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Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

‘FEW SUPPORTERS AND NO ORGANISATION’? CUMANN NA NGAEDHEAL  
ORGANISATION AND POLICY, 1923-33.

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## Contents

.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Abbreviations.....	vi
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
Broad outline of Cumann na nGaedheal, 1923-33.....	ix
Existing literature.....	xiii
Primary sources.....	xx
Structure of the thesis.....	xxii
<b>Part I.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1- The Origins of Cumann na nGaedheal.....</b>	<b>2</b>
The Treaty.....	8
The disintegration of Sinn Féin.....	14
Emergence of ‘sub parties’.....	16
Civil War breaks out, 28 June 1922.....	23
A new ‘National Party’ emerges.....	26
Organising Cumann na nGaedheal.....	33
<b>Chapter 2- The Cumann na nGaedheal organisation: an overview.....</b>	<b>40</b>
Cumann na nGaedheal’s first election.....	42
The legacy of the 1923 election.....	50
Strain, mutiny and by-elections.....	51
Cumann na nGaedheal’s organisational apex?.....	59
Attitude to local elections.....	65
Two contrasting elections.....	66
Organisational growth halts.....	74
Party newspapers and social functions.....	75
Holding its own as Depression hits.....	77
Government party to opposition party.....	79
<b>Chapter 3- Cumann na nGaedheal organisation in Clare.....</b>	<b>83</b>
Establishment of Cumann na nGaedheal in Clare.....	86
Post-election difficulties in Clare.....	91

Reorganising effort spring 1925: Purcell to the rescue.....	93
Cumann na nGaedheal prepares for electioneering.....	98
Promoting an unpopular government.....	102
Another slump in Clare activism.....	108
Reorganising in 1931.....	109
February 1932 general election.....	114
Party of opposition.....	117
<b>Chapter 4- Longford/Westmeath Cumann na nGaedheal.....</b>	<b>122</b>
Branch formation in Longford/Westmeath.....	126
Seán Scanlon arrives in Longford.....	130
Westmeath reorganised: 1925.....	135
Cumann na nGaedheal's zenith in microcosm.....	138
Mixed fortunes in two general elections.....	141
Post-election blues.....	146
President Cosgrave tours the midlands.....	149
The Longford/Westmeath by-election.....	151
Party of power to party of protest.....	156
<b>Chapter 5- Cumann na nGaedheal in Dublin North.....</b>	<b>162</b>
Politics as pastime.....	167
March 1925 by-election.....	172
Dublin North social club.....	182
The 1932 election in Dublin North.....	186
<b>Part II.....</b>	<b>194</b>
<b>Chapter 6-Cumann na nGaedheal: Isolated instance or part of a European phenomenon?.....</b>	<b>196</b>
Europe before and during the Great War.....	197
Consequences of the War.....	200
Post-War Europe and democratisation.....	203
Reaction against the new democratic order in Europe.....	209
Europe in the maelstrom of Depression.....	220
<b>Chapter 7- Cumann na nGaedheal policy in government, 1923-28.....</b>	<b>225</b>
Financing the Free State.....	228
Limited industrial development.....	235

Competing in a world market.....	240
Financial orthodoxy.....	246
Legitimacy and stability.....	248
External affairs.....	249
More retrenchment and a second national loan.....	255
<b>Chapter 8- Free State government policy, 1929-32 .....</b>	<b>258</b>
The last Cumann na nGaedheal administration.....	260
Department of Finance.....	268
Economic Committee.....	269
Eve of election retrenchment 1931.....	273
The 1932 election: political, economic and social change?.....	278
Fianna Fáil in government.....	281
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>288</b>
Party organisation.....	288
Wider trends.....	294
Political realignment in Ireland: domestic or international causes?.....	298
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>301</b>

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## Abbreviations

ACA	Army Comrades Association
ACC	Agricultural Credit Corporation
CCCA	Cork City and County Archives
CLS	Celtic Literary Society
ESB	Electricity Supply Board
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
IPP	Irish Parliamentary Party
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IRB	Irish Republican Brotherhood
KDA	Killaloe Diocesan Archive
LCA	Longford County Archive
NAI	National Archive of Ireland
NLI	National Library of Ireland
RIC	Royal Irish Constabulary
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
UCDA	University College Dublin Archive Department
UIL	United Irish League
UIP	United Ireland Party/Fine Gael



## Introduction

During the first decade of its existence, the Irish Free State was governed by the largest political party in the Dáil, Cumann na nGaedheal. Translated to English, Cumann na nGaedheal literally meant the organisation or society of the Irish and, as noted by Ciara Meehan, the name ‘strongly echoed’<sup>1</sup> Cumann Lúthcleas Gael, the Irish term for the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). During the formative years of Irish statehood, Cumann na nGaedheal in government grappled with the enormous challenges facing the newly independent Irish state. Perhaps the greatest legacy of its decade in power was the successful establishment of a fully functioning liberal democracy in a country that had become accustomed to sending its elected representatives to the Imperial Parliament in Westminster since the 1801 Act of Union. During its decade in government, Cumann na nGaedheal succeeded in legitimising the authority of the Irish Free State across the twenty-six counties. Moreover, in peacefully ceding power to Eamon de Valera’s Fianna Fáil party, usually translated as the soldiers of destiny, in 1932, Cumann na nGaedheal showed that the new state was built on firm democratic foundations.

In spite of its apparent successes in Irish state-building, by 1933 Cumann na nGaedheal’s identity had been submerged within a new political organisation to be called the United Ireland Party. Within a few years of its formation this party was known more commonly by its Irish title, Fine Gael, the tribe or family of the Irish. Coakley suggests Fine Gael provided a neater balance to the name Fianna Fáil and that its popularisation coincided with the Treatyite party’s electoral and psychological eclipse by its main rival.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the ‘Fine Gael’ label bore connotations of its parent party lending credence to suggestions the new party was ‘Cumann na nGaedheal writ small’.<sup>3</sup> Having dominated Irish politics for ten years, Cumann na nGaedheal was relegated to

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<sup>1</sup> Ciara Meehan, *The Cosgrave party: a history of Cumann na nGaedheal, 1923-33* (Dublin, 2010), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> John Coakley, ‘The significance of names: the evolution of Irish party labels’ in *Études Irlandaises*, 5 (1980), pp 174-8.

<sup>3</sup> Meehan, *Cosgrave party*, p. xiv.

second place behind the new party of its old adversary, de Valera. In the year of its second electoral defeat to Fianna Fáil, Cumann na nGaedheal's unique identity was jettisoned as party leader W.T. Cosgrave and his colleagues joined forces with Frank MacDermott's National Centre Party and Eoin O'Duffy's National Guard (Blueshirts). However, the merger failed to transform the opposition's fortunes for the better. Fine Gael remained second to Fianna Fáil at every general election from 1937 until 2007, emerging as the largest party for the first time in March 2011. In the intervening seventy-eight years Fine Gael only ever served in government in sporadic coalitions that have always included the Labour party. As such, the elections of 1932 and 1933 effected lasting political realignment in Ireland, with the party that had prided itself on having 'founded the state' bequeathing a largely fruitless inheritance to Fine Gael.

In 1923 the Cumann na nGaedheal party seemed to have held all the electoral cards worth playing. With the Civil War over, the Free State's authority ran through the twenty-six counties where most people desired peace and stability after years of bloodshed and chaos. In that year, the party's main opponents were demoralised, lacked public sympathy and had nowhere to turn at the end of a political cul-de-sac. Moreover, the pro-Treaty party had inherited from Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith the majority section of the revolutionary Sinn Féin coalition (1917-21)<sup>4</sup> and was better placed than its anti-Treaty rival to expand into the wider, non-revolutionary constituency. This included old Irish party constitutionalists, commercial farmers and the professional and business classes. Yet by 1933, Cumann na nGaedheal had ceded serious ground to de Valera's revamped anti-Treaty party which may have lost the war of 1922/23 but was proving it could win the peacetime *longue durée*. Having lost two general elections in an eleven month period, the self-proclaimed 'National Party', Cumann na nGaedheal, found itself forced to merge, as an equal partner, with MacDermott's Centre Party and O'Duffy's Blueshirts. It is indicative of the perilous position of the former 'government party' by 1933 that it should accept merger on these terms with a minor party of independents and farmers and another non-parliamentary political group led by a man whom they knew could be volatile and difficult to work with.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Laffan, 'The unification of Sinn Féin in 1917' in *IHS*, xvii, no. 67 (March 1971), pp 353-79.

<sup>5</sup> Fearghal McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy: a self-made hero* (Oxford, 2005), p. 174.

This thesis endeavours to tease out the reasons for Cumann na nGaedheal's loss of support and the consequent political realignment of 1932-33. Political parties often rebuild from the opposition benches and the merger to form Fine Gael could be interpreted simply as a pro-Treaty rebranding exercise. However, the question of Fine Gael's origins in 1933 is a more complex one that requires scrutiny. On its foundation, the Fine Gael leaders were keen to stress the discontinuity with the old Cumann na nGaedheal organisation as was reflected in the new party's leadership structure.<sup>6</sup> Initially at least, the Fine Gael project was an attempt to move away from the Cumann na nGaedheal (and Civil War) legacy by creating a new force in Irish politics. In particular, the Centre Party leaders James Dillon and MacDermott stressed the need to move on from the bitter controversy of the Civil War and seemed to genuinely regard Fine Gael as a fresh start. It also represented a new beginning for elements within Cumann na nGaedheal who had been growing disillusioned with the excessively moderate and cautious approach of the party's leadership. What were the underlying causes of this political transformation in 1933? Can an explanation be found by examining an assumed dearth of pro-Treaty grass-root organisation during the time of Cumann na nGaedheal or do we need to cast our net further by looking at the rapidly changing world of the early 1930s in understanding Cumann na nGaedheal's disappearance as an independent party in 1933?

### **Broad outline of Cumann na nGaedheal, 1923-33**

Cumann na nGaedheal's performance in government could be described as solid if at times unspectacular and has been looked at in detail by historians such as Alvin Jackson, Ronan Fanning, and Dermot Keogh, among others. The party quickly adopted a cautious, fiscally conservative approach to governance based on a commitment to what Patricia Clavin describes as 'gold standard orthodoxy',<sup>7</sup> that is, balanced budgets, controlled expenditure and minimum government interference. This was the prevailing financial policy of the period after the First World War. Arguably, the cost of reconstruction following the destruction wrought by the Civil War, and the wider economic problems facing post-war Europe, necessitated an economic policy such as that pursued by Cosgrave's administration. In other areas of policy, Cumann na

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<sup>6</sup> Maurice Manning, *The Blueshirts* (Dublin, 2006), pp 89-91.

<sup>7</sup> Patricia Clavin, *The Great Depression in Europe, 1929-1939* (London, 2000), p. 46.

nGaedheal claimed it governed in the interests of the nation as a whole and at times acted as though it alone could divine precisely what was in the national interest. Cumann na nGaedheal's steadfast commitment to balanced budgets, regardless of the political consequences, is best illustrated in Ernest Blythe's reduction of the old age pension from ten shillings to nine shillings per week in the budget of 1924. Keeping the state's finances in the black was seemingly more important to Blythe and his department of Finance officials than the welfare of some of the poorer sections of the community.<sup>8</sup> Through most of its decade in power, Cumann na nGaedheal had as its priority the day-to-day survival of the administrative machine of the Irish Free State. Indeed, Tom Garvin argues that the most successful Dáil departments were headed by ministers who took a pro-Treaty line following the split in the Sinn Féin movement.<sup>9</sup>

Historians have, however, identified some rare examples of innovation from the Cumann na nGaedheal administration during its period in office. On 13 August 1925 a contract was signed with the German firm Siemens for the construction of the Ardnacrusha power station as part of Industry and Commerce minister Patrick McGilligan's Shannon Hydro-Electric Scheme. The Electricity Supply Board (ESB) was established in 1927 as an integral part of the government's ambitious electrification programme.<sup>10</sup> McGilligan's proposal was a colossal undertaking for the newly independent state and it was achieved in spite of the hostility of the department of Finance and the political opposition of Labour and the anti-Treatyites. The establishment of the Agricultural Credit Corporation (ACC) in 1927, the first Banking Commission and the Currency Commission are cited as enterprising initiatives while the setting up of a national radio station, 2RN, in January 1926, has been described as the final modernising action of the 1920s.<sup>11</sup>

Given the bloody nature of the Free State's inception, the new government faced an enormous challenge in establishing a respected native police force in Ireland. Under the guidance of Kevin O'Higgins, the Minister for Home Affairs, and his police commissioner Eoin O'Duffy, a new, unarmed police force was gradually extended

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<sup>8</sup> Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth-century Ireland: revolution and state building* (Dublin, 2005), p. 38.

<sup>9</sup> Tom Garvin, *1922: the birth of Irish democracy* (Dublin, 1996), p. 56.

<sup>10</sup> Keogh, *Twentieth-century Ireland*, p. 37.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

throughout the Free State in 1923.<sup>12</sup> The new police force would play a significant role in restoring law-and-order in independent Ireland and was quickly accepted and respected by Free Staters and Republicans alike. The re-establishment of law-and-order fed into Cumann na nGaedheal's identity as the party that would prove Ireland was capable of self-government. As noted by Alvin Jackson, Cumann na nGaedheal succeeded in winning loyalty to the state without securing partisan party political support for itself.<sup>13</sup>

Cumann na nGaedheal government offered voters who favoured a return to bread-and-butter politics the best prospect of stability and security in the years following independence. That was an electoral card grasped by the Treatyites during the Dáil Treaty debates and the subsequent Civil War. As will be seen throughout this study, the Treaty settlement, as a basis for national progress, had widespread support among the general population of the twenty-six counties. It must be remembered that a decade earlier, most nationalists had framed their aspirations within the confines of a Home Rule settlement. Outside Sinn Féin, the 1921 Treaty was broadly welcomed by the sectional interest parties who fared well in the 1922 and 1923 elections. Delivering on promised peace and stability was Cumann na nGaedheal's trump card until Fianna Fáil entered the Dáil in 1927, thereby accepting the legitimacy of the Free State. On taking their seats, de Valera's party provided the first credible alternative to Cosgrave's administration. Labour never attained the electoral support required to offer anything more than a nominal opposition to the Cumann na nGaedheal government.

By 1932 the country was willing to embrace change as most European countries turned to alternative policies. The onset of the Great Depression had discredited the liberal economic order, largely adhered to by Cumann na nGaedheal. Throughout the 1920s, the Free State endured a harsh economic climate, and this was exacerbated following the Wall Street Crash of 1929. The onset of the Great Depression placed further pressure on the Free State's economy, while governments all around Europe began to fall under the strain of unpopular decisions that failed to satisfy disgruntled voters. In some cases, democracy itself collapsed under the weight of the dire economic problems facing Europe, as weak parliamentary majorities crumbled under the weight of

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Ireland, 1798-1998: politics and war* (Oxford, 1999), p. 282.

what seemed insurmountable problems. Ireland's democracy, established on strong foundations by Cumann na nGaedheal, survived the Depression, but its fiscally conservative government did not. Cumann na nGaedheal endured longer than many governments across Europe but nonetheless suffered its first electoral reverse in February 1932. The election had been called prematurely so as to avoid the politicisation of a Eucharistic Congress, due to take place in June. Although it only dropped 3,000 votes nationally, Cumann na nGaedheal was supplanted as the largest party in the state by Fianna Fáil which seems to have mobilised electors who had previously not voted in Free State elections.<sup>14</sup> However, the death knell tolled for Cumann na nGaedheal a year later when a snap general election was called. Unprepared for the contest, Cumann na nGaedheal's parliamentary strength slumped by a further nine seats and it now faced a prolonged spell on the opposition benches.

Many historians and political scientists are quick to attribute Cumann na nGaedheal's demise on its failure to build a strong party machine,<sup>15</sup> or to give rank-and-file branch members a greater say in policy or the running of the party. Undoubtedly, Fianna Fáil was much better organised and spent its years in opposition meticulously building up a party machine that could sweep it to power. Nonetheless, Cumann na nGaedheal too had a loyal following across the country (it secured a plurality of votes and seats in three successive general elections) and there is no reason to suggest Cosgrave's party had not the potential to at least match the organisational capacity of its main rival. Addressing this point raises a number of important questions. Was Cumann na nGaedheal, as has been suggested,<sup>16</sup> a nineteenth-century style 'cadre party'<sup>17</sup> cut adrift in an era of mass politics? If so, why would two parties with common origins in the revolutionary Sinn Féin movement adopt such contrasting approaches to party organisation? More critically, was the disparity in organisational strength between Cumann na nGaedheal and the anti-Treatyites as wide as has been perceived? Is it possible that Cumann na nGaedheal branches were active in the constituencies in spite

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<sup>14</sup> Richard English, *Irish freedom: the history of nationalism in Ireland* (London, 2006), p. 328.

<sup>15</sup> Liam Weeks, 'Parties and the party system' in John Coakley and Michael Gallagher (eds), *Politics in the Republic of Ireland* (London, 2010), pp 137-67.

<sup>16</sup> David M. Farrell, 'Ireland: centralisation, professionalization and competitive pressures' in Richard S. Kratz and Peter Mair (eds), *How parties organize: change and adaptation in party organizations in western democracies* (London, 1994), pp 216-41.

<sup>17</sup> Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: their organization and activity in the modern state* (London, 1969), pp 62-79.

of the perceived indifference of government ministers? These questions will be tackled in the first five chapters of this work.

This thesis is divided into two parts in recognition of the twin objectives at the heart of the project. Testing the actual strength of the Cumann na nGaedheal party organisation on the ground in three constituencies will form the first part of this research project (chapters one to five). In the second part of the thesis (chapters six to eight), a second issue will be addressed: to what extent did international factors impact on Ireland's domestic politics? Were the domestic policy choices on offer in 1932 part of wider trends then discernable on the European continent? As such, the second part of this thesis will go on to place the experience of the Irish Free State during this period in a wider, European context so as to properly analyse its response to the worldwide economic problems of the 1920s and early 1930s. Being mindful that Ireland did not exist in a vacuum, chapters six to eight will chart the fortunes of governments across Europe as they grappled with problems not dissimilar to those facing Cosgrave and his ministerial colleagues.

### **Existing Literature**

Until recently, little scholarly attention has been given to Fine Gael's parent party, Cumann na nGaedheal. While a plethora of works have charted the revolutionary period 1916-23, and in particular the iconic figures Michael Collins and Eamon de Valera, much less has been written of the Free State period under Cumann na nGaedheal. Michael Laffan, both in numerous articles and in his book *The resurrection of Ireland: the Sinn Féin party, 1916-23* (Cambridge, 1999), expertly discusses the unification of disparate nationalist forces under the Sinn Féin label in 1917. His work describes the coalition nature of revolutionary Sinn Féin and the compromises made to achieve party unity. Laffan's book also examines the organisational structures of the revolutionary movement, an understanding of which is a pre-requisite in trying to comprehend the structures adopted by Cumann na nGaedheal.

