CP/C/A 22, CAI.

Another important facet of the public reaction to Traveller campsites was the eradication of open spaces in residential areas. Cork city today possesses few open spaces available for public recreation. In 1969, a city covering 9,783 acres (350 of which were water) had 186 acres of public open space.⁵⁶ This situation had occurred though the Corporation had long been aware of the necessity for maintaining open spaces. In 1953, the Council adopted a proposal recommending the preservation of 3-4 acres of open space per 1,000 people. This recommendation was borne in mind by the Corporation when development applications were made,⁵⁷ but it appears to have been more an aspiration than a guideline. Calculated on the basis of the 1966 population, Cork city had 0.001 acres per 1,000 people.⁵⁸ Industrial development⁵⁹ and public housing⁶⁰ ate into public open space, but problems with unauthorised camping exacerbated by political reluctance to provide campsites ensured public and private space in residential areas was closely supervised or built up. Arguably, the failure to provide facilities for Travellers affected the allocation of amenities for all citizens.

Once Cork Corporation received a memorandum from the Department of Local Government on the recommendations of the Commission on Itinerancy, the Manager was asked to report on measures to implement the proposals.⁶¹ The City Architect, Town Planning Officer and City Engineer submitted reports in February 1965, outlining plans for a camp site in Churchfield, a public housing suburb on the north side of the city.⁶² Residents of Churchfield appealed against the camping of itinerants in their area.⁶³ When the Housing Committee considered the proposed campsite, they rejected it, asking that 'the officers examine the matter again and make suggestions for the provision of a suitable alternative site in the city or within 5 miles of its perimeter'.⁶⁴

⁵⁶ This figure excluded the city dump and small strips of land under 1 acre in extent. *Cork City Development Plan 1969*, p 11 and p 118.

⁵⁷ *Cork City Development Plan 1969*, p 113.

⁵⁸ In 1966 the population of Cork city, including the suburbs, was 125,283. Vaughan and Fitzpatrick (eds), *Irish Historical Statistics Population 1821-1971*, p 44.

⁵⁹ The 130 acre City Park had been leased to Fords in 1917, *Cork City Development Plan 1969*, p 117.

⁶⁰ Gouldings Glen was swallowed up by public housing in the 1970s.

⁶¹ Report of the Housing Committee, 3 November 1964 p 429 in Minutes of Meeting of the County Borough Council, 10 November 1964, CP/C/A 22, CAI.

⁶² Report of the General Purposes Committee, 16 March 1965 p 492, in Minutes of Meeting of the County Borough Council, 23 March 1965, CP/C/A 22, CAI.

⁶³ Minutes of the Quarterly Meeting of the County Borough Council, 13 April 1965, p 497, CP/C/A 22, CAI.

⁶⁴ Report of the Housing Committee, 6 April 1965 p 501, in Minutes of Meeting of County Borough Council, 13 April 1965, CP/C/A 22, CAI.

The planning officers had been overruled by local tenants and their public representatives. As the Commission had anticipated, opposition from residents to Traveller accommodation was fierce. This was hardly surprising given the experience of local authorities who had attempted to house Travellers before the settlement programme was adopted. On one occasion, settled people on a housing waiting list refused to accept tenancies because Travellers were accommodated in the estate.⁶⁵

The Department of Local Government circulated local authorities in June 1965 about the Advisory Committee on Itinerants. The Council voted unanimously that the City Manager forward an analysis of the situation in Cork to the committee. The memorandum sparked a discussion about Travellers among council members. Councillor Mrs Dowdall asked whether any facilities for Travellers were included in the development plan for the Cork area.⁶⁶ This pertinent question was sidestepped by the Chairman, who informed the Council that the planning officers were examining suitable sites.⁶⁷ The Manager, Walter McEvelly, informed the members that the officers of the Corporation and Cork County Council would discuss the situation in their respective areas.⁶⁸ The tone of this Council discussion on Travellers was quite moderate. Councillor T.P. Leahy felt that 'it was desirable to take action on the rehabilitation and incorporation into the community of itinerants and [the] education of their children'.⁶⁹ His contribution illustrates the extent to which the language of absorption promulgated by the Commission on Itinerancy had entered the political arena.

In the summer of 1965, Cork Corporation and County Council discussed the provision of accommodation for Travellers. The County and City Managers, and their officials agreed that the City Architect and Engineer would confer with their opposite numbers in the County, and the Chief Health Inspector, to submit suggestions on 'sites for consideration for both authorities'.⁷⁰ The report on their discussions was placed before the Housing Committee in November. Cork Corporation, Cork County Council and Cork Health Authority believed that 'a policy of re-settling itinerants in permanent

⁶⁵ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 60.

⁶⁶ A development plan for the city area was being drafted in accordance with the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act 1963. The first plan, published in 1969, made no reference to Traveller accommodation. See *Cork City Development Plan 1969*.

⁶⁷ Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 22 June 1965, p 542, CP/C/A 22, CAI.

⁶⁸ Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 22 June 1965, p 543, CP/C/A 22, CAI.

⁶⁹ Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 22 June 1965, p 543, CP/C/A 22, CAI.

⁷⁰ Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 24 August 1965, p 573, CP/C/A 22, CAI.

homes over a period of years should be adopted'.⁷¹ The County Council had experience of housing Travellers, who were 'gradually being integrated into the community'.⁷² The City Manager asked the Council to 'agree in principle to grant tenancies of its houses to itinerants who are regarded as suitable for housing'.⁷³ This agreement was not strictly necessary, since people living in poor conditions, Traveller or settled, were already eligible for public housing. Interestingly, McEvelly sought agreement 'in principle' suggesting that the Council would be asked to agree to each individual tenancy. This would have been a significant deviation from normal practice, since tenancies were allocated by housing officials rather than elected representatives. While houses were allocated to Traveller families, they would need interim accommodation. The Manager recommended the provision of a fully serviced campsite at a suitable location. Three locations were suggested: Old Whitechurch Road, Killeens Road and Ballyvolane Road. These sites were all on the northern side of the city, close to public housing developments. It was further recommended that the Corporation 'confine itself to the problem as it now exists and should be careful not to take any action which might attract itinerants to the area'.⁷⁴ The Corporation was determined not to provide for more than the 36 families camped in and around the city. This represented approximately 38% of the average number of Traveller families counted in Cork county in 1960 and 1961. Since Cork city held 35% of the county's population, this did not represent a disproportionate burden.⁷⁵ The Housing Committee deferred a decision on the report until its members had inspected the proposed sites personally. Once again, the elected representatives were unusually involved in the ostensibly apolitical task of locating a public facility. In Ireland, the management system of local government was designed to remove patronage from the hands of apparently venial elected representatives. Thus the Chief Medical Officer assessed the suitability of dwellings for human habitation, while the Manager and his officials chose appropriate sites for suburban public housing

⁷¹ Report of the Housing Committee, 2 November 1965, p 608, in Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 9 November 1965, CP/C/A 22, CAI.

⁷² Report of the Housing Committee, 2 November 1965 p 608, in Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 9 November 1965, CP/C/A 22, CAI.

⁷³ Report of the Housing Committee, 2 November 1965 p 608, in Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 9 November 1965, CP/C/A 22, CAI.

⁷⁴ Report of the Housing Committee, 2 November 1965 p 609, in Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 9 November 1965, CP/C/A 22, CAI.

⁷⁵ Average number of Traveller families in Cork county calculated from figures in *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, Appendix I. Cork city and county population figures for 1961 in Vaughan and Fitzpatrick (eds), *Irish Historical Statistics Population 1821-1971*, p 20.

estates. The marginal importance of elected representatives to the governance of their city was demonstrated in the analysis of street trading in chapter 2. Yet on the issue of Traveller accommodation, the Manager was actively seeking the involvement of the Council. This change can perhaps be explained by the different style of Philip Monahan's successor, Walter McEvelly. Monahan has been described as 'autocratic' though his disdain for the elected members seemed to stem from 1936 when the Council ignored his passionate defence of a rates increase.⁷⁶

The powerlessness of the Corporation to prevent illegal camping was further highlighted at this meeting of the Housing Committee when members discussed 'the annoyance caused to residents' in the Knockpogue Ave/Closes Road area by Traveller encampments. The Manager explained that 'the remedies open to the Corporation were no ultimate solution to the problem'.⁷⁷ Moving Travellers on from the area had already cost £300 to £400. Moving Travellers on was perhaps the one area of local government where money was no object. However, McEvelly believed that the acquisition and development of a suitable camp site could take at least eighteen months. The Committee did agree to recommend the Manager's report to the Council.⁷⁸ When the Council considered the report, the class implications of the sites chosen were highlighted by the contribution of Alderman Allen. He suggested that camp sites be located in the Blackrock and Model Farm Road areas, well-heeled Cork middle-class suburbs. The Council did not agree to this amendment and approved the locations proposed by the Manager.⁷⁹

Yet when the matter was again raised in January 1966, council members contested the Manager's policy. Alderman Allen believed he had not agreed to a settlement policy and stated 'Preference for rehousing should not be given to itinerants over citizens who had been waiting rehousing for a considerable time'.⁸⁰ Only four families were considered suitable for immediate housing; hardly a threat to the chances

⁷⁶ His appeal to the Council pointed out that pressure exerted by big business should be ignored by democratically elected representatives. Philip Monahan to Lord Mayor and Members of the County Borough Council, 24 February 1936, CP/Files/42, CAI. The Council refused to set the rate at 22 shillings per pound, an increase of one shilling from the previous year. Philip Monahan to Lord Mayor and Members of the County Borough Council, 24 March 1936, CP/Files/42, CAI.