To a considerable extent, Cumann na nGaedheal's historiography tends to focus on the party's shortcomings and the near inevitability of de Valera's rise to power. The legacy of the Civil War meant that it was some time before the more controversial aspects of the state's early years could be given scholarly attention while the outbreak of

the northern ‘Troubles’ in 1969 further influenced the shape of the historiography of the Free State period. In 1971 the pro-Treaty tradition was first examined in depth through the lens of Eoin O’Duffy’s Blueshirts. At that time Maurice Manning told the story of the Treatyite shirted movement in his landmark study simply called *The Blueshirts*. In his work, Manning discussed the Blueshirts’ origins, subsequent development and also examined their relationship to European Fascism in the 1930s. Manning concluded that the movement lacked all the elements of hardcore Fascism while having some of its overt trappings. In 1997 another study of the Blueshirts appeared. Mike Cronin’s treatment of the subject, *The Blueshirts and Irish politics*, is thematic in nature and, in contrast to Manning’s work, dealt in detail with the organisational structures of the Blueshirt organisation and the motivations of grass-root activists. Cronin argues that the Blueshirts played a key role in realigning the political opposition to Fianna Fáil,<sup>18</sup> and in the tense political climate of the early 1930s, provided more potent opposition to de Valera than the constitutional force of Cumann na nGaedheal could muster.<sup>19</sup> Fearghal McGarry’s 2005 biography, *Eoin O’Duffy: a self-made hero*, informs our knowledge of O’Duffy’s youth, his experience of the revolutionary war and cultural motivations while also dealing with the General’s fraught relationships with his political masters in the 1920s and early 1930s. Moreover, the biography sheds further light on the vacuum at the heart of Treatyite politics that enabled O’Duffy become President of Fine Gael in September 1933.<sup>20</sup>

As regards to studies dealing exclusively with the party that preceded Fine Gael, little appeared until 1988. Maryann Gialanella Valiulis’s article: ‘After the revolution: The formative years of Cumann na nGaedheal’ focuses on the tumultuous events of 1924, namely the army mutiny and the secession of nine Cumann na nGaedheal deputies. Valiulis hones in on the release by the party’s Standing Committee of a document in October 1924 entitled ‘Statement of Views’. Valiulis terms this document the ‘October Manifesto’,<sup>21</sup> and describes it as an attempt by the ‘dissident wing’ to move beyond the confines of the Treaty in an effort to create a post-independence national

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<sup>18</sup> Mike Cronin, *The Blueshirts and Irish politics* (Dublin, 1997), p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> McGarry, *Eoin O’Duffy*, p. 242.

<sup>21</sup> Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, ‘After the revolution: the formative years of Cumann na nGaedheal’ in Audrey S. Eyster and Robert F. Garratt, *The uses of the past: essays on Irish culture* (Wilmington, 1988), pp 131-43.



movement. The dissidents, she argues, were disillusioned with the cautious approach of the ‘conservative wing’ dominant within the government from 1924.

Cumann na nGaedheal’s internal mechanics were not dealt with in monograph form until 1999 in John M. Regan’s *The Irish counter revolution, 1921-1936: Treatyite politics and settlement in independent Ireland*. This was the first work to examine, in detail, Cumann na nGaedheal’s organisation and the divisions within the party and government. This work showed a party, itself born of revolution, struggle with the reality of having to consolidate the gains of the Treaty while simultaneously countering the new revolutionary forces unleashed during the Irish Civil War. Regan’s book also suggests that the deaths of Collins and Griffith left a somewhat enigmatic legacy and identity to Cumann na nGaedheal which could be open to conflicting interpretations within the overall Treatyite movement. In Regan’s view, Griffithite Sinn Féiners, militarist republicans, parsimonious free-traders and economic protectionists came together under the new party banner to put down a war waged by the anti-Treaty forces against the fledgling Free State and to develop a national policy on the basis of the settlement. Regan’s book portrays Cumann na nGaedheal as a badly organised party that lacked cohesion and vision. The work also deals with Fine Gael and the Blueshirts up to 1936 arguing that a broad nationalist consensus had emerged in the twenty-six counties by then.

While having a different focus to the *Counter revolution* thesis, here it is hoped to address some of Regan’s questions about the party organisation by analysing Cumann na nGaedheal’s constituency structures. In fact, the first book to deal with Cumann na nGaedheal exclusively appeared in 2010, three years into this research project. Ciara Meehan’s *The Cosgrave party: a history of Cumann na nGaedheal, 1923-33* is a welcome addition to the party’s historiography. Meehan’s work breaks with the perception that Cumann na nGaedheal lacked innovation in its electioneering techniques while providing a more positive treatment of the party’s achievements in government. While correctly reappraising the cliché of a ‘Cosgrave party’ in decline from 1927, the perception of a weak Cumann na nGaedheal organisation in the constituencies remains untested in Meehan’s work. In contrast, testing Cumann na nGaedheal’s organisational strength is of fundamental importance to this research project. Furthermore, this thesis

sets out to understand the reasons for the party's demise in 1933 and will analyse the impact of global economic Depression in Ireland's domestic politics.

Cumann na nGaedheal has elsewhere been the focus of historians, writers and political scientists. Brian Maye's general history of the Fine Gael party, *Fine Gael, 1923-1987*, published in 1993, deals briefly with the Cumann na nGaedheal period. However, this work's general focus and lack of primary research makes its historical value questionable. That said, the biographical details provided of key party figures are extensive and of use. In like manner, Michael Gallagher and Michael Marsh's *Days of blue loyalty: the politics of the membership of the Fine Gael party*, published in 2002 to convey the results of a 1999 survey of the Fine Gael membership's politics, deals briefly with the Cumann na nGaedheal period. Chapter two of this book explores Fine Gael's traditions and how the modern party's sense of identity dates to foundation 'myths' firmly anchored in the Cumann na nGaedheal period. The authors explain that the term 'myths' is not intended to imply that these collective beliefs are untrue, but rather refers to shared stories about the past that, regardless of their veracity, help to shape the political identity of party members today. As such, these shared memories and traditions bestow on party activists a sense of continuity with an unfolding history of political commitment to a party cause. Moreover it is argued that members' perceptions of Fine Gael (in 1999 at least) are rooted in Cumann na nGaedheal's apparent eschewing of populist policies, its commitment to law-and-order and adherence to a moderate and accommodating nationalism.<sup>22</sup> Also important is Kevin Rafter's 2009 work, *Fine Gael: party at the crossroads*. However, this book was primarily concerned with Enda Kenny's Fine Gael, devoting some space to Cumann na nGaedheal only in its second chapter.

Treatyite politics and organisation have been dealt with in general histories of Ireland in this period too. Alvin Jackson, Ronan Fanning, Terence Dooley, J.J. Lee, Dermot Keogh, David Fitzpatrick and Diarmaid Ferriter have all examined the politics, society and economy of Ireland in the twentieth century and have written on the period of Cumann na nGaedheal administration. Terence Dooley's *The land for the people': the land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004) is particularly important in that

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Gallagher and Michael Marsh, *Days of blue loyalty: the politics of membership of the Fine Gael party* (Dublin, 2002), pp 11-21.

it shows the central importance of the land within the politics of the independent state. After 1922 the land question remained a core issue in local and national politics, and in particular during the Civil War.<sup>23</sup> Dooley argues that the 1923 Land Act was connected to the Free State government's attempt to cut the anti-Treatyites off from a potential resurgence of radical agrarianism. He also argues that grass-root political movements had the potential to bring considerable pressure to bear on politicians and Land Commission officials.<sup>24</sup>

In a number of thought-provoking works, Tom Garvin has examined cleavages that he identifies within Irish nationalist politics in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His *The evolution of Irish nationalist politics* (Dublin, 1981), and *1922: the birth of Irish democracy* (Dublin, 1996) in particular are useful tools that help us to understand the origins of pan-nationalist politics in Ireland and the subsequent division that emerged between Treatyites and anti-Treatyites. In addition to historical studies, this thesis draws on the work of geographers and political scientists who have written in Journals such as *Irish Geography*, *Irish Political Studies* and *World Politics*. This thesis owes much to political science in its use of terminology such as 'cadre party' and 'mass party'. Maurice Duverger's classic, *Political Parties: their organization and activity in the modern state* proved particularly useful in this regard. In addition, Susan E. Scarrow's *Parties and their members: organizing for victory in Britain and Germany* (New York, 1996) offers an excellent synthesis of some of the seminal work of political scientists in the realm of party organisation.

This thesis also relies on a number of biographies of key figures from the period under review. These include Terence de Vere White's classic biography *Kevin O'Higgins* (London, 1948) and John P. McCarthy's *Kevin O'Higgins: builder of the Irish state* (Dublin, 2006). Biographies of W.T. Cosgrave by Stephen Collins (Dublin, 1996) and Anthony Jordan (Dublin, 2006) proved useful as did life stories of Richard Mulcahy by Maryann Gialanella Valiulis (Dublin, 1992) and by the general's son Risteárd in 1999 and 2009.

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<sup>23</sup> Terence Dooley, 'Land and politics in independent Ireland, 1923-48: the case for reappraisal' in *IHS*, xxxiv, no. 134 (November 2004), pp 176-81.

<sup>24</sup> Terence Dooley, *'The land for the people': the land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), pp 201-18.

Numerous histories with a local focus have also proved invaluable in the chapters that deal with Cumann na nGaedheal's constituency structures, in particular chapters three and four. For example, Michael Wheatley's *Nationalism and the Irish party: Provincial Ireland 1910-1916* (New York, 2005) looks at the Irish party's grass-root support structures in the five counties of 'middle Ireland' Sligo, Roscommon, Leitrim, Longford and Westmeath. Wheatley's work focuses on constitutional nationalism at a local level in the years before the Great War and is of particular interest here due to its inclusion of Longford and Westmeath (examined in chapter four). His work sheds light on the Irish party's grass-root strength on the eve of the Great War. David Fitzpatrick's *Politics and Irish life, 1913-21: provincial experiences of war and revolution* (Dublin, 1977) hones in on County Clare (examined in chapter three of this thesis) to chart the fortunes of the Irish party supporting organisations between 1913 and 1921. This book also discusses the consequent rise in support for the advanced nationalist policy of Sinn Féin in the aftermath of the 1916 Rising. In like manner, Marie Coleman has written of County Longford in her *County Longford and the Irish revolution, 1910-1923* (Dublin, 2003). This work charts the decline of the J.P. Farrell-dominated Home Rule movement in the county and the rise of Sinn Féin from 1917 after its victory in the South Longford by-election. In particular, Coleman's book focuses on the role played by the North Longford Flying Column during the War of Independence. Unlike this thesis, all of these works stop short of examining post-Treaty politics in the counties they are concerned with.

This thesis also makes use of a number of studies by historians of other parties such as Fianna Fáil and the Irish Labour party. Brian Reynolds's unpublished Ph.D dissertation, 'The formation and development of Fianna Fáil, 1926-32' (Trinity College Dublin, 1976) and Richard Dunphy's *The making of Fianna Fáil power in Ireland, 1923-1948* (New York, 1995) both inform understanding of the grass-root machine of de Valera's anti-Treaty party. These works also explain the context of de Valera's rise to power. Kevin Rafter's *Sinn Féin, 1905-2005: in the shadow of gunmen* (Dublin, 2005) covers the party in its various guises, including its third incarnation as the main anti-Treaty party until 1926.<sup>25</sup> Also consulted was Niamh Puirseil's *The Irish Labour party, 1922-73* (Dublin, 2007). This work explains Labour's failure to build a strong opposition

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<sup>25</sup> Kevin Rafter, *Sinn Féin, 1905-2005: in the shadow of gunmen* (Dublin, 2005).

to Cumann na nGaedheal in the 1920s while highlighting the party's organisational weakness across the Free State.

Of particular importance to the second part of the thesis were works that charted Ireland's economic and social history. Ronan Fanning's *The Irish Department of Finance, 1922-58* (Dublin, 1978) provides the cornerstone to understanding the power of that department within the independent Irish state. In addition, Mary E. Daly's *Social and economic history of Ireland since 1800* (Dublin, 1981) and Cormac Ó Gráda's *Ireland: a new economic history, 1780-1939* (New York, 1994) proved particularly helpful in understanding the policies pursued in the Free State during the 1920s and 1930s. Further insights are gleaned from Mel Cousins's *The birth of social welfare in Ireland, 1922-52* (Dublin, 2003) and Brian Girvin's *Between two worlds: politics and economy in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 1989).

Aware that Ireland in the 1920s and early 1930s did not exist in a vacuum, this thesis also draws on the work of a number of European historians to broadly chart the ways in which the Free State corresponds to or diverges from continental trends, particularly those affected by global economic conditions. Academics writing during the period have proved particularly useful. Warner Moss, in *Political parties in the Irish Free State* (New York, 1933), captures the general expectation that the liberal, parliamentary state was about to be replaced by the party state. Mass parties were becoming more powerful in 1933 as the world convulsed from the effects of the Depression and many new political movements proposed a complete take-over of the state arguing that party politics had had their day. Moss cited the Dáil government of Sinn Féin, Bolshevik Russia, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany as examples of party-controlled governments.<sup>26</sup> At the time of writing, the trend seemed inexorable. José Ortega y Gasset's *The revolt of the masses* (1930) correctly diagnosed the decadence of European parliamentary systems and was attuned to the reaction against liberal political values on the Continent. Europeans, according to Gasset, had moved from a period of plenitude before the Great War to one of uncertainty and decay in its aftermath with a previously all-pervasive optimistic faith in progress shattered by the destruction and bloodletting of 1914-18. The Spanish philosopher regarded Communists and Fascists as anti-Liberal. Gasset feared that mass parties, of the left and right, threatened to undo all

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<sup>26</sup> Warner Moss, *Political parties in the Irish Free State* (New York, 1933), p. 5.

the progress made since the French Revolution and risked plunging Europe into another dark age. Pessimism prevailed as Europe lurched to the extremes in a new epoch of economic hardship and political convulsions.

Contemporary understanding of inter-war Europe is further enhanced by the work of historians such as Martin Kitchen, David Stevenson, Mark Mazower, Alan Kramer, Stanley G. Payne and Patricia Clavin. R.A.C. Parker (London, 1969) provides a firm foundation in the history of inter-war Europe in his *Europe 1919-45*. Kitchen's *Europe between the wars* (London, 1988) helps to synthesise the complex trends of the period into one thematic book, as does Mark Mazower's excellent *Dark continent: Europe's twentieth century* (Bath, 1998). It would be foolhardy to write about Europe in the aftermath of the Great War without first having a reasonable understanding of the war itself and here David Stevenson's exhaustively researched *1914-1918: The history of the First World War* (London, 2004) filled the breach. Stevenson's work also delves into the problems that faced the continent in the aftermath of the war.

More specific works by historians such as Richard J. Evans, Filipe Ribeiro de Menezes and Alejandro Quiroga among others were used as they document those challenges as they revealed themselves in individual countries such as Germany, Portugal and Spain. Frustrated national expectations in the aftermath of the Great War, chronic economic problems seemingly unsolved by either liberal institutions or 'gold standard financial orthodoxy' and political experiments in democracy, Fascism and Communism contributed to a generally tense age as Europe emerged from the shadow of one war only to begin a journey towards an even more destructive second world war. Some of the economic, political and social tensions that characterised Europe between the world wars are also discernable in the Irish Free State during the 1920s and 1930s as it searched for legitimacy in the first decades of independence.

## **Primary Sources**

While making extensive use of the existing literature, this thesis aims to address a lacuna in the historiography of Cumann na nGaedheal and so is heavily dependent on original research. Having identified a gap in scholarly attention to Cumann na nGaedheal's constituency structures and the wider European context to its policies, this thesis aims to bridge the void by using sources held at various repositories. Extensive

use was made of personal papers held in the National Archives of Ireland (NAI), the National Library of Ireland (NLI), the University College Dublin Archives Department (UCDA) and the Cork City and County Archives (CCCA). Sources held in the Killaloe Diocesan Archive (KDA) and the Longford County Archive (LCA) were also useful, particularly with regard to chapters three and four. Debates of the houses of the Oireachtas and local, national and international newspapers were also consulted. Interviews conducted with Professor Risteárd Mulcahy and Dr. Garret FitzGerald proved illuminating.

Local newspapers proved invaluable in researching chapters three, four and five. A rich source,<sup>27</sup> these newspapers covered local issues in extensive detail and meetings of active organisations were usually reported on. These newspapers also proved useful in providing additional background information on some of the local Cumann na nGaedheal activists. National newspapers such as the *Irish Independent* and the *Irish Times* sometimes covered local party activity but proved most useful in their reporting of national events, government policy and party conferences. International publications such as *The Times*, the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Economist* proved particularly useful in chapters one, six, seven and eight, not just for their coverage of international news, but also for their take on events in Ireland. Various Free State, Cumann na nGaedheal, Blueshirt and Fine Gael newspapers held in the National Library were also scrutinised. These usually were geared towards party supporters and so are more useful as indicators of the party's ethos and the prejudices of supporters than as reliable factual guides. In addition, these party organs often carried organisational notes on the activities of branches around the country which were utilised in chapters three, four and five.

The Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books and the Richard Mulcahy papers in the UCD Archives proved the best sources on the party's organisation. The Seán MacEoin, Eoin MacNeill, Hugh Kennedy and Martin Conlon papers held there also yielded important material. The Liam de Róiste papers, and particularly his diaries, offer an intriguing insight into the mind of a leading Cumann na nGaedheal activist in Cork and extensive use is made of this source throughout the thesis. In gaining a picture of Free State policy, the papers of Ernest Blythe, Kevin O'Higgins and Patrick McGilligan (also in the UCD Archives) are used extensively. Sources in the National Archives

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<sup>27</sup> Moss, *Political parties*, p. 8.

including the Department of the Taoiseach papers (these included Executive Council minutes), and the Frank MacDermott papers illustrated aspects of the party's approach. Also consulted were the Sinn Féin and Cumann na Poblachta papers held in the National Archives of Ireland. Given that the party was in government for most of its existence, there was little state surveillance of its grass-root activity. With the transfer of power in 1932 this changed, although most of the reporting in the Department of Justice papers from this time centred on the activity of the Blueshirt movement. The Seán Milroy and George A. Lyons papers in the National Library provide additional sources on the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation while the Celia Shaw diary captures the horrors of civil war from the point of view of a leading pro-Treaty activist.

### **Structure of the thesis**

As stated, this thesis is organised in two parts. Part I comprises the first five chapters, part II the latter four. Chapter one is an introductory chapter that examines the origins of the Cumann na nGaedheal party, founded in December 1922 and launched in April 1923. It looks at the new cultural nationalism emerging at the turn of the twentieth century and the eclipse of the Irish party after 1916. This chapter draws on the work of Laffan and Garvin in helping to understand that Sinn Féin was united for four years and that the different sides in 1922 represented, to a certain extent, different factions of the superficially united revolutionary party. Chapter two outlines Cumann na nGaedheal's national structures and its performance in general elections during the period 1923-33. As such, the chapter paves the way for the following three which chart the party organisation's fortunes in three representative constituencies.

Chapters three, four and five focus exclusively on party life in the three constituencies of Clare, Longford/Westmeath and Dublin North. Clare was chosen because the western county was the bailiwick of Eamon de Valera and Cumann na nGaedheal struggled for support there, only ever winning one of the five seats available. Longford/Westmeath was chosen because it lies in the midlands, was a two-county constituency and represented something of a middle ground in terms of Cumann na nGaedheal support.<sup>28</sup> In three of the five elections between 1923 and 1933, the party won one seat in Longford/Westmeath before gaining a second in September 1927, which

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<sup>28</sup> Election results for each constituency can be found in Brian M. Walker's *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918-92* (Dublin, 1992).



was successfully defended as the party lost power in 1932. The third constituency, Dublin North was selected because it was an urban constituency representing the northern portion of the capital. Moreover, it was something of a Cumann na nGaedheal stronghold for much of the period, returning four Cumann na nGaedheal deputies to the Dáil in 1923 and September 1927 and three in the elections of June 1927, February 1932 and January 1933. In addition, Dublin North and Longford/Westmeath witnessed by-elections in this period while the locations of the three constituencies provide the study with something of an even geographical balance.

Chapter six provides an overview of political, social and economic change in Europe from 1918 to 1933. This chapter draws heavily on secondary sources (mentioned above) and is designed to set a wider, international context to Irish policy choices that are described in chapters seven and eight. Parallels between events in Ireland and Europe are noted as are various points of contrast. Chapter seven documents the first period of Cumann na nGaedheal government, 1923 to 1928, stopping short of the generally accepted date for the onset of the Great Depression in 1929.<sup>29</sup> The chapter charts the government's attempts to place the new state's finances on a firm footing arguing that its policy preferences largely corresponded with the dominant 'gold standard orthodoxy' of the period. Chapter eight looks at Free State government policy between 1929 and 1933. As such the chapter scrutinises the last years of Cumann na nGaedheal administration and the first year of de Valera's government. The chapter charts the downturn in the Irish economy from about 1930 as trade collapsed and recognises that the Cumann na nGaedheal cabinet, like most European governments, were slow to realise their mistake in simply continuing to pursue deflationary policies. New approaches were needed and governments across Europe fell to more radical or extremist alternatives usually encompassing some form of economic nationalism as international cooperation all but came to an end in the early 1930s. The chapter argues that Fianna Fáil, as the Irish advocate of protectionism and economic nationalism, found itself coming to power in 1932 at a time when its policy was beginning to carry weight internationally.

In the thesis that follows, it will be seen that there was more to the Cumann na nGaedheal party's organisation and policy than has been depicted to date. The party took the reins of government at a very difficult time as the country emerged from a

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<sup>29</sup> Clavin, *The Great Depression*, p. 4.

destructive civil war into statehood as the international economy creaked. On losing their two leaders, Collins and Griffith in 1922, Cosgrave and his colleagues were charged with leading the country through those turbulent years. Having taken the less glamorous side in the Treaty division, the political initiative for change would rest ultimately with their opponents and recruitment of a mass party membership was neither a priority, nor an easy task, for a government facing such gargantuan difficulties. However, in the pages that follow it is hoped that the reader will gain some fascinating new insights into pro-Treaty mobilisation in the years 1923-33.

# Part I

## The Origins of Cumann na nGaedheal

Although officially launched as a political party on 27 April 1923 at a Conference held in the Mansion House on Dublin's Dawson Street, Cumann na nGaedheal had roots stretching deep into Irish political history. Indeed, even the name Cumann na nGaedheal existed as early as September 1900 as an umbrella title devised by Arthur Griffith to link a number of small nationalist groupings.<sup>1</sup> Ireland, long dominated by England, had become an integral part of the United Kingdom 100 years earlier through the Act of Union in 1801. Throughout the nineteenth century, Ireland was no longer merely an English colony but was considered a part of the United Kingdom in much the same way as England, Scotland and Wales were. However, that century also saw national consciousness rise on the continent bringing about German and Italian unification and threatening the continued existence of the multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian empire. Ireland, never at ease under London's control, was not immune. Increasingly influential middle-class Catholics and progressive-minded Protestants such as Charles Stewart Parnell underpinned 'the Irish party' which believed Ireland could have its own 'home rule' parliament in Dublin while remaining part of the United Kingdom. After the fall of Parnell, 'the party' remained the dominant voice of nationalist Ireland. However, an *avant-garde* of cultural nationalists sought to promote a distinct Irish national culture through the formation of the Gaelic Athletic Association, the Celtic Literary Society and the Gaelic League. At this time too, a small band of advanced nationalists opposed the official policy of nationalist Ireland as espoused by the Irish party, believing that Home Rule did not go far enough.

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Maye, *Arthur Griffith* (Dublin, 1997), p. 69.

About 1900 advanced, nationalist intellectuals would attend meetings of the original ‘de-anglicizing’<sup>2</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal in promotion of their cultural and political activities. Committed to emphasising Ireland’s status as a nation in its own right, members demonstrated their patriotic zeal by giving up their smoking habits so as to deny the British treasury extra revenue from the tax on tobacco. In the early days, the organisation’s only policies were support of Irish industry and the ‘Hungarian policy’, first advocated as a model for Irish independence by Arthur Griffith at the 1902 Cumann na nGaedheal convention. Liam de Róiste was a member of Cumann na nGaedheal and the Celtic Literary Society in Cork in 1902. His diaries reflect the antagonisms that existed between members of the various organisations, the difficulties of keeping the various clubs running and the extent to which de Róiste’s generation were disillusioned with the politics of ‘the party’.<sup>3</sup> Retrospectively, de Róiste noted that he was

Very intolerant in those days of anything that was not truly Irish. Even in the C.L.S we used to have arguments over the songs, music, dances, plays [and] entertainments [...] [S]ome who regarded themselves as more “extreme” than I was in political ideas, were not with me as to the great importance of the Irish language. Music, drama, literature, to them, were things apart from our other dreams or ideals.<sup>4</sup>

Cumann na nGaedheal evolved with the National Council and other groups associated with Griffith to become Sinn Féin in 1905. ‘Sinn Féin’ was the title of a Conference in the Rotunda concert hall on 28 November 1905 and only became the recognisable name of the new organisation in 1907.<sup>5</sup> This new party advocated the abstention of Irish M.P.s from Westminster and Griffith’s policy of establishing a dual British-Irish monarchy, along Austro-Hungarian lines, through passive resistance to the British authorities in Ireland.<sup>6</sup> W.T. Cosgrave was a founding member of Sinn Féin and long-term political disciple of Arthur Griffith who established a Sinn Féin branch in

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<sup>2</sup> Richard English, *Irish freedom: the history of nationalism in Ireland* (London, 2006), p. 260.

<sup>3</sup> Between March 1943 and November 1946, Liam de Róiste re-wrote diary entries made from February 1902 to March 1910 encompassing volumes 1-15. Volumes 16-55 are original and have escaped retrospective alterations. De Róiste Diary entries, 14 Feb. 1902; 16 Feb. 1902; 17 Apr. 1907; July 1902 (CCCA, Liam de Róiste papers, U271A, Book 1).

<sup>4</sup> De Róiste diary entry, 1 May 1902 (Ibid.).

<sup>5</sup> Kevin Rafter, *Sinn Féin, 1905–2005: in the shadow of gunmen* (Dublin, 2005), pp 42-5.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Hopkinson, *Green against green: the Irish Civil War* (Dublin, 2004), p. 3.

Dublin in those early days. Sinn Féin made little impact during its first decade, and it certainly lacked a strong following though some branches did exist in various parts of the country from its inception. Cosgrave and six party colleagues were successful in elections to the eighty-seat Dublin Corporation in 1909.<sup>7</sup> In spite of this rather modest success in local politics, nationalist Ireland remained dominated by the Irish party.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, it seems that just a few years into its life, the original Sinn Féin was in decay, its sole purpose apparently to antagonise Home Rulers. By 1909 what existed of its grass-root structure lost vitality and, according to Michael Laffan, seemed to be in terminal decline by 1914.<sup>9</sup> However, Griffith's journalism, if not the detail of his policy, had a far-reaching effect and, having been wrongly arrested after the 1916 Rising, he was greeted by some of his fellow inmates as the man whose writing had incited them to rebellion.<sup>10</sup> Despite Sinn Féin's having stalled, the new nationalist and cultural organisations such as the GAA and the Gaelic League continued their campaigns of Irish cultural revival and the personal relationships that developed in these societies would be utilised in the changing political landscape up to and after 1916. Advanced nationalism's appropriation of the new cultural bodies was often resented by Irish party adherents.<sup>11</sup>

Monarchical Sinn Féin became a potent force in Irish politics only through its accidental association with the 1916 Rebellion. Ardent Treaty supporter P. S. O'Hegarty was adamant in his 1924 polemic *The Victory of Sinn Féin* that British and Irish party propaganda labelled the 1916 Rising as the 'Sinn Féin rebellion' in an effort to discredit the rebellion, such was the weakness of the abstentionist party at that time.<sup>12</sup> Sinn Féin under Griffith had committed itself to passive resistance and a monarchical settlement in Ireland, all of which flew in the face of what the leaders of the 1916 rising sought to achieve. Following the execution of fifteen republican leaders in the immediate aftermath of the rebellion, the mood of the country changed to one of sympathy for the rebels. Sinn Féin became a rallying point for this new wave of nationalist fervour which swept the country. As O'Hegarty noted, many people began to identify with Sinn Féin without fully

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<sup>7</sup> Anthony Jordan, *W.T. Cosgrave, 1880-1965: founder of modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2006), p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish life, 1913-1921: provincial experience of war and revolution* (Dublin, 1977), p. 85.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Laffan, *The resurrection of Ireland: the Sinn Féin party, 1916-1923* (Cambridge, 1999), pp 30-3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>11</sup> Fearghal McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy: a self-made hero* (Oxford, 2005), p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> P. S. O'Hegarty, *The victory of Sinn Fein* (Dublin, 1924), p. 5.

understanding what exactly it stood for or even partially imbibing its dual-monarchy proposals. Now registering on the wider public's consciousness, Sinn Féin provided the diverse elements of Irish separatism with a label around which they could unite and build a platform for the future.<sup>13</sup> Veterans of 1916 did not hesitate to exploit, to their own ends, the newfound notoriety of Arthur Griffith's Sinn Féin.

In 1917 Sinn Fein was reconstituted at its *Ard Fheis* (annual convention) along much broader lines than before.<sup>14</sup> Crucially, Arthur Griffith agreed to step aside as President in favour of the most senior survivor of the rebellion, Eamon de Valera. This changeover represented not just a broadening of the party's brand of nationalism but also the inauguration of a new chapter in Irish political development. Sinn Féin in its new incarnation was in reality a rather diverse coalition containing many varied shades of nationalist opinion, as was evident in the most significant constitutional amendment passed by the 1917 convention. In a delicate compromise designed to appease all within its ranks, the *Ard Fheis* voted to amend the party constitution to state that a republic was the declared aim of the organisation but that once independence had been achieved a referendum should decide what form of government would be adopted by the new state.<sup>15</sup> Griffith's original dual-monarchists, and the Republicans who had flocked to its ranks following the rebellion, were thereby accommodated. Moreover, in adopting such a broad policy, the reconstituted party could hope to attract disillusioned followers of John Redmond's party and possibly supplant it as the voice of nationalist Ireland. However, the unity of the newly constituted Sinn Féin party, generally termed revolutionary Sinn Féin, was but a superficial one. Already more militant newcomers had come to distrust those identified with Griffith's original party.<sup>16</sup> When it was finally put to the test in December 1921 over the complex question of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the underlying divisions quickly surfaced as the uneasy coalition created in 1917 disintegrated.

By the beginning of 1919 Sinn Féin had displaced the Irish party and had firmly established itself as the voice of mainstream Irish nationalism. It built on historic by-election victories in 1917 and 1918 by winning 73 of the 106 Irish seats available in the

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<sup>13</sup> Hopkinson, *Green against green*, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Laffan, 'The unification of Sinn Fein in 1917' in *IHS*, xvii, no. 67 (March 1971), pp 353-79.

<sup>15</sup> Hopkinson, *Green against green*, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> English, *Irish Freedom*, p. 284.

December 1918 British general election. Following the election, Sinn Féin carried out its one consistent policy: abstention from Westminster. Instead, its successful candidates set up a parliament in Dublin, Dáil Éireann. This assembly reaffirmed the Irish Republic proclaimed in Easter 1916 by declaring Irish independence and announcing a Democratic Programme. The Dáil in turn elected, as the Republic's executive arm, a government under de Valera's leadership. While the Dáil ministries evolved slowly, and some proved more successful than others, their very establishment, along with Sinn Féin's impressive mandate, represented a direct challenge to continued British rule in Ireland. Sinn Féin hoped to capitalise on the post-war move towards self-determination. However, Britain had been a victor in the Great War and the United States its ally. Opinion in America was divided. While many supported Sinn Féin's attempts to secure a hearing at the Paris peace conference,<sup>17</sup> others believed the 1916 Rising had been a stab in the back and that the 'Irish problem' was a domestic issue to be settled by the British government.<sup>18</sup>

On the same day as the first Dáil met, the first shooting in what became known as the War of Independence occurred in Soloheadbeg in south Tipperary. Acting on their own initiative, a group of Volunteers led by Dan Breen ambushed an RIC patrol killing two officers. Evidently the gun was still very much part of Irish politics, and would remain central in the years that followed. Sinn Féin clubs had sprung up around the country as nationalists of various hues abandoned the Irish party to join the new and dynamic nationalist movement that seemed to embody their aspirations. Home Rule having been obliterated, the one-party hegemony of the Irish party was replaced by that of the new Sinn Féin. Advanced nationalism was now ascendant in Ireland with even the Labour party declining to contest elections until the 'National question' had been settled. Social concerns were subordinated to nationalism and the Sinn Féin leadership, like their Irish party predecessors, successfully maintained its 'brilliant but artificial alliance'.<sup>19</sup> Had Irish Labour just missed a trick? Possibly, though as the First World War had shown, it was not unusual for parties of the left to compromise with nationalism when major constitutional or territorial issues were at stake. Moreover, it appears that a great myth of Irish history - that Labour 'must wait' - actually originated in northern nationalist Joe Devlin's analysis

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<sup>17</sup> *New York Times*, 5 Mar. 1919.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 June 1919.

<sup>19</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Ireland, 1798-1998: politics and war* (Oxford, 1998), p. 142.



of the 1918 election. However, there remained the potential for a split in Sinn Féin at a later date as constitutional, class and economic differences were put aside in the pursuit of the common nationalist goal.<sup>20</sup> Irish nationalism was accustomed to unity in broad based parties and Sinn Féin's leaders were determined to maintain the united party they had inaugurated in 1917. What use were partisan party politics when the pursuit of national aspirations bound Irish people of all classes together? The absence of an opposition inside the revolutionary Dáil further weakened the perception of some within Sinn Féin of the wider constituency outside the assembly. In the post-revolutionary climate after 1922, the realisation that Sinn Féin had been just one of many Irish parties is critical in understanding attitudes to the Anglo-Irish Treaty and the efforts of the pro-Treaty party to expand into that territory.

A major threat to the unity of Sinn Féin was the inevitability of compromise once it became apparent that the revolutionary war could not result in the outright defeat of the British government in Ireland. As we have already discussed, Sinn Féin in 1917 was a broad nationalist coalition which housed a wide spectrum of opinions. Some within Sinn Féin's ranks believed that the achievement of a thirty-two county Irish Republic was the objective of the organisation and anything less was unacceptably short of Irish national aspirations and a betrayal of those who had died in the years since 1916.<sup>21</sup> For others, even de Valera, and most of the party leadership, Irish self-determination was the primary aim of the organisation; forms of government could be worked out once that goal had been attained. De Valera, as party leader, needed to keep the movement united by holding a line acceptable to both the moderates and the die-hard Republicans. Sinn Féin was unquestionably committed to self-government if deliberately ambiguous on the question of a republic.<sup>22</sup> This approach also extended into the realm of social and economic policy. Sinn Féin leaders knew that a clear statement of economic or social policy could destabilise the united front forged in 1917.<sup>23</sup> It was the Anglo-Irish Treaty negotiations of autumn and winter 1921 that would bring these underlying divisions in the national movement to the forefront. The compromise negotiated with the British team by the Sinn

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Dunphy, *The making of Fianna Fáil power in Ireland, 1923-1948* (New York, 1995).

<sup>21</sup> Hopkinson, *Green against green*, p. 38.

<sup>22</sup> English, *Irish freedom*, p. 283.

<sup>23</sup> Brian Girvin, *Between two worlds: politics and economy in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 1989), p. 12.

Féin delegation of plenipotentiaries would prise apart the nationalist coalition formed in 1917.

## **The Treaty**

In London, Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith proved that they were pragmatists determined to secure the best terms that they could from the negotiations with the British before concluding an agreement. John Regan has provided a stimulating account of the various strategies adopted by the Sinn Féin leaders at the time of the negotiations,<sup>24</sup> and to delve into them here would be a distraction. Regan is correct to state that the commencement of negotiations on 11 October 1921 ‘marked the beginning of the end of the Irish revolutionary movement as a united nationalist front’<sup>25</sup> as an ambiguous position could no longer keep the party together now that harsh realities had to be faced.<sup>26</sup> The War of Independence ended in stalemate, the British lacking the stomach and political cover for an all-out war against the IRA and the rebels not having the resources to drive the British forces out. Britain sought talks for mainly political reasons, principal among them the need to save face on the international stage. Britain had not been militarily defeated and the difference for Sinn Féin between moral and military victory was an inevitable compromise. However, Britain’s resolve to fight would have been strengthened had the peace talks with Sinn Féin’s leaders failed. After all, Sinn Féin faced the same cabinet that had led Britain through the Great War, in the process taking responsibility for more casualties than any group of men in British history.<sup>27</sup>

The negotiations offered an opportunity to reconcile Sinn Féin’s demands for Irish independence with the aspirations of the British Empire. Irish failure to inflict outright military defeat ensured that the Crown’s terms would prevail in some form in Ireland. This was recognised by the party’s leaders even if both Collins and de Valera maintained a

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<sup>24</sup> John M. Regan, *The Irish counter revolution, 1921-1936: Treatyite politics and settlement in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), pp 4-34.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> S. M. Lawlor, ‘Ireland from truce to Treaty: war or peace? July to October 1921’ in *IHS*, xxii, no. 85 (March 1981), pp 49-64.

<sup>27</sup> Regan, *Counter revolution*, p. 19.

hard-line public stance in the months before the truce.<sup>28</sup> Suffice to say that de Valera's preferred solution of a middle road between empire and Irish Republic, external association, was pressed on five occasions by the delegation in London but to no avail. External association as a potential solution to the 'Irish problem' broke with British precedent in Canada, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa in that de Valera proposed to recognise the King as head of an empire Ireland would voluntarily associate itself with 'for matters of common concern such as defence and external relations'.<sup>29</sup>

De Valera's strategy for party unity depended on a number of imponderables. Firstly it would depend on 'Sinn Féin accepting it and secondly on the British conceding it as a basis for settlement not alone of Anglo-Irish but also imperial relations'.<sup>30</sup> From the outset it was unlikely the British would reconfigure the legal and constitutional framework of their empire for the sake of accommodating die-hard Irish republicans on the United Kingdom's Celtic fringe. But who was it that de Valera trying to bring with him? If agreement was reached in London, it would have to have had the support of ministers Robert Barton, Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith, by virtue of their membership of the Irish negotiating team. Cathal Brugha and Austin Stack indicated their difficulties with recognising the British Crown in any form, even externally, and thus were unlikely to accept compromise. That left Cosgrave. De Valera, seems to have reasoned that Cosgrave would follow whatever line he took. Up to that point, Cosgrave had been one of de Valera's closest confidants and was identified as a key ally.<sup>31</sup> De Valera's strategy was based on the preservation of a cabinet majority for his policy. It seems Regan is again correct to deduct that de Valera's strategy depended on Collins and Griffith collapsing the London talks leaving the President to redeem the situation by negotiating his own settlement with the support of the cabinet. After all, on 21 December de Valera wrote that he had gathered during his talks with Lloyd George that some form of Dominion Home Rule, save Ulster and naval defence would be achieved. Moreover, the President was aware that such an offer would be enough to carry the country even if Sinn Féin would be divided. 'With such an offer...I felt certain that the majority of the people could be weaned

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<sup>28</sup> Seán Cronin (ed.), *The McGarrity Papers* (Tralee, 1972) pp 101-3.