⁷⁷ Report of the Housing Committee, 2 November 1965 p 609, in Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 9 November 1965, CP/C/A 22, CAI.

⁷⁸ Report of the Housing Committee, 7 December 1965 p 628, in Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 14 December 1965, CP/C/A 22, CAI.

⁷⁹ Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 14 December 1965 p 629, CP/C/A 22, CAI.

⁸⁰ Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 25 January 1966 p 15, CP/C/A 23, CAI.

of people on the waiting list. These families would require the help of voluntary organisations after settlement, which the St Vincent de Paul was willing to provide. Travellers had received tenancies prior to the settlement programme, an 'experiment' described as a mixed success.⁸¹ While Councillor Healy called for a camp 'to screen, over a period of time, those itinerants who wish to settle down',⁸² Councillor O'Donovan pointed out the difficulties of building such a camp. He believed that 'every rate payer in the vicinity of such a camp would justifiably object as the value of property in the vicinity would be seriously affected'.⁸³ Councillor Barrett suggested that any camp be located at least three miles away from a built up area, an isolation policy the Commission report specifically advised against. As the discussion concluded the Lord Mayor (Con Desmond, Labour Party) struck an uncooperative attitude. He believed that 'the Corporation could not be expected to solve the problem on its own. He thought that the Minister for Local Government should take up the rehousing of itinerants with all local authorities and the Corporation would then know how many it would be responsible for'.⁸⁴ It was an odd request since the Minister had already asked authorities to draft housing policies for Travellers. Determining the numbers of houses or sites needed was, of necessity, a local concern. Central government had never surveyed the demand in a specific area for public housing because it was not responsible for housing provision. The Lord Mayor was hoping to avoid the responsibilities of Cork Corporation, or at least to delay their acceptance. After an extended discussion revealing many different viewpoints among the councillors, the Council reaffirmed the decision taken on December 1965. It also asked the Manager, in consultation with voluntary bodies to take a census of Travellers camped in or near the city.⁸⁵ Members of the St Vincent de Paul met with Corporation officials in late 1966, but the outcome was not reported to the Council.⁸⁶

In September 1966, Councillor Bermingham placed a motion before the Council 'That Cork Corporation take practical steps to provide suitable facilities for itinerants

⁸¹ Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 25 January 1966 p 15, CP/C/A 23, CAI.

⁸² Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 25 January 1966 p 15, CP/C/A 23, CAI.

⁸³ Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 25 January 1966 p 15, CP/C/A 23, CAI.

⁸⁴ Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 25 January 1966 p 16, CP/C/A 23, CAI.

⁸⁵ Minutes of the Meeting of the County Borough Council, 25 January 1966 p 16, CP/C/A 23, CAI.

⁸⁶ Minutes of the Preliminary Estimates Meeting, 22 November 1966 p 155, CP/C/A 23, CAI.

within the City Boundary'.⁸⁷ He told the Council that Travellers had been 'rejected by society and were being kept constantly on the move'.⁸⁸ Bermingham called on the Corporation to 'acknowledge its responsibility towards them' by housing as many as possible and providing a suitable camp with sanitary facilities.⁸⁹ Alderman Allen supported the motion but advocated placing any camp away from built up areas. Councillors O'Donovan and Barrett supported this suggestion. On the other hand, Councillor Stanley thought that a camp should be in a central location as children needed to be close to schools. The Manager defended the Corporation's policy on Travellers, saying that it had 'accepted responsibility for the assimilation of itinerants within the community but this would take some time'.⁹⁰ Officials were still examining possible places for camp sites. Despite McEvilly's defence, the motion was adopted by the Council.

Traveller accommodation was again before the Housing Committee in January 1967 when members were asked to approve the allocation of tenancies to five families. Councillor Barrett believed that the Committee should not consider the matter as 'the time was not opportune for such an action'. After a general discussion, his motion failed by 3 votes to 12.⁹¹ When the issue of tenancies arose again, the residents of the areas concerned had mobilised themselves to protest at the allocation of tenancies to Travellers. Residents of Adelaide Street and Frenches Quay asked that the decision be rescinded.⁹² The manner in which the families were screened for housing was again outlined.⁹³ The North Main Street Traders' Association also concerned itself with the allocation of houses in Adelaide Street to Travellers.⁹⁴ After (unminuted) discussion, it was agreed to house two families, one on Frenches Quay and one on Adelaide Street. The other two families listed would be housed 'by the Corporation in the ordinary way'⁹⁵ and no other Travellers were to be housed in Adelaide Street. Presumably, the

⁸⁷ Minutes of Meeting of the County Borough Council, 13 September 1966 p 175, CP/C/A 23, CAI.

⁸⁸ Minutes of Meeting of the County Borough Council, 13 September 1966 p 175, CP/C/A 23, CAI.

⁸⁹ Minutes of Meeting of the County Borough Council, 13 September 1966 p 175, CP/C/A 23, CAI.

⁹⁰ Minutes of Meeting of the County Borough Council, 13 September 1966 p 175, CP/C/A 23, CAI.

⁹¹ Report of the Housing Committee, 17 January 1967 p 182, in Minutes of Meeting of the County Borough Council, 24 January 1967, CP/C/A 23, CAI.

⁹² Adelaide Street was represented by Messrs Fitzpatrick, Webb and Peglar; Frenches Quay by Mr J. Forde, Miss O'Callaghan, Mrs Brennan and Mr H. Forde.

⁹³ Report of the Finance Committee, 31 January 1967 p 185, in Minutes of County Borough Council 14 February 1967, CP/C/A 23, CAI.

⁹⁴ Report of the General Purposes Committee, 7 February 1967 p 188, CP/C/A 23, CAI.

⁹⁵ Report of the General Purposes Committee, 7 February 1967 p 188, CP/C/A 23, CAI.

members intended that two families would be housed from the waiting list rather than under separate circumstances. This decision was contrary to a recommendation from the Commission that asked authorities to give Travellers priority in housing.⁹⁶ When this decision was placed before the Council, Councillors Barrett and Allen proposed an amendment to the decision. Barrett believed

that the housing of itinerants in the Frenches Quay and Adelaide Street area was unfair to both the residents and to the itinerants themselves as hostility and bad relations between the two parties were inevitable. The itinerant problem should be tackled on a national basis. Itinerants should be put into a community together and only when they have proved themselves as ready for integration with the citizens generally should they be rehoused.⁹⁷

The amendment was comprehensively defeated, 3 votes to 11. The members agreed that the housing allocation was the 'first genuine attempt' to integrate Travellers into the settled community.⁹⁸ Settled people who constantly called for the 'itinerant problem' to be eradicated objected vociferously when settlement was proposed in their area. A residents' group, the Churchfield Development Association complained of the 'danger and annoyance' presented by Travellers.⁹⁹ In response to this complaint members sought to take further punitive action, asking the Corporation to consider increasing powers over wandering animals and altering approach roads.¹⁰⁰ This was not drastic enough for Councillor Leahy who moved a motion that 'Cork Corporation hereby instruct the City Manager to draft a byelaw prohibiting the camping of itinerants within the Gurrabraher-Churchfield area and to report on the enforcement of such a byelaw'.¹⁰¹ Leahy's reasons for the motion were that 'the people of Gurrabraher were at the end of their tether' and oddly, 'for the sake of the itinerants who were living in the most unhealthy conditions'.¹⁰² Leahy reasoned that the adoption of the motion would mean that Travellers in the city 'must be provided with suitable sites, sanitation and

⁹⁶ *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*, p 61. Also see chapter 4.

⁹⁷ General Minutes, 7 February 1967 p 190, CP/C/A 23, CAI.