<sup>29</sup> Regan, *Counter revolution*, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> Jason Knirck, 'Apostates or Imperialists? W.T. Cosgrave, Kevin O'Higgins and Republicanism' in *New Hibernia Review*, 14, no. 4 (Winter 2010), pp 52-64.

from us.<sup>32</sup> Arguably, de Valera's efforts to maintain a united Sinn Féin actually made the eventual fissure worse than it might otherwise have been. The cabinet's centre of gravity lay decidedly with the moderates and de Valera's miscalculation left him floundering throughout 1922. Had he cast the hardliners adrift under Stack and Brugha's leadership (as happened in 1926 when he founded Fianna Fáil) he may have retained control of national policy. As stated elsewhere, the deft political skill de Valera was to show throughout his career deserted him in 1921 and 1922.<sup>33</sup>

On 3 December 1921 the Dáil cabinet met with the negotiating team in what would prove a heated encounter. Griffith, Collins and Duggan believed the draft Treaty, as it then stood, was 'England's last word' and the document that would either be accepted or rejected by Sinn Féin's representatives.<sup>34</sup> De Valera could not recommend the Treaty in its then form and continued to take his stand on external association with the crown. The report of a cabinet meeting later that day shows that external association did not enthuse Brugha.<sup>35</sup> Griffith intimated he would push for some more concessions from the British before submitting the document to the Dáil for approval while Collins had earlier indicated his willingness to see how the settlement would work for a year. Collins also reminded the cabinet that non-acceptance was risky given that the British were in a much stronger position than before should hostilities resume. Despite this, the delegates were sent back to London with counter proposals and a form of words for the oath of allegiance that would be acceptable to the cabinet. De Valera later recalled of the 3 December meeting that he had 'begged them to risk it. A win meant triumph, definite and final. If we lost, the loss, would not be as big as it seemed'.<sup>36</sup> On the following day, the British negotiators were unimpressed with what they saw as Irish intransigence, reminding their opposite numbers that the proposals brought back from Dublin had 'already been discussed and rejected'.<sup>37</sup> That day, the talks actually broke down when George Gavan Duffy rather clumsily said Sinn Féin's difficulty was coming into the empire after weeks

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<sup>32</sup> Cronin *McGarrity Papers*, p. 108.

<sup>33</sup> Fearghal McGarry, *Irish politics and the Spanish Civil War* (Cork, 1999), p.6.

<sup>34</sup> Copy of secretary's notes of a meeting of the cabinet and delegation, 3 Dec. 1921, quoted in Ronan Fanning, Michael Kennedy, Dermot Keogh and Eunan O'Halpin (eds), *Documents on Irish foreign policy: volume 1, 1919-1922* (Dublin, 1998), p. 344.

<sup>35</sup> Meeting of cabinet, 3 Dec. 1921 (ibid., p. 345).

<sup>36</sup> Cronin, *McGarrity Papers*, p. 108

<sup>37</sup> Arthur Griffith to Eamon de Valera, 4 Dec. 1921 (ibid., p. 349).

of holding out accommodation with the crown as a means of making Irish unity the decisive issue.

Collins met Lloyd George the next morning at 9.30 a.m. in Downing Street and the olive branch was grasped with the two making progress on the various points of disagreement, particularly trade and coastal defence.<sup>38</sup> Lloyd George met his cabinet at midday before two further sub conferences with the Irish delegation. The latter conference ended at 2.20 a.m., on the morning of 6 December, with the two sides lining up to 'shake hands and say good-bye' having put their signatures to what became known as the Anglo-Irish Treaty.<sup>39</sup>

While marking the first tangible advance in the position of Irish nationalism, the Treaty augured ill for the continued unity of the Sinn Féin movement. It was a compromise, but crucially it was not de Valera's compromise and on his support depended efforts to gain wider acceptance from Sinn Féin. De Valera's policy fell some way short of Republican aspirations, and in turn the Treaty signed by Collins and Griffith fell some way short of the external association formula worked on by the President. It gave the twenty-six southern counties the same Dominion status that had been granted to Australia and Canada while the six North Eastern counties, which had been granted their own Parliament under the 1920 Government of Ireland Act, were given just one month to decide whether to opt in or opt out of the new arrangement. Despite the face-saving trappings of imperialism insisted upon by the British, the Treaty essentially allowed for a constitution in Ireland that, according to Tom Garvin, was in essence democratic and republican.<sup>40</sup> Collins believed he had got substance from the Treaty negotiations, as he had informed his cabinet colleagues on 3 December. Persuading hardliners outside the party leadership of that fact, and securing the support of his political rivals in Dublin would prove a much more difficult task.

The first political reaction to the Anglo-Irish Treaty occurred at a cabinet meeting held in Dublin before Collins, Griffith and Barton had returned home from the negotiations. The meeting took place on 7 December 1921 and was attended by de Valera,

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<sup>38</sup> Memorandum of an interview between Michael Collins and David Lloyd George, 5 Dec. 1921 (ibid., p. 350).

<sup>39</sup> Notes by Robert Barton of two sub-conferences held on 5/6 Dec. at 10 Downing St. (ibid., p. 356).

<sup>40</sup> Tom Garvin, *1922: the birth of Irish democracy* (Dublin, 2005), p. 17.

Brugha, Stack and Cosgrave with Kevin O'Higgins in a non-voting capacity. De Valera took issue with the Treaty believing the delegates had flouted his authority by settling for less than external association and by signing without first referring back to Dublin. They had not brought the talks to the brink of collapse by pressing one last time for external association. In fact, as we have seen, they rescued the talks after Gavan Duffy's gaffe allowed the British break on the Crown and empire scuppering the strategy of making Ulster the fulcrum of any settlement. De Valera summoned the cabinet meeting as he wanted to have the Treaty rejected at cabinet before the three delegates had returned home to explain themselves. De Valera knew that he could count on the support of the two republican hardliners, Brugha and Stack, against Collins, Griffith and Barton. He continued to assume Cosgrave would follow his lead thereby giving him a majority of one in cabinet. However, Cosgrave interceded on behalf of the three delegates insisting that they should be given a fair hearing before a cabinet decision was reached. De Valera agreed to his proposal, still anticipating that he could count on Cosgrave's vote.<sup>41</sup> When the signatories returned home, they in fact had the support of Cosgrave, giving the Treaty a majority of one in cabinet when it met on 8 December. As such, the cabinet voted to recommend the Treaty to the Dáil for ratification with the President in the minority section. The cabinet split was replicated in the Dáil party.

Clear divisions had emerged in the party leadership as underlying differences of approach came to the surface. Tom Garvin argues that the parting between the two wings of Sinn Féin represented a deep cultural division within Irish society. In 1921 the separation was represented as between republican moralists, who viewed themselves as a virtuous minority defending sacred principles, and legalistic, nationalist pragmatists who would engage in the counting of heads to arrive at a decision.<sup>42</sup> Garvin goes on to argue that these divisions, concealed by the unity of the Sinn Féin party in the period 1917-21, were in fact two deep-rooted political cultures existing within Irish nationalism and predating the formation of Sinn Féin.<sup>43</sup> Elsewhere Garvin describes this 'far too tidy'

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<sup>41</sup> Jordan, *W.T. Cosgrave*, p. 63; Minutes of a cabinet meeting, 8 Dec. 1921, Fanning et al., *Documents in foreign policy vol. 1*, p. 361.

<sup>42</sup> Garvin, *1922: the birth of Irish democracy*, p. 143.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

description of the divisions of 1921/22 as a ‘useful heuristic device’<sup>44</sup> as it is also used here. Garvin links Republican moralism with austere Catholicism and the conservative, conformist culture that he believes ensues in societies where owner-occupier free farmers form the dominant social group. He links it too with a ‘communalism’ hostile to materialism and individualism. Nationalist pragmatism or civic nationalism for Garvin was rooted in Irish versions of political ideas derived from the ‘English and French Enlightenments and their Scottish and American offshoots’.<sup>45</sup> This Garvin argues was the political culture of the citizen, the bourgeois, and those with an economic interest in stability and peace. Observers at the time saw the division similarly but used different terminology. For Francis Hackett, the difference was between the scientific and romantic spirits, while for ardent anti-Treatyite Mary MacSwiney the division in nationalist ranks was between spirituality and materialism. Indeed, as subsequent chapters will illustrate, opposition to individualism and materialism continued to be the hallmark of anti-Treatyite politics for some time as evidenced particularly in Fianna Fáil’s adherence to economic nationalism, self sufficiency. De Valera once observed that ‘if a man makes up his mind to go out into a cottage, ... he has to make up his mind to put up with the frugal fare of that cottage’.<sup>46</sup> In the early decades of independence, however, frugal fare was the hallmark of both Treatyite and anti-Treatyite governments.

In accepting the Treaty as a basis on which to form an independent Irish State, Collins, Griffith and Cosgrave embarked on a pragmatic path where politics would become a means of settling differences non-violently and where progress towards greater independence for Ireland could be achieved in gradual, constitutional steps. The moralistic tone of anti-Treatyite thinking was discernable in the pronouncements of de Valera. For de Valera, the people had ‘no right to do wrong’ while in June 1922 the anti-Treaty IRA prepared to protect, with arms, the Republic from the people’s mandate in favour of the Provisional Government. Collins on the other hand referred to the people as the ‘masters’ during the Treaty debates (though the ambiguous nature of his northern policy showed he

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<sup>44</sup> Tom Garvin, ‘Dev and Mick: the 1922 split as social psychological event’ in Gabriel Doherty and Dermot Keogh (eds), *Michael Collins and the making of the Irish state* (Cork, 1998), p. 149.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>46</sup> Ronan Fanning, *Independent Ireland* (Dublin, 1983), p. 114.

remained an arch conspirator<sup>47</sup>) and his Provisional Government forces were resolute in their commitment to safeguarding the Treaty's mandate. That the divide was slim at its centre is borne out by political developments in the subsequent decades. Both Fianna Fáil and Cumann na nGaedheal would contain disgruntled factions. Cumann na nGaedheal's protectionist wing led by J.J. Walsh had more in common with the anti-Treatyites than party colleagues, while a group in Fianna Fáil led by Lemass, MacEntee and O'Kelly 'saw the merits of large-scale commercial farming inimical to the aims' of their party.<sup>48</sup> This would indicate that while, in broad terms, the split manifested itself in contrasting political styles and cultures, the circumstances of the fissure was an imperfect basis for the two party system that emerged. As such dissenting voices would be found within both of Sinn Féin's daughter parties. Cumann na nGaedheal, for its part, was shaped by the events of 1921/22. It was developed by the leaders who had taken what was described by the Bishop of Kerry as the 'less romantic' interpretation of the Treaty and the ministers who had ruthlessly defended it during the Civil War.<sup>49</sup> As noted by Ciara Meehan, the Treaty came to represent the party's *raison d'être*.<sup>50</sup>

### **The disintegration of Sinn Féin**

Long accustomed to hearing that they were incapable of self-government, Irish leaders had an opportunity in 1922 to show exactly how they would cope with the responsibility through the establishment of the Free State. The year of Irish statehood was also the year of the 'cardinal sin of Irish politics' as civil war engulfed the country. In that tumultuous year Ireland's first democratic constitution was enacted and the institutions of state began to be laid down. The traumatic events of 1922 are important in understanding the country's subsequent political, social and economic development.

On 7 January 1922 the Anglo-Irish Treaty was approved in the Dáil by sixty-four votes to fifty-seven, a slender majority of seven. Following the vote in favour of the Treaty, de Valera resigned as President of the Dáil so that a separate vote on the

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<sup>47</sup> McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy*, pp 78-81.

<sup>48</sup> Terence Dooley, *The land for the people: the land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), p. 129.

<sup>49</sup> Charles O'Sullivan, Bishop of Kerry to Dr. Brian MacMahon, President of the Tralee Cumann na nGaedheal branch, 19 July 1923. (UCDA, Desmond FitzGerald papers, P80/1099).

<sup>50</sup> Ciara Meehan, *The Cosgrave party: a history of Cumann na nGaedheal 1923-33* (Dublin, 2010), p. 5.



presidency would be taken. Griffith was elected to replace de Valera by an even slimmer margin of sixty votes to fifty-eight.<sup>51</sup> Treaty supporters maintained for many years that had de Valera supported the Treaty, the split in Sinn Féin would have been on a smaller scale as the President would have carried the support of some wavering deputies who remained loyal to his judgement.<sup>52</sup>

After the vote on the presidency, anti-Treaty deputies departed the Dáil. In order to ensure that the Treaty would be passed, Griffith and Collins had laboured to secure the confidence of deputies covering a wide spectrum of views within Sinn Féin. As evidenced by the vote taken on the presidency, some deputies who had voted for the Treaty still retained respect for de Valera and as such their loyalty to the settlement was fragile. Collins and Griffith had just about secured enough concessions from the British to enable them secure a slim majority of Sinn Féin deputies, though the rump of the party they were left with would itself come to resemble a coalition of diverse elements and interpretations of what the Treaty could achieve. Some deputies who sided with Collins and Griffith viewed the Treaty as a reasonable settlement to the conflict. Others viewed it as a temporary agreement that would lead to greater independence for Ireland at some point in the future. As such, militant republicans who followed Collins joined with Griffithite moderates in accepting the Treaty ‘on the promise that one day they would advance together toward the republic’.<sup>53</sup> Like its pre-truce predecessor, pro-Treaty Sinn Féin was an odd mixture united only in support of the Treaty as deputies, who had been as republican as anybody in the ranks of the anti-Treatyites, joined with the moderate political wing overshadowed since the outbreak of violence in 1919.

Under the terms of the Treaty, a Provisional Government was established on 14 January 1922. This, rather than the Dáil government, had ‘real responsibility for launching the new state on a safe course’.<sup>54</sup> Eoin MacNeill proposed Collins as chairman at the inaugural meeting of the Provisional Government on 16 January. It came as something of a surprise internationally that the youthful Collins was chosen over Griffith.<sup>55</sup> Griffith was to remain head of the revolutionary Dáil during the transition period with Collins taking

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<sup>51</sup> Hopkinson, *Green against green*, p. 39.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Regan, *Counter revolution*, p. 49.

<sup>54</sup> J.J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: politics and society* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 54.

<sup>55</sup> *New York Times*, 15 Jan. 1922.

charge of the official changeover. Having chosen Collins as chairman, the Provisional Government adjourned until 4pm so that ministers could visit Dublin Castle for the handover of the various departments from the British.<sup>56</sup> The Dáil government remained in existence under Griffith, but under the terms of the Treaty could not legitimately accept the formal handover of power. Until September 1922, the two governments existed simultaneously though from April, it was more usual for Dáil ministers not serving on the Provisional Government to simply sit in on its meetings.

### **Emergence of ‘sub parties’**

Despite the extent of the Treaty division, each wing of Sinn Féin was determined to maintain some semblance of unity and from the ratification of the Treaty until the so called ‘pact election’ of 16 June 1922 the party tried to exist as a united entity. This was in spite of the fact that de Valera’s followers were openly denouncing the Provisional Government. Efforts were taken by both sides to avoid a formal vote on the Treaty with the February Sinn Féin *Ard Fheis* deferring its decision. The Collins/de Valera pact agreed in May 1922 was designed to buy Collins much needed time, as he busied himself trying to establish an army to defend the fledgling state while at the same time assuring the British he was determined to secure the Treaty position. The campaign leading up to the June 1922 election proved the last time many of Sinn Féin’s leading politicians shared the same political platform. In reality the party was split down the middle right across the country with each side clinging to the Sinn Féin label in the futile hope that somehow a formal split could be avoided, or that they could portray themselves as the true inheritors of the revolution. From the end of the pact in June 1922, onetime comrades became bitter opponents.

While in public Sinn Féin was attempting to avoid the divisive issue of the Treaty, privately each side was preparing for the inevitable and mobilising support for its own candidates. The Sinn Féin *Ard Fheis* of February 1922 was dominated by a pro-Treaty

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<sup>56</sup> Provisional Government, minutes of meeting, 16 Jan. 1922 (NAI, G/1/1).

leadership,<sup>57</sup> but it was believed at the time that the anti-Treatyites held a majority on the floor. Certainly there was speculation that the Republican camp had at least attempted to swamp the conference with anti-Treaty delegates, as they had for local meetings around the country.<sup>58</sup> The decision not to push a vote on the issue of the Treaty means there is no conclusive proof one way or the other.<sup>59</sup> Various branches around the country were declaring for or against the Treaty while some officers were ejected from their positions based on their support or opposition to de Valera or Collins. There is partial evidence suggesting that many members of the party who supported the Treaty began to leave Sinn Féin around this time, either through disillusionment, a belief that their work in politics was completed with the establishment of the Free State or through continued intimidation from anti-Treatyites. Certainly there is evidence to suggest that grass-root Treatyites in Sinn Féin were subjected to some level of coercion by the anti-Treaty IRA, and even Cumann na mBan, particularly in Mayo where letters addressed to pro-Treaty members were undelivered.<sup>60</sup> There is similar evidence in other rural centres and in Cork and Dublin. As the split became more permanent, pro-Treaty members of the north Dublin Michael O’Hanrahan Sinn Féin club magnanimously shook hands with the remaining anti-Treatyites and departed, while Treaty supporters simply stopped attending meetings of the south city Thomas Davis and Éamonn Ceannt clubs.<sup>61</sup> Those experiences may well have been a factor in the perceived lack of activism of Treatyites from 1922 through the next decade. What is more probable is that the perceived manipulation of the Sinn Féin organisation by the anti-Treatyites influenced Treatyite leaders’ reluctance to be dictated to by rigged convention halls. The leadership of each faction, while still clinging to the Sinn Féin party label, privately prepared to contest the election as separate entities. That so much energy was spent on trying to force a united front demonstrates the continued national sentiments of each side and their reluctance to see the national interest challenged by a descent into fractious party politics.

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<sup>57</sup> The Sinn Féin Standing Committee was twelve to seven in favour of the Treaty. Undated and untitled (NLI, George A. Lyons papers, MS 33,675/C/2).

<sup>58</sup> Laffan, *Resurrection of Ireland*, p. 367.

<sup>59</sup> Lee, *Ireland, 1912-85*, p. 56.

<sup>60</sup> Rafter, *Sinn Féin*, p. 64.

<sup>61</sup> Regan, *Counter revolution*, p. 53.

In early 1922 each wing of Sinn Féin had set up rival election committees to oversee their election machineries for a crucial election necessary under the terms of the Treaty. Characteristically, even when it was the underdog, the anti-Treaty faction of Sinn Féin demonstrated the greater prowess in developing its political strategy and grass-root organisation. While their stance on the Treaty went against the general mood of the country, anti-Treatyites displayed a keener desire to mobilise support. In addition, the evidence suggests they devoted much more time than their pro-Treaty contemporaries to discussing the possible permutations that could occur if the split in Sinn Féin proved permanent, hence showing a shrewder political nous. While their opponents in the Provisional Government were busy laying the foundations of the fledgling state, de Valera's followers on his organising committee were considering all available options for maintaining a position of political strength given the circumstances. In this period, the anti-Treatyites discussed the best ways of organising their supporters and the need for contingency plans in the event of their pro-Treaty opponents wresting control of Sinn Féin. Anti-Treaty organising committee documents from early 1922 reveal an emphasis on the need for an active party machine at grass-roots level to campaign against the Treaty and the Provisional Government. From an early stage the anti-Treatyites had employed organisers to marshal their supporters around the country. One such example of anti-Treaty organisational skill during this time can be found in instructions issued to each republican organiser in March 1922. Each organiser was told to send the director of organisation a copy of his area's local newspapers each week.<sup>62</sup> In correspondence with his organising committee, de Valera adopted a hands-on approach to party organisation, instructing that each branch be sent a definite programme of organisational work to be completed as soon as possible.

There was little discussion of this nature in the minute books of the pro-Treaty election committees in early 1922. The difficult task of gaining support for the Treaty remained its main concern in early 1922. De Valera was also a step ahead in another way. He was aware of the potent symbolism that was attached to the Sinn Féin label and from an early stage he was keen that his faction would retain control of the party in spite of the

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<sup>62</sup> Director of organisation (Eamon Donnelly) to each organiser, 25 Mar. 1922 (NAI, Cumann na Poblachta & Sinn Fein papers, 1094/1/8).

fact that many of his Treatyite opponents had been its founding members in 1905. Again, in letters to his organising committee, de Valera was frank about his fears that Treatyites may try to gain control of the old Sinn Féin organisation, leaving his own followers stranded. In March 1922, in what could be interpreted as a contingency plan, de Valera founded a new Republican party to be called Cumann na Poblachta, the Society of the Republic. De Valera asked his followers in Sinn Féin to meet him on the day of the February *Ard Fheis* and it seems Cumann na Poblachta was formed as a result of that meeting.<sup>63</sup> Cumann na Poblachta imitated the structures of Sinn Féin and foreshadowed many of Fianna Fáil's objectives.<sup>64</sup> A year on from its launch, and after deciding instead to pursue his aims through a broadly based Sinn Féin, de Valera stated Cumann na Poblachta's mission had been to house the extremist or 'left wing of Sinn Féin'.<sup>65</sup> By March 1922 revolutionary Sinn Féin was on a downward spiral of disintegration with both sides operating independently of it. During the Civil War, Treatyites closed its central office and allowed the organisation to lapse.<sup>66</sup> While the Treatyites had retained its best administrators,<sup>67</sup> as evidenced by the activity of de Valera's election committees, the more talented political strategists of revolutionary Sinn Féin had clearly ended up in the anti-Treaty faction. Cumann na Poblachta only ever really existed on paper and as a label for anti-Treaty deputies, but as we can see it was most probably established as a contingency whereby anti-Treaty Sinn Féin supporters would find a political home should Sinn Féin have ended up in pro-Treaty hands. As we shall see, there was little by way of forward planning in pro-Treaty ranks at this time; the day-to-day survival of the Provisional Government, and a successful outcome to the June election, occupied much of their time.

The split following the Dáil vote on the Treaty was not confined to Sinn Féin or even the IRA, it also applied to Cumann na mBan, the women's movement. A majority of Cumann na mBan members went against the Treaty with the smaller faction, under Jennie Wyse Power, forming a new women's Treatyite organisation. When it was established in

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<sup>63</sup> Undated and untitled (NLI, George A. Lyons papers, MS 33,675/C/2).

<sup>64</sup> Laffan, *The resurrection of Ireland*, p. 380.

<sup>65</sup> De Valera to the organising committee, 29 May 1923 (NAI, Cumann na Poblachta & Sinn Fein papers, 1094/8/4).

<sup>66</sup> David Fitzpatrick, *The two Irelands, 1912-1939* (Oxford, 1998) p. 185.

<sup>67</sup> Regan, *Counter revolution* p. 9.

March 1922 Cumann na Saoirse became the first pro-Treaty political organisation.<sup>68</sup> Cumann na Saoirse immediately set about building up support for the Treaty among voters, producing a substantial body of literature to that end. Cumann na Saoirse, and particularly Jennie Wyse Power, would play a significant part in pro-Treaty politics up until the formal launch of Cumann na nGaedheal in April 1923. Ultimately, the women's organisation was merged into the new party.

Following the Dáil vote on the Treaty, its supporters faced the immediate task of implementing the agreement and gaining public support for it. Collins led the case for the Treaty side publishing pamphlets and speaking at enormous public meetings throughout the country.<sup>69</sup> A collection of his various speeches in favour of the agreement was published in advance of the June election and could be purchased for six pence. Treatyites also published de Valera's alternative of external association, labelled 'Document Number Two' by Collins, to demonstrate how much trouble he was causing for an alternative which came very close to the actual constitutional position envisaged in the Treaty. Clearly the Provisional Government wanted the electorate to grasp that an isolated, thirty-two county Republic was not being offered by either side. Anti-Treatyite literature in the summer of 1922 referred to the 'English King's provisional government', to the Black and Tans having been 'outdone' by Collins and Griffith and frequently termed the Free State the 'Slave State'.<sup>70</sup> Treatyite propaganda on the other hand termed the anti-Treatyites 'Irregulars' and urged voters to choose the Treaty over the 'alphabet of miseries' (Auxiliaries, Black and Tans, Commandeering's etc).<sup>71</sup>

Collins continued to grow in stature and influence during the first half of 1922 while his charismatic personality, and the strong reputation he had built up in the years since 1916, helped to convince many sceptics that Ireland's future in fact lay within the framework set out in the Treaty.<sup>72</sup> At this time, Collins's talents as an administrator were utilised as he set about asserting the primacy of the department of Finance within the administration and he was prepared to accept able 'castle personnel' such as the

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<sup>68</sup> Marie O'Neill, *From Parnell to de Valera: a biography of Jennie Wyse Power, 1858-1941* (Dublin, 1994), p. 139.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Collins, *Arguments for the Treaty* (Dublin, 1922), p. 9.

<sup>70</sup> Anti-Treatyite propaganda in handbills and posters and copies of *The Fenian*, June/July 1922 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/8).

<sup>71</sup> Pro-Treaty leaflets (CCCA, Liam de Róiste papers, U271/Dail material/k).

<sup>72</sup> Keogh, *Twentieth-century Ireland*, p. 4.

conservative Joseph Brennan into his fledgling department.<sup>73</sup> The Free State side was keen to show that having men of a militarist republican background like Collins, Mulcahy, MacEoin and O'Duffy supporting the settlement proved that it was not a betrayal of all those who had fought for a Republic since 1916. Loyalty to individual leaders at both national and local level often determined the opinion many people at the grass-roots level formed of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. On balance, this was probably more of a factor within the IRA than Sinn Féin.

Like their Republican opponents, pro-Treatyites had established organising committees in early 1922 to oversee their preparations for the June election. Before the foundation of Cumann na Saoirse, from January 1922, the pro-Treaty General and Election committee had been the only Treatyite political group in existence and it was charged with securing the Treaty position in the summer election. Minutes of an election subcommittee meeting of 30 March 1922 reveal that the Treatyites too were behaving as a distinct party long before the pact between de Valera and Collins was agreed in May. The 30 March meeting discussed the situation in Sinn Féin clubs with the Republican faction in its ranks referred to as the 'anti-treaty party' showing the levels to which the split had percolated from leadership level down to the ordinary rank-and-file member.<sup>74</sup> In anti-Treaty correspondence, Sinn Féin clubs were routinely labelled 'Republican' or 'Free State'. At this time, Treatyite organisers were working in each province with P.J. Ryan responsible for Leinster. There was no real discussion of long-term organising strategy at the pro-Treaty election meeting with nothing of note being said about the future of Sinn Féin or its pro-Treaty faction. It was also clear that Collins was in demand, both at home and abroad. Correspondence was received from Glasgow asking that Collins address a meeting in the city to outline the benefits of the Treaty. This request was dismissed on the grounds that Collins was needed in Ireland to carry out the same function in advance of the June election.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ronan Fanning, *The Irish department of Finance, 1922-58* (Dublin, 1978), p. 41.

<sup>74</sup> The first recorded meeting of the pro-Treaty election committees was chaired by Seán Milroy and attended by veteran Sinn Féin organiser Dan McCarthy who was Treatyite director of elections. The Treatyite election committee, like its propaganda sub-committee and newspaper sub-committee were answerable to a General Election council which met later that night. Election sub-committee, minutes of meeting 30 Mar. 1922. (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

The pro-Treaty campaign was organised from offices in 3 and 4 College Street. Newspaper and propaganda subcommittees were established by the General and Election Committee. A report of the latter subcommittee alleged that some of its members ‘hardly knew’<sup>76</sup> they were on a committee which cannot have augured well for its success. Minutes from the propaganda and newspaper subcommittees reveal that an attempt was made at this time to compile lists of Sinn Féin clubs where Free Staters were in the majority and that Cumann na Saoirse were given posters and literature to distribute.<sup>77</sup> A meeting of 13 April decided that Collins and Seán MacEoin, another hero of the War of Independence from Longford, would address a meeting in Ennis County Clare on 30 April, in the bailiwick of Eamon de Valera.<sup>78</sup> This is further evidence of the pro-Treaty organisers understanding the need to show that the Treaty was not a betrayal of those who had fought and died for a republic, and that they were in fact proud to showcase their own revolutionary wears by pushing men with strong military reputations, like MacEoin, to the forefront of their campaign. Furthermore, organiser reports discussed at this meeting revealed that IRA intimidation of Treaty supporters and raids on the party’s election rooms remained widespread.

Treatyite minute books leading up to the general election indicate that the day-to-day business of articulating the Treaty’s benefits, and therefore gaining it more public support, was the primary concern. Public meetings were organised around the country with the intention of articulating the benefits of the Treaty. However, there was little strategic planning in evidence and scarcely any attempt was made to recruit people to Treatyite ranks. Tellingly, the committee meeting of 13 April 1922 received correspondence from the recently established Cumann na Saoirse asking if there was any more organisational work that they could be given to complete.<sup>79</sup> While Republicans assigned work to grass-roots activists, Treaty supporters sought out such work.

In spite of the Collins/de Valera pact of 16 May, which was repudiated by Collins in the days before polling,<sup>80</sup> the election was always going to be a de-facto referendum on

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<sup>76</sup> Report from propaganda committee, undated [Apr. 1922?] (UCDA, Michael Tierney papers, LA39/315/1).

<sup>77</sup> Propaganda sub-committee, minutes of meeting, 4 Apr. 1922; 11 Apr. 1922 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>78</sup> Election committee, minutes of meeting, 13 Apr. 1922 (ibid.).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ronan Fanning, *Independent Ireland*, p. 14.



the Treaty in spite of the participation of other parties and candidates. Many observers were critical of Collins for agreeing a pact with de Valera. The pact would exaggerate anti-Treaty support according to the *New York Times* who put it down to Collins's patriotism and lack of experience.<sup>81</sup> Sinn Féin had already split on the question of the Treaty, the pact merely delayed the inevitable. Moreover, Sinn Féin was not the only party contesting the election. Labour, the Farmers' Party and ex Unionists were also competing. Newspapers published the stance of each candidate on the Treaty while all non Sinn Féin parties supported the settlement. As such, pact or no pact, the only way to register opposition to the agreement was to vote for candidates from the anti-Treaty wing of Sinn Féin. The election results showed that the position of Collins and Griffith had been endorsed by the Irish electorate. Fifty-eight pro-Treaty Sinn Féin candidates were elected as opposed to thirty-six anti-Treatyites. The remaining thirty-four seats went to other pro-Treaty parties and candidates. In many ways, the performance of non-Sinn Féin parties was the most significant factor of the election. A considerable section of the voting public stood aloof from the Sinn Féin divide as Labour, the Farmers' Party and independents secured the remaining seats. This was a lesson quickly heeded by the pro-Treaty party as it sought to expand into the wider non Sinn Féin constituency. The threat of civil war, ominously hanging in the air since the signing of the Treaty, became more potent with the decisive vote for peace and stability in June 1922.

### **Civil War breaks out, 28 June 1922.**

Following the June election and the public's endorsement of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, military matters came to the forefront once again. As was the case during the War of Independence, politics became sidelined as the storm clouds long brewing on the horizon finally unleashed their might in a hail of bullets, shrapnel and shells. The Civil War erupted in Dublin at 4.00am on 28 June 1922. It was tragic that the united front achieved at the 1917 *Ard Fheis* should end with Irish nationalists fighting each other over the minutiae of the document that had resulted from their best efforts. On 12 July Michael Collins informed his colleagues on the Provisional Government that he 'would not be able

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<sup>81</sup> *New York Times*, 21 May 1922.

to act in his ministerial capacity until further notice'.<sup>82</sup> He resigned temporarily from his position at the head of government to take charge of the military campaign as commander-in-chief of the new national army which was being established virtually in a time of war.<sup>83</sup> Despite his absence from the cabinet table, Collins continued to dominate his more jittery ministerial colleagues in the summer of 1922 in the sheer bulk of memoranda that represented his position in government. W.T. Cosgrave took on Collins's role and his rebuttal of criticism from a Treaty supporter shows the difficulties faced by the Provisional Government at that time:

No doubt the arrangements for relief of distress were not perfect, but the urgency of the matter left no time for thinking out a well-organised plan of distribution of relief. At all events, we achieved our main object, namely, the immediate relief of distress, and reports from all quarters show that no necessitous person went away empty-handed. In the circumstances "queues" were unavoidable.<sup>84</sup>

Collins would never again occupy high political office although he made a real difference to the government's military effort in the short length of time that he was commander of the army. The plan to land troops in Cork by sea took the anti-Treaty forces there by surprise and forced them out into the hills of the county, which in itself would have serious ramifications for the National army as the anti-Treaty military strategy came to rely increasingly on guerrilla tactics. On 22 August 1922 while on a tour of inspection in his native Cork, the convoy protecting the commander-in-chief was ambushed by such a group of anti-Treaty guerrilla fighters under the command of Tom Hales. A short skirmish followed before Collins was shot dead. He was the only casualty in what was an opportunistic ambush and his untimely death denied him the opportunity of shaping the state he had given so much of his young life to building. Collins's death was a devastating blow for the Provisional Government. Days earlier he had led the military at the funeral of Arthur Griffith. In the early hours of 23 August, senior Treatyites were woken by the

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<sup>82</sup> Provisional Government, minutes of meeting, 12 July 1922 (NAI, G/1/1); Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985*, p. 61.

<sup>83</sup> Keogh, *Twentieth-century Ireland*, p. 10.

<sup>84</sup> W.T. Cosgrave to George A. Lyons, 14 July 1922 (NLI, George A. Lyons papers, MS 33675/A/1/24).

military and summoned to an emergency meeting in Merrion Street. A crisis conference lasting until 7.30 a.m. chose W.T. Cosgrave as leader.<sup>85</sup>

A meeting of the General and Election committee on 21 July offers an insight into the feelings of Treatyites in the weeks before Collins' death. The cataclysm of Civil War deeply affected the mindset of the pro-Treaty party who instinctively responded as though the issue at stake was now more important than the Treaty itself. It was now a question of whether the majority would have a right to govern in the new state that was being created. The committee was much more concerned with the civil strife sweeping the country than with party politics. Séamus Hughes outlined to the 21 July meeting a scheme whereby Treaty supporters could be used as a voluntary arm of the state to assist in restoring order and public safety.<sup>86</sup> Rather than direct the energy of its supporters to party political work, the committee seemed keen to utilise that potential in the national interest. Administration and the defeat of the IRA was more important than the work of party organisation as Treatyites watched the country tear itself apart in the Civil War. J.J. Lee has argued that the Treaty was the occasion rather than the cause of the Civil War: that it was fought over the issue of majority right or divine right. The issue was whether the Irish people could choose their own government at any time according to their own judgement.<sup>87</sup> Similar arguments have been put forward by Tom Garvin and Ronan Fanning. Such points of view may oversimplify what were complex political choices in 1922 and probably overstate the democratic tendencies of the pro-Treatyites and the undemocratic tendencies of anti-Treatyites. However, the evidence suggests that from the autumn of 1922, victory in the Civil War became a matter of principle for the leaders of the Provisional Government. It was about more than the Treaty, it was a war to continue the project of self-government. It would appear that with the outbreak of the Irish Civil War came an unflinching determination among Treatyite leaders to defend the fledgling state at all costs and to defeat their opponents militarily, thereby consolidating the legitimacy of the settlement.<sup>88</sup> Alternatively, some trace authoritarian tendencies that later emerged within elements of the Treatyite movement to the Civil War. John Regan has labelled as a 'bunker mentality'

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<sup>85</sup> Brief manuscript diary, 12-25 Aug. 1922 (UCDA, Hugh Kennedy papers, P4/298).

<sup>86</sup> General and Election Committee, minutes of meeting, 21 July 1922 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>87</sup> Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985*, p. 67.

<sup>88</sup> RTÉ documentary, *Seven Ages* (2000) vol. one, episode one.

the Treatyite government's attitude during the Civil War. This was a straight-jacket from which the party struggled to escape from after the conflict ended.

Liam de Róiste's diary illustrates the extent to which ideas were in flux during 1922 and 1923. Civil war destroyed the optimism of the revolutionary generation of which de Róiste was a part of. A sense of despair and an awareness of the wrongs committed by both sides is evident in his diary entries during the fratricidal conflict. On 19 November 1922 de Róiste expressed doubts about the government's conduct during the Civil War,<sup>89</sup> and on 16 March 1923 wrote that he could see fault with both sides.<sup>90</sup> However, in between these entries, de Róiste expressed his opposition to the anti-Treatyite campaign in explicit terms. In February and March 1923 he criticised what he termed the 'new Republicanism' of the Treaty's opponents. For him, the Provisional Government's opponents believed the majority had no right to form a government. Such a government, 'when Eamon De[sic] Valera and his armed minority object' was a 'usurpation'.<sup>91</sup> De Róiste further claimed that the 'new' Republicans regarded as traitors anybody who did not share their point of view.<sup>92</sup> Yet by May the disillusioned de Róiste could criticise the final executions as 'indefensible' and express his 'disgust and abhorrence' at the excesses of both sides during the Civil War.<sup>93</sup> Such were the depths of demoralisation of the revolutionary generation as they watched their efforts culminate in green against green.

### **A new 'National Party' emerges.**

From August 1922 onwards the Treatyite General and Election Committee began to take steps towards the establishment of a distinctive pro-Treaty national organisation. The first outright discussion of this nature occurred at a meeting held on 29 August where the possibility of setting up a new political organisation in support of the Treaty was discussed and agreed to by those present. It is symbolic that the meeting took place just seven days after Michael Collins had been killed in West Cork and seventeen days following Arthur

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<sup>89</sup> De Róiste diary entry, 19 Nov. 1922 (CCCA Liam de Róiste papers, U271A/ Book 47).

<sup>90</sup> De Róiste diary entry, 16 Mar. 1923 (ibid., Book, 48).

<sup>91</sup> De Róiste diary entry, 28 Feb. 1923 (ibid.).

<sup>92</sup> He wrote: 'practically all the priests are traitors, and the overwhelming majority of the people are traitors' de Róiste diary entry, 2 Mar. 1923 (ibid.).

<sup>93</sup> De Róiste diary entry, 3 May 1923 (ibid., Book, 49).

Griffith's death. With the death of the two leaders of the Treaty cause, the document they had signed in London had been sanctified in the eyes of those who had looked to them for leadership in 1921/22. The Treaty could no longer be dismissed as an imperfect means to an end now that people had died in its defence.<sup>94</sup>

At the 29 August meeting, the General and Election Committee expressed its desire to continue on as a distinct party that would uphold the Treaty position.<sup>95</sup> It realised that a nationwide political organisation was now necessary to ensure the Provisional Government would remain in power beyond the formal establishment of the Irish Free State on 6 December 1922. Seán Milroy, the committee chairperson and veteran Griffithite Sinn Féiner, agreed to report the views that had been expressed at the meeting to pro-Treaty Sinn Féin deputies. Milroy moved swiftly. On 7 September a special meeting of the General and Election committee took place with pro-Treaty deputies Ernest Blythe, Séamus Dolan, Padraic O'Maille and Walter Cole in attendance.<sup>96</sup> Blythe was forceful in articulating the type of party he hoped would evolve from their work. He urged the need for a party in parliament that would seek to carry the 'national cause to completion under the Free State' and suggested the name 'National Party', showing that the new organisation would continue to champion the cause of a broadly based Irish nationalism as opposed to any specific social policy programme.<sup>97</sup> Revolutionary Sinn Féin had, with all its ambiguities, left a mark which would manifest itself at various stages in the life of the new party that would emerge. Given its state of decay, it was unfortunate for the embryonic party that Blythe used the Liberal party of Britain as an example of what kind of relationship the new organisation could expect to develop with the Free State government it would support. This was especially true given that 1922 proved to be the last time the Liberals ever served in a British government (until the Liberal Democrats, formed from a merger of the Liberal party and the Social Democrats in 1988, entered coalition with the Conservatives in 2010).