⁹⁸ General Minutes, 7 February 1967 p 191, CP/C/A 23, CAI

⁹⁹ Report of the Finance Committee, 30 May 1967 in Minutes of Meeting of County Borough Council, 13 June 1967 p 231, CP/C/A 23, CAI. The deputation consisted of Fr Walsh, Mr W. Rogers, Mrs Kelleher and Hurley, Messrs T. O'Driscoll, D. O'Brien, J. Twohig and J. O'Driscoll.

¹⁰⁰ Report of the Finance Committee, 30 May 1967 in Minutes of Meeting of County Borough Council, 13 June 1967 p 231, CP/C/A 23, CAI.

¹⁰¹ Minutes of Meeting of County Borough Council, 13 June 1967 p 239, CP/C/A 23, CAI.

¹⁰² Minutes of Meeting of County Borough Council, 13 June 1967 p 239, CP/C/A 23, CAI.

water'.¹⁰³ This was dubious logic since the Council was unable to approve a location for a camp site, but the motion succeeded.

Plans to build three halting sites in Cork city ran into considerable middle-class opposition in 1968. The Department of Local Government held a sworn inquiry into the compulsory purchase orders made by the Corporation for land in Ballyvolane and Bishopstown.¹⁰⁴ The Corporation intended to develop a third site on land it already owned in the Blackrock area. McEvilly told the inquiry that the Corporation had turned to compulsory purchase orders because it had concluded that sites for Traveller accommodation could not be obtained by agreement.¹⁰⁵ The halting sites would form part of the city's plan for accommodating Travellers; by May 1968, it had already housed 13 families.¹⁰⁶ Though residents from both parts of the city objected,¹⁰⁷ Bishopstown householders were the only group to hire a solicitor to state their case. Mr Charles Hennessy represented the Melbourne Estate Residents Association and the 300 members of the Bishopstown Development Association. Mr Hennessy asked the Manager to agree that the value of property in an area with a halting site would be lowered. McEvilly insisted 'that to imagine this was to suppose that the camp would be a nuisance', whereas it would be under control and well supervised.¹⁰⁸ He told the inquiry that Travellers on sites were eventually destined for public housing, as the Commission on Itinerancy had envisaged. McEvilly further stated that there was no corporation housing in Bishopstown and there were no plans to develop public housing estates there. The line of questioning then taken by Mr Hennessy revealed, in a frank and forthright manner, the deep class consciousness engendered by public and private housing schemes. He suggested that 'it might be a much better proposition to place the camp nearer the corporation housing estates for which they were eventually destined.'¹⁰⁹ When the Manager replied that it made no difference, Mr Hennessy pointed out that Bishopstown was 'the greatest scheme of middle-class housing in Cork: there were 20 separate estates with over 2,000 houses'.¹¹⁰ He suggested that 'more consideration must

¹⁰³ Minutes of Meeting of County Borough Council, 13 June 1967 p 239, CP/C/A 23, CAI.

¹⁰⁴ *Irish Times*, 22 May 1968.

¹⁰⁵ *Irish Times*, 22 May 1968.

¹⁰⁶ *Irish Times*, 22 May 1968.

¹⁰⁷ *Irish Times*, 22 May 1968.

¹⁰⁸ *Irish Times*, 23 May 1968.

¹⁰⁹ *Irish Times*, 23 May 1968.

¹¹⁰ *Irish Times*, 23 May 1968.

be given to the man who owned his house, buying it on a loan, than to a corporation tenant with no commitment other than paying his rent every week'.¹¹¹ Since this was a public inquiry, public tenants objecting to the halting site in Ballyvolane were undoubtedly present to hear this. McEvilly did not agree with Hennessy, arguing it was not right to suggest that corporation tenants deserved less consideration. Mr Hennessy then made the astonishing statement, 'Everyone deserves well, but who deserves most?'.¹¹² He proposed that halting sites be built adjacent to public housing rather than near people who owned their homes 'and might in six months time have to sell them'.¹¹³ Furthermore, Travellers would eventually live in public housing, so it was more appropriate to place caravan sites in 'those areas'.¹¹⁴ When McEvilly protested that 'a clear distinction was being made in a way he did not like', Hennessy replied 'I don't like it either but those are my instructions'.¹¹⁵ Mr Hennessy was articulating solid middle-class opinion which equated the spatial organisation of the city with its class boundaries.¹¹⁶ For Bishopstown residents, placing a halting site in Ballyvolane was the natural choice because it was on the north side of the city and adjacent to housing estates built to accommodate slum dwellers. South-side home owners could not be expected to live near Travellers who were allocated the lowest rung on the social ladder. No halting site was built in Bishopstown; out of the three proposed sites, only one was built by 1970.¹¹⁷ Bishopstown remained overwhelmingly middle class until the Corporation built large scale public housing schemes there in the 1970s.¹¹⁸

The implementation of the settlement programme by Cork Corporation was poor; by 1970, six families lived on a halting site,¹¹⁹ thirteen in houses. Cork city was not unique in failing to provide facilities for Travellers; even by 1978 Meath County

¹¹¹ *Irish Times*, 23 May 1968.

¹¹² *Irish Times*, 23 May 1968.

¹¹³ *Irish Times*, 23 May 1968.

¹¹⁴ *Irish Times*, 23 May 1968.

¹¹⁵ *Irish Times*, 23 May 1968.

¹¹⁶ For a well researched outline of these boundaries see Michael J. Lennon, 'Residential Segregation in Cork City 1901-46' (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University College Cork, 2000).

¹¹⁷ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 244, cols 297-8 (5 February 1970).

¹¹⁸ 200 houses were built not far from Rossa Avenue in 1974. Richard Henschon, *Bishopstown, Wilton and Glasheen: A Picture of Life in the Three Western Suburbs of Cork from Early Days to Modern Times* (Cork, 2001), p 66.

¹¹⁹ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 244, cols 297-8 (5 February 1970).

Council had not built a halting site for local Travellers.¹²⁰ The figures below illustrate the poor record of site provision nationwide.

Fig. 1: Numbers of sites provided and families accommodated, 1966-69

	1966	1967	1968	1969
Kildare County Council	1 (4 families)			
Limerick County Council	1 (14 families)			
Dublin Corporation		1 (40 families)		1 (20 families)
Cork Corporation			1 (6 families)	
Athlone Urban District Council			1 (1 family)	
Galway County Council				1 (8 families)
Galway Corporation				4 (18 families)
Clare County Council				2 (4 families)
Kerry County Council				13 (16 families)
No. of families provided for	18	40	10	66

Source: *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 244, cols 297-8 (5 February 1970).

Site provision was more politically controversial than housing which progressed at a faster rate. Between January 1962 and July 1969, 229 families were housed by 49 local authorities.¹²¹ Although Cork Corporation had an unusually small number of families to accommodate, it is clear that public, political and bureaucratic reluctance to countenance Travellers' rights to basic facilities hindered the provision of accommodation. The fault lines of class loyalties were exposed by the Corporation's attempt to accommodate Travellers. Middle-class residents forced the Corporation to hold a public inquiry, at which a solicitor questioned the City Manager about his plans for Traveller accommodation. Yet the residents who complained most about Travellers lived in public housing on the north side of the city (also see chapter 2). Corporation tenants could also force the abandonment of halting site plans, as Churchfield residents

¹²⁰ Niall Bradley, 'Report on Travelling Families in County Meath', 28 February 1978. This report was kindly forwarded to me by the Meath County Librarian.

¹²¹ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 244, cols 297-8 (5 February 1970).

did in 1965. Opposition to Traveller settlement crossed all class barriers but it is equally important to realise that not all settled people were publicly opposed to Traveller accommodation. Indeed, the failure of local authorities to face down opposition to Traveller settlement led to the growth of the Itinerant Settlement Movement.

Post-Commission Charity

Voluntary organisations such as the St Vincent de Paul worked hard to secure tenancies for Travellers while concerned settled people formed Itinerant Settlement Committees. People were motivated by charitable intent to help Travellers secure basic facilities, a task that was difficult when so many were hostile to Travellers. No doubt their efforts were encouraged by the decision of Pope Paul VI to celebrate his sixty-eightieth birthday among Europe's Gypsies in 1965. This very public gesture of solidarity from the leader of the Roman Catholic Church probably had a significant affect on public opinion.