It was clear from this meeting that Blythe, and most of his cabinet colleagues, did not desire the creation of a party machine that could potentially challenge or influence

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<sup>94</sup> Ronan Fanning, *Independent Ireland*, p. 42.

<sup>95</sup> General and Election Committee, minutes of meeting, 29 Aug. 1922 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>96</sup> General and Election Committee, minutes of special meeting, 7 Sept. 1922 (ibid.).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

decisions made by the government. After all, the Treatyites were already secure in power without a party machine supporting them, and they did not want that position threatened by rigged conference halls as had been the case in the days of Sinn Féin. Blythe's vision was of an executive and parliamentary party that could rely on an obedient and pliable constituency organisation to support it. Various names were suggested for the new party, most of which carried national connotations.<sup>98</sup> Given that the anti-Treaty side had appropriated the Republic, the pro-Treatyites adopted 'national' as part of their political identity.<sup>99</sup> Proposed names included: An Cumann Náisiúnta, United Irishmen, Páirtí Náisiúnta and Cumann Sonais Eireann, among others. While no decision was taken on a party name, the meeting resolved 'that a Political Organisation be formed to safeguard the National position which would work through the Treaty towards a united and distinctively Gaelic Ireland, and that the Executive of the Free State Party be utilised to launch the Party'.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, two sub-committees were established to oversee the new party's development. Long term Griffithites Seán Milroy, Diarmuid Fawsitt, Walter Cole, and Séamus O'Dwyer joined a sub-committee to draft the objectives of the new party, while a further sub-committee of O'Dwyer, Cole and Montgomery was established to seek out suitable premises for the organisation. By 21 September O'Dwyer was able to announce to a General and Election committee meeting the acquisition of new premises at 5 Parnell square, an old safe house of Collins formerly owned by Oliver St. John Gogarty, a prominent Dubliner and long term associate of Arthur Griffith.<sup>101</sup> Having found a headquarters, the work of defining the party's objects, drafting a party constitution and settling on a party name could begin.

In October and November of 1922 the effort to establish the new political organisation gathered momentum. However, there was no unanimity within the pro-Treaty party as to the right time to launch the organisation. On 18 October Mulcahy wrote to Dan MacCarthy outlining his opposition. Mulcahy, as commander-in-chief and Minister for Defence, believed the new party's name would be sullied by association with the Civil

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<sup>98</sup> Meehan, *Cosgrave party*, p. 7.

<sup>99</sup> Mel Cousins, *The birth of social welfare in Ireland, 1922-52* (Dublin, 2003), pp 30-31.

<sup>100</sup> General and Election Committee, minutes of special meeting, 7 Sept. 1922 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>101</sup> General and Election Committee, minutes of meeting, 21 Sept. 1922 (ibid.).

War if it was launched during the conflict.<sup>102</sup> By contrast, Blythe and the members of the Treatyite General and Election committee were anxious to launch the party at the earliest opportunity even though a distinct policy programme had not yet been agreed and fratricidal conflict continued to claim Irish lives. At a meeting on 3 October Blythe was non-committal on policy, recommending that the new party's objectives ought to emphasise the carrying on of the national tradition under the Treaty and that the finer details of policy could be enunciated at public meetings at a later date.<sup>103</sup> This meeting also resolved that the new party, unlike Sinn Féin and Cumann na Poblachta, would not establish branches in Britain. At this point, no consideration was given to the possibility of Treatyites regrouping under the Sinn Féin banner. The pro-Treaty wing of Sinn Féin were not involved in the type of strategic planning that de Valera was engaging in with his anti-Treaty organising committee. Sinn Féin was dormant and the Treatyites made little effort to recapture it. It is reasonable to suggest that the pro-Treatyites may have desired a break away from the Sinn Féin label now that they were running a fledgling state that was being challenged by an armed minority. After all there was a certain contradiction in the manner in which the state had been brought into being and the way its first leaders now faced the same type of threat as the British administration had during the War of Independence. Alternatively, Treatyite leaders may have wanted a new beginning away from the Republican identity assumed by Sinn Féin in 1917 and the decision to found a distinct party may have been in reality a conscious attempt to revert to a more moderate strain of Irish nationalism, palatable to old Sinn Féiners such as Cosgrave or Milroy and that part of the electorate which had stood outside the revolutionary party's support base. Such voters would need a new home too. As discussed earlier, many Treaty supporters had left Sinn Féin in 1922 either through disillusionment or intimidation and it is reasonable to assume that this also contributed to the desire to make a clean break.

On 3 November the General and Election committee decided that the convention should take place on 7 December 1922. MacCarthy compiled a list of potential delegates who ought to be invited.<sup>104</sup> Suggested delegates were discussed as were the objects and

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<sup>102</sup> Richard Mulcahy to Dan MacCarthy, 18 Oct. 1922 (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy papers, P7/b/325).

<sup>103</sup> General and Election Committee, minutes of special meeting, 3 Oct. 1922 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>104</sup> General and Election Committee, minutes of meeting, 3 Nov. 1922 (ibid.).

programme of the new party. Nothing was agreed until the next meeting on 10 November when the first draft of the party's constitution emerged. The 'Objects and Programme' of the new party were presented on headed notepaper bearing the Treatyite leadership's preferred name for the new party, An Cumann Náisiúnta.<sup>105</sup> However, the final text would not be agreed until April 1923. Names of suggested delegates were again discussed while it was agreed that Jennie Wyse Power and the historian Alice Stopford Green would represent Cumann na Saoirse at the convention. In the event, five Cumann na Saoirse members were represented at the convention as Celia Shaw, Mrs. Gavan Duffy and Wyse Power attended in a separate capacity.<sup>106</sup> Letters to Treaty supporters throughout the country (presumably those on the pro-Treaty list compiled earlier in the summer) informed them of the Conference. Symbolically the Conference was scheduled to take place on the day after the Irish Free State would formally come into being and a year on from the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty.

Nothing captures more aptly the Civil War birthmark that would always be borne by Cumann na nGaedheal than the events of 7 December 1922. Following the morning session of the preliminary conference summoned to inaugurate the new political party, deputies Seán Hales and Padraic O'Maille travelled from Parnell Square to the Ormond Hotel on the quays for their lunch. On their way to lunch, the two deputies were set upon by gunmen. Upon returning for the evening session of the conference, delegates were horrified as news spread that O'Maille had been wounded and Hales shot dead in an opportunistic shooting by Republicans at lunch time. Feelings were running high against the assassins as the news began to sink in among those present. Fearing further assassinations, and the desertion of Free State supporters, the following day senior Free State army officers requested permission to execute four IRA prisoners as a reprisal and deterrent against further assassinations. Despite the misgivings of O'Higgins and McGrath the government consented and without any pretence to legality Joe McKelvey, Liam Mellows, Rory O'Connor and Dick Barrett were executed.<sup>107</sup> The events of 7/ 8 December 1922 count among the darkest days in Irish history, and are a stain on the Free

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<sup>105</sup> An Cumann Naisiunta: Objects and Programme, 3 November 1922(ibid.).

<sup>106</sup> Celia Shaw diary entry, Dec. 1922 (NLI, Celia Shaw diary, MS 23409).

<sup>107</sup> Regan, *Counter revolution*, pp 115-116.



State government's otherwise commendable record in establishing Irish democracy.<sup>108</sup> Unsurprisingly, news of the Conference was suppressed with the official launch deferred until the following spring so as not to associate the name of the new party with those bloody events that marked the birth of the Irish Free State and its party of government. Celia Shaw, who attended the preliminary conference as a Cumann na Saoirse representative, noted in her diary:

When we came back for the evening session we heard the horrifying news that Sean [sic] Hales had been killed [and] Padraig O'Maille [sic] seriously injured. Everyone was dumbfounded [and] feeling was very high against the assassins. The next morning the 8<sup>th</sup> of December was a dreary[,] wet day, a stop press came out announcing the execution of Liam Mellows, Rory O'Connor [and] two others as a reprisal for the killing of the deputy.<sup>109</sup>

One important function carried out by the 7 December conference was the final and definitive severing of Treatyite ties with the Sinn Féin organisation. When it came to deciding the party's name, an amendment was proposed by the two Clare delegates Canon William O'Kennedy and Commandant Paddy Brennan that Treaty supporters should attempt to recapture the old Sinn Féin organisation and name. This suggests there was a substantial body of Treatyite support that was keen to maintain the old machinery as a pro-Treaty national movement. When the issue was put to a vote the amendment to reorganise as Sinn Féin was defeated by 'a large majority' according to the official conference minutes.<sup>110</sup> However, delegates would leave their mark on the new party. An Cumann Náisiúnta, the leadership's preferred name, was not endorsed by the conference either. Instead delegates settled on a compromise motion, proposed by Alderman Monahan who had earlier supported the Clare delegates' suggestion to continue as Sinn Féin. Monahan found a compromise by proposing the name Cumann na nGaedheal, thereby creating a link Arthur Griffith's organisation of 1900. The amendment proved popular with delegates embodying as it did continuity and change. Cumann na nGaedheal was adopted by 19 votes to 16. As John Reagan has pointed out, at one and the same time, Treatyites reconciled a break with the revolutionary movement that emerged in 1917 while

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>109</sup> Celia Shaw diary entry, Dec. 1922 (NLI, Celia Shaw diary, MS, 23,409).

<sup>110</sup> Preliminary conference of Cumann na nGaedheal, minutes of meeting, 7 Dec. 1922 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

maintaining a link with their separatist past by choosing the name Cumann na nGaedheal.<sup>111</sup> Additionally, the name Cumann na nGaedheal ‘may also be seen as a counterpoint to the name *Cumann na Poblachta* [original emphasis]’.<sup>112</sup>

Reflecting on the preliminary conference, Mulcahy noted in his diary that Blythe had opposed Brennan and O’Kennedy’s motion on the grounds that Sinn Féin’s work was done and that its programmes would be carried out by an Irish government.<sup>113</sup> As such, the Free State was conceived as a new beginning by Blythe and power would rest with the legislature and its executive arm rather than with a political party. The preliminary conference also discussed the party programme and draft constitution in some detail with amendments being made to some paragraphs based on suggestions from the floor. A provisional executive of twenty-five was appointed to develop an organisation in advance of a formal Cumann na nGaedheal convention to take place in the new year. Additionally, the preliminary conference narrowly endorsed by twenty votes to nineteen an age limit of 18, as opposed to 21, for prospective members while loyalty to the Free State and support of majority rule were added as pre-requisites for anybody interested in joining Cumann na nGaedheal.<sup>114</sup> With the draft constitution as yet uncompleted, Cumann na nGaedheal would remain a work in progress for some months. Celia Shaw recorded in her diary that the preliminary conference had been ‘a very thrilling meeting’.

De Valera’s reaction to the foundation of Cumann na nGaedheal was swift. Days after the Cumann na nGaedheal preliminary conference, anti-Treatyites were endeavouring to organise Sinn Féin. A concerted effort was to be made to re-establish the party under anti-Treaty auspices and from the outset the IRA was to help with organisational work.<sup>115</sup> The existing structures of Sinn Féin would be retained while efforts would be made to establish clubs in each parish. By May 1923 de Valera was preparing, like his opponents, to build a broad-based party. His energy was thrown into reorganising ‘nationalist’ or ‘independence’ opinion through Sinn Féin with Cumann na Poblachta remaining on only as a ‘rallying centre for strict Republicans’. In reality

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<sup>111</sup> Regan, *Counter revolution*, p. 141.

<sup>112</sup> John Coakley, ‘The significance of names: the evolution of Irish party labels’ in *Études Irlandaises*, 5 (1980), p. 174.

<sup>113</sup> Mulcahy diary entry, 21 Dec. 1922 (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy papers, P7/b/325).

<sup>114</sup> Preliminary Conference of Cumann na nGaedheal, minutes of meeting, 7 Dec. 1922 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>115</sup> Notes on organisation, 13 Dec. 1922 (NAI, Cumann na Poblachta & Sinn Fein papers, 1094/1/9b).

Cumann na Poblachta was dead. By vacating Sinn Féin, the Treatyites had given de Valera his opportunity. De Valera had previously feared the pro-Treaty side would retain control of Sinn Féin. However, that prospect 'has been since removed practically by the formation of Cumann na nGaedheal which leaves Sinn Fein[sic] to us'.<sup>116</sup>

### **Organising Cumann na nGaedheal**

Following the deliberately low-key preliminary conference, Cumann na nGaedheal evolved slowly. On 14 December 1922<sup>117</sup> the General and Election Committee decided to circulate a report of the Parnell Square convention to those who had been in attendance and to urge that they take action to form branches in their localities as soon as possible.<sup>118</sup> Efforts to establish branches of Cumann na nGaedheal were discussed in detail by the provisional executive, chaired by Fred Allen. It was around this time that bad financial habits began to set in. On 26 January 1923 Allen outlined the details of a meeting he had held with Cosgrave and Blythe. In spite of an earlier decision to rely on their own followers for direct subscriptions, Cosgrave and Blythe urged Allen to appoint staff and organisers promising that the necessary funds would be forthcoming without indicating its source.<sup>119</sup> Deputies were encouraged to help in the organisational drive in their constituencies so that a fully representative convention could be organised to launch the new party in March 1923.<sup>120</sup> From the outset Cumann na nGaedheal's finances were not adequately administered, which is unusual given the party's commitment to balanced budgets in government. There was a constant trickle of what could be described as unnecessary spending. Much of the party's expenditure could have been avoided if a thorough voluntary service ethic was developed at an early stage in the party's life as was

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<sup>116</sup> Eamon de Valera to the organising committee, 31 May 1923 (NAI, Cumann na Poblachta & Sinn Féin papers, 1094/1/11).

<sup>117</sup> The General and Election Committee continued to meet until May 1923. As in 1922, this body's chief concern was Treatyite electoral success and it administered the Treaty election fund. It fulfilled a largely nominal role as Cumann na nGaedheal's committees gradually took on its organisational duties. At its last meeting on 25 May 1923, it was agreed that Cumann na nGaedheal take on its remaining functions. Treaty election committee, minutes of meeting, 25 May 1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>118</sup> General and Election committee, minutes of meeting, 14 Dec. 1922 (ibid.).

<sup>119</sup> General and Election Committee, minutes of meeting, 26 January 1923 (ibid.).

<sup>120</sup> Séamus Dolan to each deputy, Feb. 1923 (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy papers, P7/b/325).

initially indicated by the provisional committee set up following the 7 December convention.<sup>121</sup> However, it must be remembered that the army, police and state administrative machine absorbed much Treatyite organisational talent in 1922/23 and the cherry was well eaten by the time the party came looking.<sup>122</sup>

Allen's committee hired its first organiser, R.J. Purcell in January 1923. Purcell previously worked for the Irish Self Determination League of Great Britain and was also involved in the June 1922 election campaign on the recommendation of Collins. Purcell was awarded the handsome salary of £6 per week, only slightly less than the wage of a Dáil deputy, and would play a significant role in organising Cumann na nGaedheal in subsequent years. Purcell immediately set about organising the party in Dublin with branches emerging in most wards by the end of March. Another organiser, J.J. Egan, was appointed and dispatched southwards towards the old John Redmond strongholds of Waterford and Wexford. The Home Rule influence of Redmond remained strong in the South East and the new party was greeted with some hostility as a successor to the Sinn Féin party that had unceremoniously obliterated the Irish Parliamentary Party tradition in the 1918 general election.<sup>123</sup> Purcell requested advice on the point of admitting former Unionists to the party. In response, the committee emphasised that the new organisation was open to all who agreed to its programme.<sup>124</sup> Was this a tacit realisation that in the future the party would have to embrace people from outside the Sinn Féin fold? As discussed above, there were other deep rooted political traditions in the Free State and a party that truly aspired to be all embracing and national in outlook would eventually have to practice what it preached, especially if the state over which it presided was to have any symbolic meaning to the wider community. Cumann na nGaedheal was quickly adapting to the realities of Irish statehood, and sought to follow in the tradition of the Irish party and Sinn Féin in establishing itself on a wide platform.

Though branches of Cumann na nGaedheal were being established around the country from early 1923, three high profile launches in Tuam, Kilkenny and Cavan on 8 April garnered a great deal of media attention in advance of the official launch, planned

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<sup>121</sup> Regan, *Counter revolution*, p. 142.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

<sup>123</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal [provisional general council?] minutes of meeting, 9 Mar. 1922 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>124</sup> Provisional general council, minutes of meeting, 2 Feb. 1922 (*ibid.*).

originally for 20 March, but now scheduled for 27 April. On 9 April the *Freeman's Journal* was able to exclaim that 'Cumann na nGaedheal has been decisively launched' following the three meetings held on the previous day.<sup>125</sup> Likewise the *Irish Independent* carried extensive coverage of the three meetings, recognising that the Tuam launch was attended by Bishop Gilmartin and that the meeting had called for public support of the forces of law-and-order and free elections.<sup>126</sup> With the Civil War petering out, the 8 April meetings showed that the new organisation was coming into the open after months of quiet organising work in the wake of the preliminary conference. It is clear that in advance of its official launch, Cumann na nGaedheal was eagerly anticipated around the country and was one of the main political talking points during April. Addressing a Farmers' Union meeting in Longford on 19 April, Kilkenny T.D. Dennis Gorey commented that the government was forming a new political organisation to be called Cumann na nGaedheal.<sup>127</sup> Criticising the government's policy on partition deputy Gorey stated to some applause that: 'They are also calling their party, I understand, the "National Party". Where is the Nationality about the party who have thrown over the Catholic Nationalists of Ulster?' The deputy went on to say that he did not believe de Valera had an answer to the Northern question either, showing that the farmers' organisation was trying to carve out a niche by distancing itself from both Cosgrave and de Valera.

As April 1923 progressed, an end to the Civil War was in sight. On 12 April the *Irish Times* predicted that the death of Liam Lynch two days earlier would have an adverse affect on the anti-government military campaign.<sup>128</sup> Indeed, the death of Lynch removed a substantial obstacle to peace between the government and the Irregulars. Lynch's successor as IRA chief-of-staff, Frank Aiken, favoured making some sort of peace agreement with the government and took steps to that end immediately upon his appointment. Although moves were afoot to end the war, the conflict continued to inhibit the enforcement of civil administration, as evidenced by an attack on two gardaí in Roscommon on 27 April.<sup>129</sup> However, with railways back up and running and a demoralised anti-Treaty army in retreat, the country was beginning to return to conditions

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<sup>125</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 9 Apr. 1923.

<sup>126</sup> *Irish Independent*, 9 Apr. 1923.

<sup>127</sup> *Longford Leader*, 28 Apr. 1923.

<sup>128</sup> *Irish Times*, 12 Apr. 1923.

<sup>129</sup> *Irish Times*, 26 Apr. 1923.

resembling normality. Having cost the country £50m, in real terms the equivalent of a quarter of a year's GNP, the Civil War ended with the defeat of the anti-Treaty IRA on 24 May 1923.<sup>130</sup> The country was now securely in the hands of the Free State forces.