Grattan Puxon may have scorned services offered to Travellers on the basis of Christian charity, but it was (and still is) a powerful force in the provision of social services. The plight of many European nomads was finally addressed by the highest echelons of the Catholic Church in the 1960s. Following Vatican II, Catholic social policy was more forthright in its defence of the marginalised and neglected. Accordingly, Gypsies and Travellers, in Eastern Europe among the most despised peoples, were singled out for special attention by Pope Paul VI in 1965. The ceremony was attended by two members of the Irish hierarchy, Dr Dunne, Bishop of Nara and Dr. McFeeley, Bishop of Raphoe. Fr Thomas Fehily and Justice Brian Walsh also attended. Addressing the large gathering of several thousand gypsies, the Pope described his visit as 'almost a discovery'. He listed 'the gypsies long catalogue of deprivation and want', referring explicitly to the fate of Romany gypsies under the Nazi regime, and promised them 'the help and comfort' of the Catholic Church.¹²² Pope Paul asked the crowd to 'accept the solicitous and disinterested help of the good priests and people who have led you here and who want to guide you on the road of goodness and faith'.¹²³ To the eyes of the reporter, John Horgan, the Mass was a 'healthy, cheerful, uninhibited' affair, and a 'vast murmur of conversation, comment and prayer lapped like a tide around the

¹²² *Irish Times*, 27 September 1965.

¹²³ *Irish Times*, 27 September 1965.

altar'.¹²⁴ One man even played a trumpet fanfare during the Pope's address, 'to the evident distress of the Vatican officials'. Horgan commented

And this was the contrast which remained throughout the afternoon – the fact that the gypsies in spite of their Peugeots and their Fiats and Opels, are still a people apart from the world. They showed it in their faces as much as in their clothes and it was to this strange, unjustly treated and misunderstood people that the Pope, who is often, in this way, a man of symbols, stretched out his hands in greeting.¹²⁵

The symbolic importance of this event would have made a significant impression upon the Irish public. The fact that Irish figures associated with Travellers attended established a link between all European nomads, whether Romani or indigenous. Fr Fehily conferred with national chaplains for itinerants from other countries, including Holland, France and Germany. The chaplains agreed that the best solution to conflict between nomads and settled people was 'the help and reintegration, where possible, of the itinerant community'.¹²⁶

Itinerant Settlement Committees

Following the establishment of the Advisory Committee in 1965, the government also began to encourage the setting up of local voluntary committees, whose objectives would be 'to help in the resettlement of itinerant families and to encourage the employment of professional social workers by local authorities'.¹²⁷ In 1969, the Irish Council for Itinerant Settlement, an executive committee and supervisory body was established to coordinate the work of local committees.¹²⁸ No documents appear to survive from this organisation, so the following account is based on an interview with Fr Fehily, who helped to establish the first Committee in Dublin in 1965. The unopened records of the Department of Local Government would probably shed some valuable light on the extent of this voluntary activity. In 1974, Sharon B and George Gmelch published a critical assessment of the settlement movement based on interviews and survey material which provides valuable information on the work of settlement committees across Ireland.

¹²⁴ *Irish Times*, 27 September 1965.

¹²⁵ *Irish Times*, 27 September 1965.

¹²⁶ *Irish Times*, 27 September 1965.

¹²⁷ Synopsis of address given by Justice Brian Walsh to the GCCC, 5 August 1965, GCCC files.

¹²⁸ Sharon B. Gmelch and George Gmelch, 'The Itinerant Settlement Movement', *Studies*, 63, (Spring 1974), p 2.

The Dublin Itinerant Settlement Committee (ISC) was set up to promote findings and settlement proposals of the Commission on Itinerancy. The founders were Victor Bewley,¹²⁹ Lady Eleanor Wicklow¹³⁰ and Fr Thomas Fehily.¹³¹ Perhaps because Bewley was a Quaker and Lady Wicklow a Protestant, Archbishop John Charles McQuaid agreed to be patron of the Committee. His name influenced the clergy and religious organisations to believe that, at least, there was little point in opposing settlement policy.¹³² However, the opposition of local councils to Traveller accommodation soon became clear and Fr Fehily realised that voluntary work was the only way to circumvent official intransigence.¹³³ When the committee met with Dublin County Council officials in 1965, they were informed that 12 sites had been proposed, but that all had been abandoned due to public opposition.¹³⁴ With Victor Bewley,¹³⁵ Fr Fehily travelled the country establishing settlement committees and publicising the idea of Traveller settlement. Their visits were not always welcomed; in one parish the Vicar General (one rank below the Bishop) warned parishioners against him as 'an evil man'. Gmelch and Gmelch commented that some settlement committees 'spend as much time selling settlement to the Irish community as they do working with Travellers'.¹³⁶ Until at least 1974, an annual 'Itinerant Week' was held to promote the ideals of the settlement movement.¹³⁷ A bi-monthly newsletter called *Settlement News* was also produced.¹³⁸ Although it was never intended as an aid body, the Committee began to receive donations which it spent on providing caravans for tent dwelling families. The nationwide character of the movement is worth stressing: after 1967, 15 voluntary

¹²⁹ Victor Bewley was a Quaker and a member of the family that ran the famous Bewley Cafés in Dublin. His voluntary work was extensive though his involvement with Travellers was his most public activity. See Fiona Murdoch, *Victor Bewley's Memoirs* (Dublin, 2002), pp. 61-73.

¹³⁰ Eleanor Clonmore, Countess of Wicklow was described as 'one of the leading figures in post-war Irish public affairs of her generation'. She was a Labour Party Senator and a prominent campaigner on housing, social issues and Northern Ireland. See her obituary in *Sunday Tribune*, 9 March 1997. Thanks to Niall Keogh for this reference.

¹³¹ Murdoch, *Victor Bewley's Memoirs*, p 64.

¹³² Interview, Fr Thomas Fehily 8 May 2001.

¹³³ Interview, Fr Thomas Fehily 8 May 2001.

¹³⁴ Murdoch, *Victor Bewley's Memoirs*, p 65.

¹³⁵ Murdoch, *Victor Bewley's Memoirs*, p 64.

¹³⁶ Gmelch and Gmelch, 'The Itinerant Settlement Movement', *Studies*, 63 (Spring 1974), p 8.

¹³⁷ The event ended when Travellers objected to being marked out as particularly needy. Interview Fr Thomas Fehily, 8 May 2001.

¹³⁸ Gmelch and Gmelch, 'The Itinerant Settlement Movement', *Studies*, 63 (Spring 1974), p 8. No trace of this newsletter survives.

committees covered 55% of the country.¹³⁹ However, these committees were not united on the most appropriate way to settle Travellers. Gmelch and Gmelch reported a division within the settlement movement over the appropriate accommodation for Travellers. The Irish Council and 75% of local committees believed in placing families on serviced campsites before offering them housing. The site was therefore 'an indispensable first step on the way to conventional housing'.¹⁴⁰ By 1974, over 300 families were settled on 70 sites across the country.¹⁴¹ A quarter of settlement committees favoured housing over sites, believing that the physical isolation of sites prevented Travellers integrating with the settled community. Between 1965 and 1974, 150 families were housed.¹⁴² Housing was easier to provide in areas outside Dublin city, which suffered from a public housing shortage during the 1960s. Committees favouring direct housing over site provision were based outside the major urban centres.¹⁴³ Despite this difference of opinion, the ISCs achieved significant results. Between 1965 and 1974, ISCs created or found accommodation for over one-third of the Traveller population.¹⁴⁴

The membership of these committees was dominated by members of the St Vincent de Paul. Given the organisation's history in helping Travellers, it is likely that members of the Legion of Mary also joined in large numbers. In 1966, the St Vincent de Paul assessed its 'modest contribution to the itinerancy problem'. It was estimated that it provided housing for 50 families, while cooperating with other organisations in the provision of education for Traveller children. Several conferences were devoted exclusively to such work.¹⁴⁵ In 1968, a new conference was established in Longford to work exclusively with Travellers.¹⁴⁶ Thus, in addition to settlement committees linked to Fr Fehily's Dublin committee, there were dedicated conferences of the St Vincent de Paul helping to settle Travellers. In 1969, a survey revealed the extent of the Society's participation in the settlement movement.

¹³⁹ Calculated on basis of the information provided by Miss Murnaghan to the Northern Irish House of Commons. *Northern Ireland Commons Debates*, vol. 69, cols. 1472-3 (22 May 1968)

¹⁴⁰ Gmelch and Gmelch, 'The Itinerant Settlement Movement', *Studies*, 63 (Spring 1974), p 3.

¹⁴¹ Gmelch and Gmelch, 'The Itinerant Settlement Movement', *Studies*, 63 (Spring 1974), p3.

¹⁴² Gmelch and Gmelch, 'The Itinerant Settlement Movement', *Studies*, 63 (Spring 1974), p 4.

¹⁴³ Gmelch and Gmelch, 'The Itinerant Settlement Movement', *Studies*, 63 (Spring 1974), p 4.