The provisional executive of Cumann na nGaedheal, elected at the preliminary conference in December, took charge of the party's preparations for the Mansion House convention. The convention was to be split between a private and public session with decisions on the new party's programme and constitution to be made by delegates in secrecy. However, the public session was to be a more boisterous affair with ten tickets sent to every branch secretary, fifty to the organisation throughout Dublin while a further 100 tickets were allocated to members of Cumann na Saoirse.<sup>131</sup> Invitations to the public session were also circulated to members of the press. Delegates to the conference unanimously adopted Cumann na nGaedheal's objectives and programme, which had evolved since December to take on a more conservative tone. The party's constitution proved a slightly more contentious issue. Indeed, Cosgrave wrote to the provisional executive inviting its members to meet with his cabinet to discuss the Cumann na nGaedheal programme. Cosgrave, Mulcahy, Hayes and Blythe met with the provisional executive on 18 April where the objects and programme were discussed and ministers agreed to address the convention.<sup>132</sup> On 25 April Dolan and MacCarthy met with Cosgrave, O'Higgins, MacNeill, FitzGerald, Blythe, Mulcahy, Hugh Kennedy, Duggan, Hogan, Walsh and Lynch. Modifications were made to the programme that would be presented to the delegates attending the convention and a clause was added to fix the minimum membership of each branch at twelve.<sup>133</sup>

On 27 April Cumann na nGaedheal was officially launched. Mulcahy noted that 'anybody could have got in' to the private session, indicating that the gathering was not so exclusive after-all. Mulcahy also criticised the chair's control of the meeting and considered that the majority of delegates favoured protection demonstrating the continued

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<sup>130</sup> Garvin, *Birth of democracy*, p. 164.

<sup>131</sup> Provisional general council, minutes of meeting, 13 Apr. 1922 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal meeting in government buildings, 25 Apr. 1923 (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy papers, P7/b/ 325).

adherence of rank-and-file Treatyites to Griffithite Sinn Féin policies.<sup>134</sup> Various changes to the objects and programme were proposed from the floor though the final decision on the constitution was left to the national executive newly elected by the convention.<sup>135</sup> In another break with what had been the tradition in Sinn Féin, the leader of government did not seek the presidency of his party. In refusing to seek the presidency of Cumann na nGaedheal, Cosgrave demonstrated his belief that he was leader of the nation first and that he did not want to compromise that by taking on the lead role in the party organisation.

The nomination of Eoin Mac Neill as party president had only been agreed at the last minute by the provisional executive on 26 April.<sup>136</sup> MacNeill was held in high regard in 1923 as the founder of the Irish Volunteers and as a leading scholar and cultural nationalist. He was unanimously endorsed as president by the convention the following day. However, that the party of government would be led outside the Dáil by the Minister for Education reflected the strange relationship that would develop between Cumann na nGaedheal and the government it supported. Indeed, the unusual leadership structure of the new pro-Treaty party illustrates the high-brow attitude of many in Cumann na nGaedheal to party politics and the organisation at times seemed to resemble more closely the loosely tied political machines of the nineteenth century than the new mass parties emerging across Europe in the 1920s with numerous writers noting a ‘dislocation’<sup>137</sup> between the grass-roots and the Dáil party (these questions will be addressed in more detail in subsequent chapters). Cosgrave in particular did not have any great affection for partisan party politics and his government was unprepared to cede too much ground to the machine that would keep it in power.<sup>138</sup> Cosgrave saw class and party divisions as fractious and damaging to the national interest and his speeches often emphasised the need to hold the scales even between the various interest groups.

Cumann na nGaedheal’s formal launch passed without much fanfare. The *Irish Independent* commented that it was ‘gratifying to see the deplorable conflict transfer to the platform’, a clear reference to the Civil War. The same reporter described the day’s

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<sup>134</sup> Mulcahy’s notes on ‘Party Convention, 27 April’ [1923] (ibid.).

<sup>135</sup> Report of Cumann na nGaedheal convention, the Mansion House, 27 April 1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>136</sup> Provisional general council, minutes of meeting, 26 Apr. 1923 (ibid.).

<sup>137</sup> Meehan, *Cosgrave party*, p. 14.

<sup>138</sup> Jordan, *W.T. Cosgrave*, p. 109.

proceedings as ‘practical and businesslike’.<sup>139</sup> In like manner, the *Southern Star* reported that there ‘was no undue exaltation in the speeches at the gathering. On the other hand, there was no shirking of burdens’.<sup>140</sup> In contrast, the *Manchester Guardian* noted that the convention had conveyed an unrealistic and aspirational tone and that the new party was best placed to bridge the various differences between Irish people.<sup>141</sup> Much like its ministers approach to administration, Cumann na nGaedheal would prove practical and somewhat dour as a political organisation and it lacked the dynamism of both its revolutionary progenitor and anti-Treatyite ‘half sister’. However, there was no guarantee that an electorate accustomed to the rhetoric of Home Rulers and strident nationalism of Sinn Féin’s leaders during the revolution would warm to a new party forced to deal with the realities of self-government and the politics of administration as opposed to that of protest.<sup>142</sup>

1923 marked the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Ireland. The British departed the twenty-six southern counties and the nascent Free State government had succeeded in crushing the military campaign of an armed minority determined to fight against the new settlement. Following the August 1923 election Cumann na nGaedheal had a mandate to continue the work begun by the provisional government in bedding down the new state on a firm footing. Remarkably, given their intense opposition to deValera and their fierce prosecution of the Civil War, the Free State government did much in the years to re-integrate rather than exclude the anti-Treatyites from the state’s political apparatus. There was a dogged determination among the government to establish a functioning democracy in Ireland, regardless of the consequences for its own electoral prospects, a point picked up on elsewhere. By 1927 with de Valera’s entry to the Dáil his revolution was finally over just as Collins’s revolution had ended with the shelling of the Four Courts in June 1922. The chapters that follow look into the Cumann na nGaedheal grass-root organisation in greater detail, its performance in elections, the activism levels in the constituencies and the reasons behind a perceived electoral fatalism. However, before we proceed it is important to acknowledge that the year of Cumann na nGaedheal’s

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<sup>139</sup> *Irish Independent*, 28 Apr., 1923.

<sup>140</sup> *Southern Star*, 5 May 1923.

<sup>141</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 28 Apr. 1923.

<sup>142</sup> Garvin argues that the Free State side’s political culture was unemotional, legalistic and rational, *Birth of democracy*, p. 140.



foundation was a watershed in Irish history. It marked the beginning of what has been a remarkably stable period of democratic government in Ireland and for that achievement, Cumann na nGaedheal can take a great deal of credit.

## **The Cumann na nGaedheal organisation: an overview**

Having established Cumann na nGaedheal's origins, this chapter goes on to detail the workings of the party's national organisational structures over the period 1923-33. This chapter is divided into sections to sketch out various aspects of the party organisation. Three distinct phases in the party's life are identified and discussed. The first phase covers the initial two years from the party's official launch in April 1923 through to the establishment of a new organising committee, under the chairmanship of J.J. Walsh. This committee was created in November 1924 to oversee the campaign for the March 1925 by-elections caused by a split in the party in the previous year. This period was marked by initial organisational growth over the summer of 1923, followed by stagnation in the aftermath of the August general election.

In early 1925 Cumann na nGaedheal began an organisational renewal that saw it grow substantially in the constituencies. This new phase of organisational growth was short-lived and corresponded with J.J. Walsh's accession to the lead role in the organisation. During this time of growth, the *cumainn* were given more direct representation at the annual party conference. Cumann na nGaedheal's organisation was at its strongest in the mid-1920s with the number of *cumainn* nationwide growing to their highest number. However, the party struggled to maintain its new strength and vitality beyond the September 1927 election, though it would be wrong to suggest an irretrievable decline had set in. As subsequent chapters will show, while the party machine did lose some momentum in 1927, it remained quite robust despite setbacks such as Walsh's decision to leave Cumann na nGaedheal in the summer of 1927 and the global economic crash from 1929 onwards. After 1927 the impetus towards a more significant role for

rank-and-file members stalled, although some innovation continued to be shown by the various constituency organisations in this period (see chapter five).

Cumann na nGaedheal's difficulties were compounded by the failed Boundary Commission in 1925 and by political developments in 1926. William Redmond's new National League threatened Cumann na nGaedheal's right flank and weakened its capacity to attract the wider non Sinn Féin constituency. More significantly, Fianna Fáil's foundation the same year, and subsequent decision to take its Dáil seats, finally presented the electorate with a viable alternative to W.T. Cosgrave's government. A further split in Cumann na nGaedheal in 1926, this time over the Boundary Agreement, led to the foundation of Clann Éireann. While this party never made an electoral breakthrough, its leaders embraced the policies of Fianna Fáil in 1927. Facing an increasingly emboldened opposition from 1927 and in having to deal with the consequences of global economic collapse from 1929, Cumann na nGaedheal's prospects in the 1932 election were bleak. The February 1932 poll proved to be a 'critical' election as the Free State electorate returned a Fianna Fáil government supported by the votes of the Labour party. A snap election eleven months later gave de Valera his first overall majority. He was to remain in power, uninterrupted, until 1948. However, it would be wrong to interpret Cumann na nGaedheal as a party in terminal decline from 1927. As this and subsequent chapters will show, the *cumainn* were robust at election time and in the three elections of September 1927, February 1932 and January 1933 its vote never again fell as low as the June 1927 figure of 27%. Moreover, facing a prolonged spell in opposition, Cumann na nGaedheal was forced to rethink its strategy and to re-evaluate the question of party organisation and competing in local elections. In its last months as a distinct party, Cumann na nGaedheal made a concerted effort to reorganise. The party engaged in root and branch reform of its structures and belatedly decided to contest local elections. In September 1933 the newly formed Fine Gael would inherit from its parent party a grass-root machine already undergoing a process of renewal. As such, this and subsequent chapters will show that Treatyite political reorganisation pre-dated the foundation of Fine Gael in September 1933.

## Cumann na nGaedheal's first election

Cumann na nGaedheal faced its first electoral test just four months on from its public launch in April 1923. Irish society was left deeply divided by a Civil War which claimed the lives of more Irishmen in eleven months than total Irish Volunteer deaths in the period 1916-21.<sup>1</sup> Civil war bequeathed a poisonous legacy to the Irish political system that would take many years to heal. Its position secured with the end of the conflict in May, the government called a general election for 27 August 1923.<sup>2</sup> The ballot was the first since the Irish Free State officially came into being on 6 December 1922 and a strong performance by the government party was needed to bed down the new state's institutions and to show the world, and potential investors,<sup>3</sup> that the government still had the support of the people. Although the fighting had stopped, the country remained deeply unsettled. Over 10,000 Republican internees remained in government hands while estimates put the material and financial damage of the conflict at close to £50m, a vast sum for the period.<sup>4</sup>

The political landscape in Ireland had been utterly transformed in the time since the 'pact' election of June 1922. Having campaigned on the same platform in June 1922, the Sinn Féin 'sub parties' had since definitively evolved into their separate entities. After the Civil War, anti-Treatyites regrouped and inaugurated themselves as the third incarnation of Sinn Féin at a meeting in the Mansion House in June 1923. De Valera jettisoned the Cumann na Poblachta project as he sought to broaden the anti-Treaty support base by building on the potent symbolism of the old party. Reorganised Sinn Féin in 1923 had a much stronger Republican ethos than before, given that most moderates had vacated it upon the foundation of Cumann na nGaedheal.<sup>5</sup> Many Treatyites regretted that the anti-Treatyites had regrouped under the Sinn Féin banner. Both sides claimed to be the natural inheritors to the Sinn Féin legacy.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, key military and political figures from each side had been

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Hopkinson, *Green against green: the Irish Civil War* (Dublin, 2004), p. 272.

<sup>2</sup> Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth-century Ireland: revolution and state building* (Dublin, 2005), p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Terence Dooley, *'The land for the people': the land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), p. 50.

<sup>4</sup> Keogh, *Twentieth century Ireland*, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> Kevin Rafter, *Sinn Féin, 1905-2005: in the shadow of gunmen* (Dublin, 2005), p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> Liam de Róiste wrote in his diary that Sinn Féin may have been revived by de Valera but the spirit of the old movement would never return. De Róiste diary entry, 8 Aug. 1923 (CCCA, Liam de Róiste papers, U271/A/49).

casualties of the Civil War, with the Free State side having to face the electorate without the charismatic leadership that Michael Collins had provided in 1922. While W.T. Cosgrave did not provide the same level of charismatic leadership, and assumed the role of chairman rather than chief in cabinet, he could nevertheless be relied upon as a steady pair of hands to guide the country through its darkest hours.<sup>7</sup>

Cumann na nGaedheal had been established to keep in power those who had steered the Provisional Government through the unsteady waters of autumn and winter 1922 and to safeguard the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Although its main opponent was demoralised, with many of its active supporters interned, Cumann na nGaedheal remained a work in progress as the election drew nearer. In the months before its first electoral test Cumann na nGaedheal's organisation lacked the vigour of its parent party. In the early days, Cumann na nGaedheal was disadvantaged in that much Treatyite organisational ability was in the service of the state rather than the party.<sup>8</sup> Sinn Féin had at least inherited the party structures of the original movement, and experienced something of an explosion of growth after its June meeting from just sixteen branches to several hundred. Conversely, outside the capital Cumann na nGaedheal branches were slow to take root and with a crucial general election on the horizon the race to get Cumann na nGaedheal organised across the Free State began in earnest.

After the 27 April meeting, Séamus Dolan issued a circular to supporters on 3 May. In the circular, Dolan pointed to the successful convention and the formation of *cumainn* as tentative signs for optimism. Dolan called on supporters to volunteer their time to building up the party as it was not yet possible to appoint organisers pending the raising of funds for the organisation. For its part, the Standing Committee would assist these efforts by supplying copies of the party's constitution, membership cards and literature.<sup>9</sup> However, Cumann na nGaedheal quickly became preoccupied with the approaching electoral contest, the government's international prestige resting on a strong showing at the polls. As such, electoral work soon came to overshadow that of organisation building. In its urgency to win with a new and untested party machine, Cumann na nGaedheal made the mistake of

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<sup>7</sup> Rafter, *Sinn Féin*, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> John M. Regan, *The Irish counter revolution, 1921-1936: Treatyite politics and settlement in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), p. 164.

<sup>9</sup> Séamus Dolan circular, 3 May 1923 (CCCA, Barry Egan papers, U404/2).

throwing money raised from organisation and electoral appeal funds at any organisational problem it encountered. Cumann na nGaedheal set out its stall as a non-class party and advertised as ‘the national party’. Organising in Naas, speakers said the organisation was launched to ‘raise it above all party [and class] interests’.<sup>10</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal members could also belong to farmer and labour organisations so long as they ‘put their country before their immediate class interests’. The *Southern Star* was unimpressed, preferring if Cumann na nGaedheal would admit that it too was a political party like the Farmers’ Union or the Labour party. Cumann na nGaedheal organisers, usually men from a military background, were appointed and despatched to the constituencies throughout the summer of 1923. In their instructions, these paid organisers were asked to enlist the support of influential people in towns and cities to help organise new *cumainn*. Once paid organisers had worked the provincial towns, the new local party leaders were expected to establish the machine in the ‘outlying parish areas’ where they had influence. What was expected of organisers was clearly set out in the instructions each was issued with:

#### Instructions to Organisers

1. Organiser to work the towns in his district, enlist the support of influential people and ask them to organise *cumainn* in outlying parish areas.
2. Affiliate *cumainn* immediately.
3. Will be judged on the number he can affiliate.
4. To send chief organiser weekly report with a programme of work for the coming week.<sup>11</sup>

Cumann na nGaedheal’s rapidly growing network of paid organisers was led by its energetic chief organiser P.J. Ryan.<sup>12</sup> In advance of the 1923 election Ryan oversaw the appointment of new organisers, issued them with their instructions, and furnished the Standing Committee with weekly reports of the progress. These reports brought mixed news for the committee. The positive reaction to organisers in the capital and provincial towns was balanced out by the disappointing reception the party was receiving in predominantly rural areas. Ryan’s report of 29 June provides a taste of the frantic efforts to manufacture an electoral machine in the time available before the election. In it Ryan

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<sup>10</sup> *Southern Star*, 23 June 1923.

<sup>11</sup> Instructions to organisers, 21 June 1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>12</sup> Ciara Meehan, *The Cosgrave party: a history of Cumann na nGaedheal, 1923-33* (Dublin, 2010), p. 26.

informed the Standing Committee of the recent appointment of organisers Seán Scanlon in Clare, William Breen in County Dublin, Michael O’Hara in Longford/Westmeath and Michael McGrath in Wexford.<sup>13</sup> Every constituency was assigned an organiser and some of the bigger ones ended up with two. A total of forty paid organisers were working for Cumann na nGaedheal by August. In the same report Ryan elaborated on the difficulties his organisers faced in rural areas. To combat the apathy facing the party in the provinces, Ryan instructed his organisers to arrange as many parish meetings as possible and sent on posters and such materials as might help attract people into Cumann na nGaedheal meetings. However, the party structures of Cumann na nGaedheal did little to make life easy for the organisers or influential townsmen to organise *cumainn*. Ryan’s report of 6 July reveals an important problem in the mechanics of the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation. While admitting that the people in rural areas were slow to take an interest, Ryan stated that some recent meetings called to start new *cumainn* had been abandoned by organisers on the grounds that only eight or nine people were present.<sup>14</sup> Party rules stated that twelve people were needed to inaugurate a Cumann na nGaedheal branch. Ryan suggested that election committees be established in areas where it had not been possible to form branches. Might it be that the party had set the bar too high? It would probably have proved more beneficial in the long term to proceed in setting up a branch with eight or nine prospective members present than to abandon the exercise altogether. It is unclear from Ryan’s report of 6 July if people who had turned up for the abandoned meetings were instructed to join nearby branches or if they were assured a *cumann* would be formed at a later date.

In order for the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation to manoeuvre its way out from 5 Parnell Square and reach into every street and every parish in the country, it would have to demonstrate greater flexibility than that shown in June and July. Branches continued to appear in July and August, although many of these became inactive on the passing of the election.<sup>15</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal was launched in Cork at a public meeting on 8 July. Liam de Róiste commented that Cork Treatyites were ‘not a perfectly united body’ and that some

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<sup>13</sup> Chief Organiser’s report, 29 June 1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>14</sup> Chief Organiser’s report, 6 July 1923 (ibid.).

<sup>15</sup> In subsequent chapters it will be discernable that much of the organisational work in rural areas resulted in the formation of electoral machines which expired once the election passed. Branches and election committees were formed in Clare, Longford/Westmeath and Cork. De Róiste diary entry, 10 June 1923 (CCCA, Liam de Róiste diary, U271/A/49).

supporters believed Cumann na nGaedheal was ‘too broad’ in composition reflecting the diverse nature of the party. By the end of July committees were being formed in those places where branches could not be formed.<sup>16</sup> While this action was beneficial to the party in the short term, it was a quick fix that would do little to set down firm roots for Cumann na nGaedheal in the longer term. In some remote areas it would have been more advantageous to proceed with setting up *cumainn* even if few members were present. Perhaps Cumann na nGaedheal’s desire to establish strong branches stemmed from the experience of pre-independence political movements. Sinn Féin and the United Irish League before it had been national movements with branches in every parish.<sup>17</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal and its anti-Treaty rival operated in a changed environment. Political fragmentation, particularly on the pro-Treaty side, replaced the unity of pre-independence nationalist politics. Cumann na nGaedheal it seems, continued to see itself as the quintessential ‘national’ organisation and adopted the rigid structures that had worked in the past. However, Fianna Fáil from 1926 onwards set its minimum branch membership at nine and managed to lay the foundations of a strong, dynamic party machine by organising itself in small, tight-knit units in every parish. Unlike Cumann na nGaedheal, Fianna Fáil was an opposition party when it was founded so could devote much energy to developing a strong grass-root machine and quickly adapted to the changed political landscape.