¹⁴⁴ Gmelch and Gmelch, 'The Itinerant Settlement Movement', *Studies*, 63 (Spring 1974), p 3.

¹⁴⁵ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1966*, p 3, SSVP.

¹⁴⁶ The conference was called St Benedict Joseph Labre, after the Beggar of Perpetual Adoration, patron saint of the homeless. *Report of the Council of Ireland 1968*, p 9, SSVP.

In a number of areas, Itinerant Settlement Committees were entirely composed of its [SVP] members and in most places Society was strongly represented on these Committees. The members bore the brunt of local opposition to settlement proposals, but it was encouraging to learn that they stood up and were counted in the cause of justice for a suffering and unpopular group of people.¹⁴⁷

Puxon may have scorned the charitable basis of government policy in the 1960s, but the importance of mobilising vocal support for Travellers among the settled community was central to Fehily's idea of the settlement committees. Voluntary organisations provided unpaid social workers and supporters of Traveller accommodation. Gmelch and Gmelch noted 'Some ISCs spend as much time selling settlement to the Irish community as they do working with Travellers'.¹⁴⁸ This work was an essential part of their success and probably reduced the opposition to local authority plans. As sites began to be established across the country, the extent of cooperation between voluntary agencies and the administration became clear. The Minister informed the Dáil that sites offered temporary accommodation, essentially a preliminary stage in the settlement of Traveller families.

These sites are intended not alone to be a settled abode for itinerant families but also to provide the essential base from which voluntary helpers and official agencies can co-operate to set in motion a comprehensive programme of rehabilitation, with special emphasis on education and employment.¹⁴⁹

The importance of social work in the settlement programme was clear, although no professional social workers paid by public funds were hired until 1969. A subsidy of 50% was contributed by central government to the salaries and expenses of social workers employed by local authorities to work exclusively with Travellers.¹⁵⁰ In 1969, just four social workers were employed on this basis.¹⁵¹ With so few professionals in the area, voluntary work remained significant.

Fr Fehily believes that settlement committees became pioneers by accident, making decisions because government bodies would not take the initial steps.¹⁵² While local and national government generally failed to address the politically controversial issue of Traveller accommodation, a politician interested in the issue could make a significant contribution. When Kevin Boland was appointed Minister for Local

¹⁴⁷ *Report of the Council of Ireland 1969*, p 2.

¹⁴⁸ Gmelch and Gmelch, 'The Itinerant Settlement Movement', *Studies* 63 (Spring 1974), p 8.

¹⁴⁹ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 233, col. 1035-6 (26 March, 1968).

¹⁵⁰ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 242, col. 20-2 (4 November 1969).

¹⁵¹ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 242, col. 528 (11 November 1969).

¹⁵² Interview, Fr Thomas Fehily, 8 May 2001.

Government in 1966, his determination to provide facilities for Travellers made an impact upon reluctant local authorities. In the late 1960s, with some success, he pressured local government bodies to provide sites and accommodation for Travellers.¹⁵³ In a 1969 letter to the Taoiseach, Fr Fehily praised the 'interest and hard work' of the minister, describing him as 'a tower of strength'.¹⁵⁴ Had Boland not resigned over the Arms Trial, Michael Flynn felt that he would have implemented the recommendations of the Commission more thoroughly than his predecessor or many of his successors.¹⁵⁵ Due to government inertia, it was voluntary groups who worked hardest to provide facilities for Travellers. Sites could be selected, purchased and developed by settlement committees, but they still required planning permission from local authorities. Victor Bewley's attempts to develop a halting site on land owned by the Bewley firm ran up against this obstacle.¹⁵⁶ In addition to housing and site provision, ISCs helped organise educational facilities for Traveller children. Nationwide, from 1965 to 1974, ISCs organised seventeen special classes and six special schools. Some committees purchased buses to transport children from scattered roadside camps and sites to school. These small scale efforts could hardly hope to address the problems of adult illiteracy and irregular schooling that continued to distinguish Travellers from settled people.¹⁵⁷

A major flaw in the Itinerant Settlement Movement was the lack of official consultation with Travellers themselves. A few ISCs included Travellers in their work, but these were exceptional.¹⁵⁸ According to Gmelch and Gmelch, some officials in the Movement 'openly discouraged' the participation of Travellers.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the National Council for Travelling People (NCTP) was established in 1969, a body in which settled people and Travellers worked together. Essentially, the council was a continuation of the Itinerant Settlement Movement, but with a different emphasis on the extent of Traveller participation. It remained publicly associated with Bewley, Fehily and Sister Colette Dwyer, another prominent pro-Traveller activist. Yet internal

¹⁵³ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, vol. 244, col. 298 (5 February 1970).

¹⁵⁴ Fr Fehily to Taoiseach, 26 September 1969, DT 2000/6/340, NAI.

¹⁵⁵ Interview, Dr Michael Flynn, 2 February 2001.

¹⁵⁶ Murdoch, *Victor Bewley's Memoirs*, pp. 65-6.

¹⁵⁷ Gmelch and Gmelch, 'The Itinerant Settlement Movement', *Studies* 63, 249 (1974), p 11.

¹⁵⁸ Gmelch and Gmelch, 'The Itinerant Settlement Movement', *Studies* 63, 249 (1974), p 13.

¹⁵⁹ Gmelch and Gmelch, 'The Itinerant Settlement Movement', *Studies* 63, 249 (1974), p 14.

divisions and disagreements led to a 'very bitter break-up' of the NCTP in 1990.¹⁶⁰ The Council's place was taken by the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM), an organisation with more significant input from Travellers themselves.¹⁶¹ The history of these organisations is outside the scope of this study, but Travellers' developing political awareness can be clearly seen in the establishment and dissolution of various bodies. This study concludes before Travellers were officially part of the decision making process on issues affecting their community. Contemporary Traveller representatives, whose work has influenced government decision making and media commentary¹⁶² have been labelled an 'ethnic intelligentsia'.¹⁶³ However, this study was more concerned with charting the position of Travellers before members of the community became politicised.

Conclusion

The implementation of the settlement policy depended upon voluntary organisations, who were willing to take on the opposition of other settled people and local politicians. The class affiliations of ISC members can only be guessed at but, drawing heavily as they did from the St Vincent de Paul and the Legion of Mary, it can be speculated that ISCs were largely middle class.¹⁶⁴ Galwegians fighting for facilities for Travellers believed it 'represented a necessary, and long overdue, national duty consistent with the goals of a modernizing Catholic city and country'.¹⁶⁵ Few seemed to share this view; plans for halting sites and housing faced determined opposition from a middle class anxious to preserve the spatial segregation between public tenants and homeowners, and a working class bent on improving their lot. A working class that had undergone considerable upheaval since the growth of public housing was not willing to sacrifice its newly acquired petit bourgeois status to facilitate the accommodation of Travellers. Living in suburban housing estates with large gardens and commuting to work, former slum dwellers had ostensibly become middle class. As government intervention had often forcibly changed the economic and social structure of the working class, public

¹⁶⁰ Seán Ó Riain, *Solidarity with Travellers: A Story of Settled People Making a Stand for Travellers* (Dublin, 2000), p 17.

¹⁶¹ Ó Riain, *Solidarity with Travellers*, p 17.

¹⁶² Aoife Bhreatnach, 'Travellers and the Print Media: Words and Irish Identity' *Irish Studies Review* 6, 3 (1998) pp. 285-290.

¹⁶³ Mac Laughlin, *Travellers*, p 82.

¹⁶⁴ According to Helleiner, the Galway ISC was composed of, 'several influential and relatively well-off citizens of Galway', *Irish Travellers*, p 82.

¹⁶⁵ Helleiner, *Irish Travellers*, p 83.

housing tenants had responded by becoming politically aware and capable of mobilising to protect their interests. The local authorities that housed them now faced the additional responsibility of heeding their tenant's concerns.

Faced with determined opposition from residents, local authorities left the task of accommodating Travellers to the voluntary sector. In a long standing tradition of the Irish welfare system, religious orders, the Church and religiously motivated voluntary groups accepted the challenge of caring for an unpopular minority which had proved too difficult for the administration to handle. Just as the St Vincent de Paul and the Legion had taken on the task of rehabilitating the homeless and ex-prisoners in the 1920s and 1930s, so they accepted responsibility for helping nomads to adjust to permanent settlement in the 1960s. Government welfare still restricted itself to providing basic subsistence, leaving more complex social work to the Catholic voluntary sector. This arrangement may have benefited Travellers since bureaucracy often cannot respond appropriately to poverty and exclusion when the people it seeks to help are illiterate and do not have a fixed abode. Charities can be more flexible in dispensing aid and present a more human face than officialdom. But in the case of Travellers, who lacked shelter and security of tenure, the state refused to honour even the narrowest definition of welfare support. Classed as a charity case, Travellers were not given their welfare entitlements as citizens of the state.

Conclusion

This study has analysed the historical relationship between Travellers and settled people. This relationship deteriorated markedly after World War II when Travellers were defined by the majority community as a politically charged, public problem. Scattered references to their presence in the 1920s and 1930s were not complimentary but hostility towards Travellers increases in volume and intensity in the 1950s. Why should unauthorised encampments, animal trespass and begging suddenly become a problem when, by virtue of nomadism and economic structure, Travellers had always infringed upon the norms of settled society? Smith points out that 'not all social problems become concerns in the public domain' and that it is difficult to predict what will be defined as a public problem.¹ Before World War II, Travellers were hardly mentioned by government or the press, yet after 1945 complaints from politicians and their constituents about Traveller encampments dramatically increased.

George Gmelch has argued that Travellers changed their accommodation patterns in the post-war period, living for extended periods on the fringes of urban areas.² With the decline of tinsmithing as a profitable craft, Travellers were no longer useful to settled people, who reacted with hostility to their increasingly visible presence. There are a number of problems with this explanation, the most significant for a historian being that drastic change in Traveller society is impossible to analyse in available archival material. Gmelch also assumes that Travellers were uniquely rural yet they were not necessarily perceived as rural, as Arensberg and Kimball's brief reference suggests. Travellers, or 'tinkers' belonged to an 'outcast lowest class' with loyalties to the towns, visiting country areas for short periods of time and with 'predatory' intentions.³ Viewing Travellers as naturally belonging to an urban or rural milieu is essentialist and fundamentally misreads nomadism, which esteems travelling, rather than the origin or destination.

The modernisation model posited by Gmelch should not be completely disregarded however. The process of change known as modernisation played a role in determining the social and economic contexts of minority-majority relations in

¹ Smith, *Public Problems*, p 4.

² Gmelch, *The Irish Tinkers*, p 3.

³ Conrad M. Arensberg and Solon T. Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland* (Cambridge Mass., 1940), p 274.

twentieth-century Ireland. Undoubtedly one of the most important developments to affect Travellers was the decline of fairs and markets. Their presence was an essential part of every fair and they may have symbolised the holiday atmosphere surrounding these occasions. Once fairs vanished, settled people saw no purpose to Travellers' visits and perhaps resented their appearance. For Travellers themselves, the fairs were opportunities to earn money and meet family and friends normally scattered throughout the country. The end of fairs impoverished Travellers both socially and economically. Fairs faded away due to a complex interplay of market forces, social change and commercial developments best summed up in the word 'modernisation'.

Yet the most important changes which affected Traveller-settled relations did not result from an inexorable modernisation process. Greater control over street trading instituted in 1926 illustrated the desire by government and police to regulate the economic and social lives of the urban poor. With the provision of public housing in the 1930s, the planning of urban areas revolutionised the position of the Irish working class. The standard of living among the poorest in Irish society dramatically improved but their independence was greatly circumscribed. Trades and crafts practised in tenement basements or yards could not continue in public housing estates because of strict planning regulations differentiating residential and industrial areas. With their opportunities for self employment limited, many working-class families became more dependent on social welfare payments. In response to this increased demand, welfare payments were increased in 1938 though they could hardly be described as generous.

Travellers who did not live in local authority housing were relatively untouched by these changes. However, those Travellers anxious to settle permanently or temporarily found the supply of cheap rented property now controlled by local government. The application process discriminated against illiterate people while some local authorities deliberately refused housing to Traveller families. In general, the effect upon Travellers was more indirect; the transformations in social and economic organisation profoundly affected their position in Irish society. When the whole family economy was abolished by compulsory school attendance and the informal labour habits of the working class criminalised, some central values of Traveller society were deemed unacceptable. The gap between Travellers and poor settled people was widening. As local authorities acquired land for housing, compulsory purchase orders

had the consequence, unlooked for or not, of eradicating Traveller encampments. When former slum dwellers became responsible members of local residents' associations, they began to lobby the local authority to remove Travellers who probably reminded them of their uncomfortably recent past.

The language of planning and tourist amenity further legitimised complaints about Travellers. Public housing and town planning evolved in tandem, arguably because the former created the need for the latter. The Department of Local Government and Public Health believed in 1934 that neat, well maintained public space was a corollary of rising living standards made possible by preventative medicine and slum clearance. Creating a tourist friendly landscape justified the improvement of derelict sites; space was tailored for public consumption. Tourist income did not necessarily originate from foreign visitors though no study has yet documented the importance of domestic tourism in independent Ireland.

In addition to this politicisation of space, the importance of welfare and charity must be considered. In the first half of the twentieth century, Travellers were not alone on the roads. The wandering poor and insane subsisted on charity, joined by a number of individuals who functioned as news bearers in a semi-literate society. As welfare benefits increased, begging by settled people declined. Travellers were then distinguished from the majority population by this practice. By virtue of their nomadism and illiteracy, they were less likely to avail of benefit than settled people. Since state funded assistance was known to provide the basic necessities of life, resentment over begging may have gradually developed. Also, when subsistence production on farmsteads was replaced by food bought in a grocery store, householders may have become less inclined to dispense charity. Catholic charitable organisations long recognised that Travellers were unable to secure welfare benefits. Typically, St Vincent de Paul and the Legion of Mary ministered to the material and spiritual needs of those neglected or forgotten by the state and Travellers were no exception. A well established pattern in welfare provision was followed: voluntary organisations took on difficult social work such as caring for the homeless while local and national government provided basic subsistence allowances.

The extent to which Travellers were ignored by government was perhaps unparalleled in the history of Irish welfare provision. Even the coercive measures

designed to target Travellers after an outbreak of typhus in 1940 were later applied only to women with venereal disease. Despite their lack of schooling and unconventional upbringing, Traveller children evaded institutional care because the legal and governmental systems were unwilling to commit them. The same local government officials that refused Travellers housing also refused to pay the expenses of industrial schools. When government stirred itself to take action against Travellers in the Education Bill 1942, it was barred by the constitution. But the most significant factor protecting Travellers, a politically powerless minority, from government surveillance was the administrative division of responsibility in which no department was concerned with Travellers as a group. If Travellers caused settled society problems, these issues were allocated to various arms of government. Therefore, no one department was ever unduly worried by their presence and complaints from voters and local representatives could be passed endlessly between departments. The ending of this administrative vacuum was one of the recommendations contained in the *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*. Set up in response to increasing complaints from Dublin city residents, the Commission gathered evidence and deliberated on the 'itinerant problem' from 1960-63. The Commission produced a thoughtful and comprehensive report that advocated settlement and absorption as the solution to Traveller poverty and the problem of illegal camp sites. Its proposals for sites and housing were detailed and humane, with advice about providing accommodation adjacent to schools and shops. Although the Commission knew the settled population would object to living near Travellers, it recommended the implementation of the settlement programme in the strongest terms. This was the first official examination of Travellers by the Irish state. While the Commission deliberated, the passing of the Derelict Sites Act in 1961 further politicised the use of marginal land. As private and public landowners reclaimed derelict land, definitions of conventional land use hardened. The political implications of Traveller accommodation were heightened by the increased value given to previously neglected sites.

The studied inaction of the Dublin administration contrasted sharply with the policy of the Stormont government. The Northern Irish government was determined to be seen to be addressing the complaints of local representatives about Travellers. The progressive nature of the Commission's proposals and the forthright demand that

Travellers be facilitated in availing of welfare benefits also distinguished its report from those produced by two committees appointed in Northern Ireland. The 1949 and 1956 reports on controlling Travellers in Northern Ireland demonstrate the repressive potential of the state which the Commission on Itinerancy chose not to exploit. However, legislation penalising Travellers was withdrawn in 1950 because it was not considered punitive enough by local officials and politicians. The outright refusal of local government to provide basic facilities for Travellers contrasted with the rhetorical acceptance of this in the South. Instead legislation was enacted that gave the police increased powers of arrest over people of no fixed abode. The Education (Northern Ireland) Act 1950 contained a section similar to that found unconstitutional in the Education Bill 1942. However, this was rarely enforced because local authorities, like their Southern counterparts, refused to spend ratepayer's money on Travellers. Local government in both jurisdictions were unwilling to contemplate Travellers' entitlement to various welfare services, from housing to institutional care. Sectarian politics in the North further strengthened their determination not to provide for Catholic Travellers. From 1949, the numbers of Travellers in Northern Ireland dropped, as the state increased police powers over people of no fixed abode. Yet politicians continued to receive complaints about camp sites and wandering horses in the 1960s. The Northern Irish example, and the failure of such legislative measures to solve the 'itinerant problem' no doubt influenced the Commission on Itinerancy.

When the Commission's report was accepted by the cabinet in 1963, the Department of Local Government was given overall responsibility for Travellers as a group. While the Department formulated policy, local authorities continued to break up Traveller camp sites on public property. A nascent Traveller political organisation, based in Dublin, was headed by Grattan Puxon. The Itinerant Action Campaign protested about the constant round of evictions suffered by Dublin Travellers; central government was embarrassed, but Dublin Corporation was not deterred. Puxon returned to England in 1965 and many of the group's Traveller leaders followed him. This short lived episode in Traveller mobilisation has been completely neglected by scholars discussing the formation of a Traveller ethnic intelligentsia. Without an organised representative body, Travellers as a community had little influence over the settlement programme. The voluntary Itinerant Settlement Committees (ISCs) were mainly

responsible for driving settlement forward when local and central government was paralysed by vociferous opposition to housing and camp sites from residents. Given the Society's pioneering role in providing welfare services for Travellers in the 1930s, it was appropriate that many ISCs were dominated by members of the St Vincent de Paul Society. In cooperation with local authorities, ISCs liaised between both communities, attempting to convince Travellers and settled people that settlement was a viable proposal. ISCs also ensured that Travellers could avail of any welfare benefits to which they were entitled. Government welfare was still restricted to providing basic subsistence, leaving more complex social work to the Catholic voluntary sector. Yet local and national government reneged upon their responsibilities to Travellers as citizens by not providing them with basic sanitation and housing. At a time when the government was promoting the benefits of universal sanitation to sceptical farmers,⁴ this was an indictment of their claims to treat Travellers simply as poor citizens in need of assistance. Although the Commission was careful to deny the ethnic status of Travellers, the image of Travellers among the majority community was obviously determined by cultural and racial factors.

The findings of this thesis are not confined to the changing relationship of Travellers and settled people. Discovering how and why that relationship altered has involved examining many issues crucial to Irish social history. To write a narrative on a statistically insignificant minority without analysing the majority society and government would indeed be impossible. However, examining Irish society in the twentieth century has revealed the political significance of legislation considered mundane by many Irish historians. Police surveillance over public space and profound shifts in the public perception of social convention transformed Irish society. As society changed, so did the socio-economic contexts of Traveller-settled relations. This thesis has surveyed the most important of these developments; much work remains to be done on specific areas such as the involvement of female religious orders in education and settlement. However, this study has proved that such work is not only possible but extremely profitable.

⁴ *Report of the Department of Local Government 1961-2*, p 30.

Appendix 1

Legal Glossary

Statutes relevant to the Republic of Ireland

Dublin Police Act 1842

This legislation was used to prosecute street traders in Dublin city that proved inadequate, as proving an 'obstruction' was difficult

Vagrancy Act 1847

'An act to make provision for the Punishment of Vagrants and Persons offending against the Law in force for the Relief of the destitute Poor in Ireland'. Men who deserted their wives and children, causing their dependants to be relieved in the workhouse could be imprisoned for three months hard labour. Anyone 'wandering abroad and begging', those causing children to beg, and individuals who travelled from Union to Union, or District to District for relief could be imprisoned for one month's hard labour.

Summary Jurisdiction (Ireland) Act 1851

'An Act to consolidate and amend the Acts relating to certain Offences and other Matters as to which Justices of the Peace exercise Summary Jurisdiction in Ireland'.

This statute was used for a variety of purposes. In Dublin, Gardai applied it in conjunction with the Dublin Police Act 1842 to control street trading. In Northern Ireland, the RUC applied the act's on provisions road offences to control Travellers. These included turning animals loose (section 10 (1)), leaving carts etc. on the roads (10, (3)), making fires on or near the road (10, (8)) and a driver leaving his vehicle (12, (4)). Section 20 allowed a farmer or property owner to seize and detain animals causing damage until compensated by the animal owner. Amendments made to it by the Northern Irish government in 1953 and 1958 (outlined below) were further designed to target Traveller's movements.

Pedlars Acts 1871 and 1881; Hawkers Act 1888

Under these statutes, licences were available for pedlars, defined as travelling merchants without a beast of burden, and hawkers, those with transportation. On March 1924, 186

licences had been issued under the Hawkers Act.¹ The Commission on Sick and Destitute Poor reported that 348 individuals (148 men, 122 children) were 'Bona fide hawkers, pedlars etc' in November 1925.

Public Health (Ireland) Act 1878

Sections 148 and 149 empowered the Minister for Local Government and Public health to make regulations for containment of an infectious disease. Although Dr Ward maintained it allowed for the detention of infected persons, section 149 was not as specific as its replacement, section 38 of the Health Act 1947, which was based on an Order drafted to detain and isolate Travellers resisting treatment for typhus.

Section 149 read

Whenever any part of Ireland appears to be threatened with or is affected by any formidable epidemic, endemic or infectious disease, the Local Government Board may make, and from time to time alter and revoke, regulations for all or any of the following purposes; (namely)

- (1) For the speedy internment of the dead; and
- (2) For house to house visitation
- (3) For the provision of medical aid and hospital accommodation; and
- (4) For the promotion of cleansing, ventilation, and disinfection, and for guarding against the spread of disease.

Promotion and prevention did not necessarily imply detention and compulsion.

Employment of Children Act 1903

Gave any local authority the power to make byelaws regulating, for all children or for girls and boys separately, the types of occupation and hours of employment allowed.

Children's Act 1908

'An Act to consolidate and amend the Law relating to the Protection of Children and Young Persons, Reformatory and Industrial Schools and Juvenile Offenders, and otherwise to amend the Law with respect to Children and Young Persons.' Section 14 covered begging, sections 57-70 dealt with committal to an industrial school, reformatory or the care of another person.

¹ Office of the Revenue Commissioners to Secretary D/J, 5 January 1925 D/J H207/1, NAI.

Education (Provision of Meals) (Ireland) Acts 1914-17

Meals could be provided to school children, funded jointly by local authorities and central government.

Local Government (Temporary Provisions) Act 1924

This act formalised the changes made to the poor law system by local authorities during the war of independence. Money for poor relief was now raised from a county at large charge instead of poor law union rates. The Act abolished or amalgamated workhouses, cottage hospitals and lunatic asylums while increasing the availability of outdoor relief, rechristened 'home assistance'. Institutional care was now offered in the County Home, rather than the workhouse.

Housing (Building Facilities) Act 1924

Enacted to revive private enterprise in the building trade, this act was to 'facilitate the provision of dwelling-houses, and for that purpose to authorise the making of grants to persons providing such houses, to ensure the supply of building materials at reasonable prices, and to make other provisions contributing to an increased supply of dwelling houses'.

Local Government Act 1925

This act abolished Rural District Councils and transferred functions of road maintenance to county councils and the sanitary duties to county councils as sanitary authorities acting through the Boards of Health. Section 20 was formulated to deal with Travellers encampments.

20 (1) A tent, van, shed or similar structure used for human habitation, or a barge, lighter, boat or other vessel on any river, canal or inland water (in this section referred to as a 'barge') used for human habitation, which is in such a state as to be a nuisance or injurious to health, or which is so overcrowded as to be injurious to the health of the inmates (whether or not they are members of the same family), shall be deemed a nuisance within the meaning of section 107 of the Public Health (Ireland) Act, 1878, and the provisions of that act shall apply accordingly.

(2) A sanitary authority may make byelaws for promoting cleanliness in, and the habitable condition of tents, vans, sheds and similar structures used for human habitation, or of barges used for human habitation, and for preventing the spread of infectious disease by persons inhabiting the same, and generally for the prevention of nuisances in connection with same.

Street Trading Act 1926

Designed specifically for Dublin city, section 14 of the Act extended the power to enact byelaws to local authorities governing populations of 1,500 or more. Byelaws could prohibit stall trading in any street and prescribe the times and types of trading allowed. Local authorities could also enforce standards for cleanliness of items on sale and prohibit the handling of goods without wrapping. A street trader's certificate and a street trader's stall-licence were required to trade legally in permitted areas.

School Attendance Act 1926

This act amended the compulsory attendance clauses of the Education Act, (Ireland) 1892. In Cork, Dublin, Limerick, Waterford and the Urban Districts of Blackrock, Dún Laoghaire, Rathmines, Rathgar and Pembroke the act was to be administered by School Attendance Committees. The committees in the rest of the country were abolished, their duties taken over by the Gardaí. Children from 6 to 14 years old were covered by the Act. Under Section 4 a 'reasonable excuse' for missing school was allowed, including 'light agricultural work' for 10 days between 1 April and 15 May, and 1 August and 15 October each year. Under section 17 (4), upon a second or more offence by the same child, 'the child can be sent to a certified industrial school or committed to the care of a relative or other fit persons named'.

Children's Act 1929

Amended section 58 (1) of 1908 Act. Amendment outlined in detail the rights of parents, the mothers of illegitimate children and the minister over children committed to institutional care.

Cork City Management Act 1929

This act established the division of policy and executive powers between elected councillors and local officials, a concept inspired by city management in the United States. Philip Monahan, who had run Cork city as Commissioner since the suspension of the Corporation in 1924, became the state's first City Manager. City management was extended to Dublin in 1930, Limerick in 1934 and Waterford in 1939.

Road Traffic Act 1933

'An Act to amend and consolidate the law relating to mechanically propelled vehicles, the regulation and control of road traffic, and the use of mechanically propelled vehicles, the regulation and control of road traffic, and the use of mechanically propelled vehicles for the carriage of passengers, to make provision for compulsory insurance against liabilities arising from negligent driving of mechanically propelled vehicles, and to make provision for other matters connected with the matter aforesaid.' Under this act (sections 147-160), the Commissioner of the Garda Síochána was given powers to regulate road traffic. Although local authorities retained some control when fairs or markets took place, the Garda's general power was outlined in section 160.

160 Nothing in this Act shall prejudice or derogate from the general power and duty of the Commissioner and other members of the Gárda Síochána to preserve order in public places and to regulate and control traffic therein.

Unemployment Assistance Act 1933

The first comprehensive and dedicated piece of legislation on unemployment assistance, it contained an important residency test to prevent the rural poor joining the ranks of the urban unemployed. Section 15 (1) (e) meant an applicant had to prove he was 'that either he has been ordinarily resident in such urban area for at least one year before his latest application for unemployment assistance or has had at least three months' employment in such urban area within one year before such latest application'.

Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1931

This Act introduced measures for 'the clearance of unhealthy areas and the repair and demolition of insanitary houses'. Under this legislation and its 1932 amending successor, local authorities received generous subventions if they demolished slums and housed former slum dwellers in newly built public housing. Under section 2 (1) an 'unhealthy area' meant

an area the dwelling houses in which are by reason of disrepair or sanitary defects unfit for human habitation or are by reason of their bad arrangement or the narrowness or bad arrangement of the streets, dangerous or injurious to the health of the inhabitants of the area and in which the other buildings, if any, are for a like reason dangerous or injurious to the health of such inhabitants.

Unemployment Assistance (Amendment) Act 1938

Section 4 increased rates of assistance.

Shops (Hours of Trading) 1938

'An Act to make further and better provision for regulating the hours during which shops may remain open for the serving of customers.' Traders without shops – stallholders and door to door salespeople - were also regulated.

Town and Regional Planning Acts 1934 and 1939

The 1934 act was 'to make provision for the orderly and progressive development of cities, towns, and other areas, whether urban or rural, and to preserve and improve the amenities thereof ...' These statutes were the first attempt to introduce planned development. This failed because it proved cumbersome and expensive for local authorities to implement. Nevertheless, the acts successfully introduced the concept of planning permission.

Acquisition of Derelict Sites Act 1940

A derelict site was defined as

any land-

- a) which is unoccupied or is not being put to any bona fide use by the occupier thereof and,
- b) on which either all the buildings are ruinous or in disrepair or there have, for a period of at least two years, been no buildings, and
- c) which is or is likely to become injurious to health or the amenities of the neighbourhood by reason of its objectionable or neglected condition or by reason of the deposit or collection thereon of debris, rubbish or insanitary material, and
- d) which is not held or occupied by a local authority or any body corporate for the purposes of any railway, tramway, dock, canal, water, gas, electricity, or other public undertaking.

This act had significant implications for Traveller's use of marginal land.

Local Government (Sanitary Services) Act 1948

Although intended to eradicate unauthorised camping at beach resorts, this statute was applied by many local authorities to ban Traveller encampments. Section 30 and 31 were the most significant.

30 (1) A sanitary authority may make bye-laws regulating the use of temporary dwellings in their sanitary district and the bye-laws may, in particular, provide for all or any of the matters mentioned in the second schedule of this Act.

31 (1) A sanitary authority may by order prohibit the erection or retention of temporary dwellings on any land or water in their sanitary district if they are of the opinion that such erection or retention would be prejudicial to public health or the amenities of the locality or would interfere to an unreasonably extent with traffic on any road.

(2) A prohibition under this section may relate either to specified land or water or all land or water of a specified class and, in particular, may relate to all land or water within a specified distance of the centre line of any road or specified road.

Common law rights were protected under section 34 (12)

34 (12) Nothing in this section shall prohibit or restrict the use of land for camping-

- a) if the land is agricultural land and the camping is carried on during the same seasons in each year by persons engaged in farming operations on the land or
- b) if the land is occupied in connection with a permanent dwelling situate on or in the vicinity of such land, and the camping is carried on by no persons other than the occupier of the permanent dwelling and members of his household.

Derelict Sites Act 1961

This replaced the 1940 statute which had proved too cumbersome and difficult to use. Local authorities now had better powers of acquisition, increasing their control over marginal land used for camping by Travellers.

Local Government (Planning and Development) Act 1963

‘An Act to make provision, in the interests of the common good, for the proper planning and development of cities, towns and other areas, whether urban or rural (including the preservation and improvement of the amenities thereof), to make certain provisions with respect to acquisition of land and to repeal the Town and Regional Planning Acts 1934 and 1939 ...’

Under Section 77 (2) (b), local authorities could provide caravan sites.

77 (2) A local authority may provide –

- (b) factory buildings, office premises, shop premises, dwellings, amusement parks and structures for the purpose of entertainment, caravan parks, buildings for the purpose of provisional accommodation, meals and refreshments, buildings for provisional trade and professional services and advertisement structures

This was the statutory instrument under which the first halting sites in Ireland were provided.

Social welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1967

Section 14 abolished the residency tests inserted into the 1933 act by the Unemployment Assistance (Amendment) Act 1940.

Statutes relevant to Northern Ireland

Housing of the Working Classes Act 1885

Section 9 contained byelaws on camping which, the Northern Irish government reminded local authorities, could be used to control Travellers.

9 (2) A sanitary authority may make byelaws for promoting cleanliness in, and the habitable condition of tents, vans, sheds and similar structures used for human habitation, and for preventing the spread of infectious diseases by persons inhabiting the same, and generally for the prevention of nuisances in connection with the same.

Southern authorities used the more rigorous provisions of the Local Government (Sanitary Services) Act 1948 for the same purposes.

Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1950

Section 20 targeted nomadic parents who did not send their children to school

20 (1) If a person habitually wanders from place to place and takes with him –

- a) any child who has attained the age of five; or
- b) any young person who has not attained the upper limit of compulsory school age

he shall unless he proves that the child or young person is not, by being so taken with him, prevented from receiving efficient full time education suitable to his age, ability and aptitude, be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding two pounds.

(2) Any constable who finds a person wandering from place to place and taking a child or young person with him, may, if he has reasonable ground for believing that the person is guilty of an offence under this section, apprehend him without a warrant, and may take the child or young person to a place of safety in accordance with the provisions of this Act.

Section 20 (1-2) were remarkably similar to the powers contained in the Education Bill 1942, found unconstitutional by the Irish courts.

Summary Jurisdiction (Northern Ireland) Act 1953.

Section 28 amended section 14 (2) of the Summary Jurisdiction (Ireland) Act 1851 so that it read:

Where the Name and Residence of such an Offender shall be unknown and cannot be ascertained, or where he has no fixed place of abode, he may, with or without any Warrant, be arrested by any such County or Sub-Inspector, Head or other Constable ...

Summary Jurisdiction and Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 1958

Under this act, justices of the peace could hear cases of offences committed under the Vagrancy Acts. Section 5 (1-3) made a number of amendments to the 1851 Summary Jurisdiction Act.

Caravan (Northern Ireland) Act 1963

Under Section 21, local authorities could provide camp sites.

21 (1) A district council shall, with the consent of the Ministry, have power within their district to provide sites where caravans may be brought, and to manage the sites or lease them to some other person.

The Act also regulated the use of private land for camping:

1 (1) Subject to the provisions of this Act, an occupier of any land shall not after the commencement of this Act cause or permit any part of the land to be used as a caravan site unless he is the holder of a site licence (that is to say, a licence under this Act authorising the use of land as a caravan site) for the time being in force as respects the land so used.

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