In an attempt to stamp the authority of headquarters over the entire organisation, the Standing Committee asked that every branch send reports of their meetings to headquarters and the local press.<sup>18</sup> With the election fast approaching the committee wanted to keep a watchful eye on the grass-roots. There is evidence to suggest that around this time the *cumainn* themselves, particularly those in Dublin North, were also trying to put their mark on the new party. As we shall see in chapter five, the Dublin North constituency was well organised by the summer of 1923. Party members in that constituency, particularly from Drumcondra and Glasnevin, showed a keen interest in shaping the new party. Correspondence to the Standing Committee from the Glasnevin *cumann* in early July urged

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<sup>16</sup> Chief Organiser’s report, 26 July 1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>17</sup> In March 1906 there were 1,460 UIL branches nationwide though this figure had fallen to 1,076 in February 1910. National Directory, minutes of meetings, 6 March 1906 and 10 February 1910 (NLI, United Irish League, minute book of the National Directory, MS, 700).

<sup>18</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 29 June 1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).



that only Gaelic type should be used in all printing matters connected with Cumann na nGaedheal.<sup>19</sup> In September the Standing Committee and National Executive discussed resolutions from the Glasnevin branch and Dublin North constituency committee,<sup>20</sup> this time advocating the advisability of holding a national convention to consider the position of the organisation. Drumcondra *cumann* voiced its support for this in October.<sup>21</sup> In July a meeting of the National Executive advocated the breaking up of larger *cumainn*, (Dún Laoghaire was cited as an example) into smaller ones and reaffirmed the party's desire to have one branch per ward or parish.<sup>22</sup> Clearly the party's machinery was still developing and unlike their anti-Treaty counterparts, Cumann na nGaedheal organisers did not have the benefit of working within the framework of an existing entity.

Throughout July and August, Cumann na nGaedheal headquarters in 5 Parnell Square bristled with activity as the party's election apparatus was in creation. Simultaneously, a new party organisation was being established around the country while having to immediately throw itself into a campaign critical to the survival of Cosgrave's administration. Psychologically, the objectives of fighting the election and building the organisation remained separate. As in 1922, a Treaty election fund was established though a separate organisational fundraising drive met with a meagre response as was typical of the party in this period.<sup>23</sup> Treaty supporters were more willing to donate to the election campaign than to the building up of a party organisation. The two funds were merged into one at the 9 July National Executive meeting. At this meeting, headquarters made itself liable for nomination fees and expenses for each constituency less ten per cent. Ryan's report of 20 July stated that thirty one new Cumann na nGaedheal branches had been affiliated in the previous week.<sup>24</sup> The policy of recruiting paid organisers was working while the upcoming election gave an added impetus for Treaty supporters not already swallowed up in the army, police or administrative service to get actively involved in the new party.

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<sup>19</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 6 July 1923 (ibid.).

<sup>20</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 7 Sept. 1923; National Executive, minutes of meeting, 18 Sept. 1923 (ibid.).

<sup>21</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 12 Oct. 1923 (ibid.).

<sup>22</sup> National Executive, minutes of meeting, 9 July 1923 (ibid.).

<sup>23</sup> Meehan, *Cosgrave party*, pp 10-13.

<sup>24</sup> Chief Organiser's report, 20 July 1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

In constituencies where it had become established, the party organisation set about selecting candidates. The well organised Dublin North constituency selected its team to contest the election under the Cumann na nGaedheal banner at a convention on 1 August,<sup>25</sup> with a convention in Cork taking place on 5 August.<sup>26</sup> In an indication of things to come, Treatyites in Cork had been urged to broaden their appeal by cooperating with the city's business interests as represented by the Cork Progressives.<sup>27</sup> For veteran Sinn Féiners this was a bitter pill to swallow, given the Irish party and Unionist tendencies of the Progressives in the past. Conversely, in more rural constituencies, party structures were patchy and candidate selection more problematic. This was acknowledged by the Standing Committee. At first, the committee suggested that affiliated *cumainn* in such constituencies should 'invite representatives from areas as yet unorganised, to a meeting for the selection of candidates'.<sup>28</sup> This proved impractical in some areas and so practice varied from constituency to constituency. For instance, the Clare organisation, and various non-party groups (see chapter three), selected five candidates to contest what was a five-seat constituency. As the election drew closer, party structures continued to evolve. In addition, three provincial organisers were appointed to link workers on the ground with Ryan.

As a final flourish before the general election, 100,000 copies of an address by Cosgrave were ordered in large poster form while the same text was to appear in advertisements in the *Irish Independent*, the *Irish Times* and the *Freeman's Journal*.<sup>29</sup> A prevailing sense of pessimism characterised the 1923 election. The Civil War had killed off much of the optimism characteristic of the revolutionary period. Even meetings organised by the opposition failed to generate enthusiasm.<sup>30</sup> 1923 was a difficult year for Irish farmers, as the war-time boom in agricultural prices came to an end.<sup>31</sup> It is quite possible that the vote for the government party, which had inherited a natural commercial farming base from

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<sup>25</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 3 August 1923 (ibid.).

<sup>26</sup> De Róiste diary entry, 4 Aug. 1923 (CCCA, Liam de Róiste papers, U271/A/49).

<sup>27</sup> De Róiste objected to Richard Beamish of the Progressives on the basis that he was a former Unionist. Ibid. Earlier, he and other Treatyites in Cork 'naturally' disliked being asked by Walsh to 'join with the business organisations and conservatives for election purposes'. De Róiste diary entry, 25 May 1923 (ibid.).

<sup>28</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 20 July 1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>29</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 17 Aug. 1923 (ibid.).

<sup>30</sup> De Róiste notes in his diary that an anti-Treaty meeting in Cork had, 'like all' lacked enthusiasm.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Sinnott, *Irish voters decide: voting behaviour in elections and referendums since 1918* (Manchester, 1995), pp 43-4.

its advocacy of the Treaty and stability, was affected by the economic depression.<sup>32</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal won 39% of the vote and sixty-three seats, a gain of five on the number won by pro-Treaty Sinn Féin in 1922. Given that the Dáil had just been increased from 128 to 153 seats, Cumann na nGaedheal's seat total was something of a disappointment.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless Richard Sinnott makes the point, that Cumann na nGaedheal's share of the vote in 1923 must be considered against the emergence of a multi-party system in Ireland that year. For the first time every constituency was contested by a multiplicity of candidates. Moreover, much of the political re-alignment of 1923 occurred on the pro-Treaty side. Sectional interest parties could offer voters greater choice while agreeing to work within the framework of the Treaty.<sup>34</sup>

Cumann na nGaedheal had performed particularly well in the west and in Dublin. In Dublin North, General Richard Mulcahy received an unprecedented 22,205 first-preference votes.<sup>35</sup> Sinn Féin managed to win forty-four seats in spite of the fact that many of its activists, and indeed candidates, were in prison. Sinn Féin was the sole beneficiary of anti-Treaty sentiment with no Republican pretender to its left or right. The Farmers' Party, controlled by the Farmers' Union, founded in 1920, and strong in most rural constituencies, won fifteen seats. Meanwhile, the Labour party won fourteen seats, as yet failing to stir the Irish electorate to the social cause. Although short of an overall majority, the abstention of the anti-Treaty Sinn Féin deputies gave Cumann na nGaedheal a comfortable majority inside the Dáil allowing the government continue in office. In the absence of de Valera and his deputies, Cosgrave faced Tom Johnson of the Labour party, who provided a nominal leadership of the opposition. While the opposition represented a diverse range of interests, from ex-unionists and farmers to Johnson's Labour party, it was no threat to the government. So long as Sinn Féin continued to abstain Cosgrave was safe in power.

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<sup>32</sup> Brian Maye, *Fine Gael, 1923-1987* (Dublin, 1993), p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> Keogh, *Twentieth-century Ireland*, p. 18.

<sup>34</sup> Sinnott, *Irish voters decide*, p. 98.

<sup>35</sup> Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918-92* (Dublin, 1992) p. 112.

## The legacy of the 1923 election

With Cosgrave returned as head of government, and with Cumann na nGaedheal holding more seats in parliament than the anti-Treatyites in abstention, the summer's frantic organisational efforts had paid off, even if the party had won slightly less than two-fifths of the votes cast. With the passing of the election, efforts to organise Cumann na nGaedheal across the country slackened. The Standing Committee immediately set about reducing spending as it tried to grapple with the financial legacy of the contest. All but two paid organisers were told that their services were no longer required.<sup>36</sup> Even the minutes of Standing Committee meetings from the end of August reflect a more sedate atmosphere as party work eased. Correspondence from the grass-roots urged that the party immediately begin preparations for the local elections due the following year, but as we shall see the party never formally contested local government, instead unofficially fielding candidates where there was no other pro-Treaty person in contention.<sup>37</sup>

Throughout the autumn of 1923 the Standing Committee grappled with the debts left in the wake of the lavish excesses of the August general election. In addressing the poor state of the party's finances, various options were considered by the National Executive. J.J. Walsh was prepared to ask constituency committees to pay their own liabilities while other ministers in attendance suggested that outstanding nomination fees dating from 1917 to 1921, now controlled by Cumann na nGaedheal members, should be obtained.<sup>38</sup> Leaving it to the various constituency committees to pay monies owed would have been unfair, given that headquarters had indicated its own liability for these before the election. Such a move would have done little to encourage activism grass-root activism. At this time, the Standing Committee decided to let out rooms at party headquarters. Cumann na Saoirse had been using a room at 5 Parnell Square but they were vacating by 12 October. Cumann Sugradh

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<sup>36</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 31 Aug. 1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. Cumann na nGaedheal never contested local elections though when it was in opposition in 1933 it decided that it would officially contest the council elections due in June of that year. However, these were subsequently postponed and by the time the elections were held, Fine Gael had been formed. *Irish Independent*, 2 May 1933.

<sup>38</sup> National Executive, minutes of meeting, 18 Sept. 1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

an Airm, a committee set up to provide recreational facilities for soldiers,<sup>39</sup> began renting Cumann na Saoirse's old room for a yearly rent of £52.<sup>40</sup> Also, the party's newly formed central branch, or *Ard Chumann* (Chapter five) contributed by paying a small fee for the use of rooms three and four at headquarters for its meetings and functions.

As the autumn progressed, Cumann na nGaedheal's election hangover worsened. Two subcommittees were formed in October, one for finance and one for organisation.<sup>41</sup> On 26 October the Standing Committee discussed correspondence from the Clare constituency committee indicating that it was £630 in arrears from the election. Clare requested funds from the party's cash-strapped headquarters to help it clear debts owed to local businesses. Despite the decision to forward £150 to the Clare constituency committee with an explanation of headquarters' own financial difficulties (see next chapter), acrimony rumbled on in the county for a further two years. By 7 December the situation was so bad that further redundancies and salary cuts for staff were considered. Indeed, even the chief organiser's salary was reduced as Cumann na nGaedheal desperately tried to make savings.<sup>42</sup> If the nascent organisation had benefited from the excesses in party spending during the election, it was now suffering disproportionately from its after-effects.

### **Strain, mutiny and by-elections**

Ultimate responsibility for the organisation lay with Eoin MacNeill, Cumann na nGaedheal president and Minister for Education. By November 1923, with the party's finances in a dire position and with the Fiscal Inquiry Committee having blunted the protectionist argument (chapter seven), MacNeill was urging closer cooperation between the organisation and the government. He also stressed the need to formulate an attractive economic policy to draw people into the *cumann*.<sup>43</sup> As a member of the cabinet, and the highest officer in Cumann na nGaedheal, MacNeill was in an ideal position to mediate between the organisation, the parliamentary party, and the government, and should have

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<sup>39</sup> *Irish Independent*, 24 Apr. , 9 June, 13 June 1923.

<sup>40</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 12 Oct.1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>41</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 19 Oct.1923 (ibid.).

<sup>42</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meetings, 26 Oct., 7 Dec. 1923 (ibid.).

<sup>43</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of special meeting, 27 Nov. 1923 (ibid.).

been able to represent the views of the deputies and the organisation in cabinet. On 3 December MacNeill summoned a conference of the Standing Committee and the Executive Council in government buildings. Séamus Hughes, the party's newly appointed general secretary,<sup>44</sup> also attended. MacNeill understood the importance of giving the organisation a function between elections and urged his cabinet colleagues to heed the lessons learned from the demise of the Irish party in 1918. MacNeill's conference discussed the lack of contact between grass-roots, party and government. An exchange of views ensued as to how best to improve coordination between these.

The question of a distinctive policy was also discussed, with some suggesting an inducement for joining Cumann na nGaedheal ought to be the opportunity to influence legislation. FitzGerald believed the *cumainn* should welcome all elements, 'old and new', a reference to the constitutional nationalists of the Irish party, while Blythe saw party organisation as a 'conduit pipe' for testing public opinion. O'Higgins stated that a distinctive Cumann na nGaedheal policy would simply 'crystallise around government legislation'.<sup>45</sup> For O'Higgins and like-minded ministers, the government would shape Cumann na nGaedheal and not *vice versa*. There was, however, a fault line in the government. McGrath, Mulcahy and Walsh, all Irish-Irelanders (cultural nationalists), were party men who enjoyed uneasy relationships with more 'cosmopolitan' colleagues such as FitzGerald, O'Higgins and Hogan with Cosgrave holding the centre ground.<sup>46</sup> The party machine would have little scope to influence ministers or to flex its muscle in the pursuit of patronage (although some organisers did attempt the latter in 1924). In spite of his efforts to mediate between government and its political machine, MacNeill demonstrated an inability to develop the organisation more forcefully. However, MacNeill's selection as president itself was an afterthought. One minister who did demonstrate a knowledge and interest in party organisation was Mulcahy and it seems that Cumann na nGaedheal suffered for his role as Commander-in-Chief in late 1922 and early 1923 as the new party was evolving. After the Civil War Mulcahy took a genuine interest in the party organisation, was critical of some of his ministerial colleagues' neglect of it and regretted the failure of the Treatyites

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<sup>44</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 30 Nov. 1923 (ibid.).

<sup>45</sup> Conference of Executive Council with Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 3 December 1923 (ibid.).

<sup>46</sup> Regan, *Counter revolution*, p. 83.

to retain the Sinn Féin label.<sup>47</sup> In retrospect, Mulcahy's enforced absence during the party's formative days was detrimental for the organisation.

Scarcely six months on from its first election, Cumann na nGaedheal faced a crisis which potentially threatened the survival of both the state and party. The complex issues surrounding the army mutiny, the resignation of two ministers and the secession of nine deputies from the Cumann na nGaedheal party have been examined adequately by other historians.<sup>48</sup> What is examined here is the impact of these traumatic events on the wider Cumann na nGaedheal organisation and the party's identity. The mutiny brought to a head tensions in the government, the army and the Cumann na nGaedheal party and ultimately cost Mulcahy his place in cabinet as he resigned his position before being forced out. O'Higgins, acting on behalf of an ill Cosgrave, moved against rival old IRA and IRB factions organising themselves in the national army. As such, the episode brought out into the open three factions in the overall Treatyite movement, all of whom claimed to be following in Collins's footsteps: the old IRA men, Collins's former subordinates in the clandestine IRB, and, of course, the civilian ministers.

Disgruntled army officers were unhappy with the extent of demobilisation after the Civil War and the slow pace of progress towards a Republic. They presented Cosgrave with an ultimatum on 6 March 1924. The mutineers had little sympathy, the *Manchester Guardian* arguing they simply wanted the public service purged of those with whom they 'did not see eye to eye'.<sup>49</sup> A move against the mutineers on 18 March, ordered by Gearóid O'Sullivan and Richard Mulcahy, created a new crisis as the Executive Council deemed that particular action to have cut across government authority. In the end O'Higgins, under the direction of Cosgrave from his sick bed, moved against both factions to bring the armed forces under true civilian control.<sup>50</sup> However, the reasons behind Mulcahy's demise require further teasing out. Mulcahy as Minister for Defence in the wake of the Civil War was faced with the task of reforming and demobilising a swollen army. Mulcahy remained a soldier and some of the more murky civil war atrocities such as that at Ballyseedy had left

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<sup>47</sup> Risteárd Mulcahy, *Richard Mulcahy (1886-1971) a family memoir* (Dublin, 1999), pp 218-21.

<sup>48</sup> Ciara Meehan, John Regan, Maryann Valiulis, John P. McCarthy among others.

<sup>49</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 3 Nov.1924.

<sup>50</sup> John P. McCarthy, *Kevin O'Higgins: builder of the Irish State* (Dublin, 2006), pp 137-64.

his ministerial colleagues unimpressed with his army.<sup>51</sup> The army's arrest of the mutineers, seemingly without government authority, gave the civilian ministers an opportunity to install a non-military Defence Minister. McGrath, on the other hand, had resigned from cabinet in sympathy with the original Old IRA mutineers. Eight of McGrath's supporters on the Cumann na nGaedheal backbenches joined with him in seceding from the party to form the National Group opposition.

For the most part, Cumann na nGaedheal's organisation fell into line behind the Executive Council, passing a resolution affirming its belief in the authority of the government and appealing to the parliamentary party to remember that 'the National interest is paramount'.<sup>52</sup> An attempt was made by the Dublin North constituency committee to use the crisis to discuss the aims and policy of Cumann na nGaedheal and to again have clarified the relations between the organisation, party and government (see chapter five). McGrath's new group hoped to use the offer of reunion with the party as a ruse to prize substantial concessions on policy from the government and to secure the reinstatement of the mutinous officers.<sup>53</sup> The National Group were invited by the Standing Committee to a meeting of the National Executive on 13 May where the Dublin North committee's resolution would be debated. Only one member, Seán Milroy, attended and he walked out at the beginning of the meeting on the grounds that the wording of the Dublin North motion was not as it had been circulated.<sup>54</sup> McGrath was then invited to a meeting of the Standing Committee but declined. Cosgrave was also keen to maintain party unity and adopted a conciliatory position with McGrath and the National Group.<sup>55</sup> With five by-elections due in November 1924, it was unsurprising that Cosgrave should have gone out on a limb to try to preserve the party's unity and reintegrate the National Group. The possibility of the Treatyite vote being split even further by National Group candidates must have played on the minds of party officials and the President alike. In correspondence with his friend, and ardent Treatyite, Bishop Michael Fogarty of Killaloe, Cosgrave described efforts to unite as honest on behalf of both McGrath and himself. Fogarty reassured Cosgrave that the split

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<sup>51</sup> Fearghal McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy: a self-made hero* (Oxford, 2005), p. 133.

<sup>52</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 25 Mar. 1924 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>53</sup> Regan, *Counter revolution*, p. 199.

<sup>54</sup> National Executive, minutes of meeting, 13 May 1924 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>55</sup> Regan, *Counter revolution*, pp 214-19.



might be for the best.<sup>56</sup> The government chose to face down the McGrathites rather than concede ground on administrative probity or economic policy. On 29 October McGrath resigned from the Dáil followed by the rest of the National Group two days later. With five by-elections due in November, the resignation of the nine National Group deputies further contributed to an air of crisis. Cosgrave and his colleagues knew their position was precarious and so turned their attention to grass-root revival.

Cumann na nGaedheal was in turmoil when it faced the electorate in five constituencies during November 1924. Sinn Féin sought to capitalise on the government's difficulties, claiming that the resignation of the McGrathites was the beginning of the end for the Free State.<sup>57</sup> By-elections in Donegal and Cork Borough were caused by the resignations of Cumann na nGaedheal deputies P.J. Ward and Alfred O'Rahilly. A seat in Mayo North became vacant due to its forfeiture by the Cumann na nGaedheal candidate, the government party deputy for Cork East died while a vacancy arose in Dublin South on the appointment of Hugh Kennedy as the state's first Chief Justice.<sup>58</sup> In Cork Borough, Michael Egan was selected by a Cumann na nGaedheal convention which was attended by former Hibernians and United Irish Leaguers, people who in Sinn Féin days had 'been the enemy'.<sup>59</sup> In subsequent months old Sinn Féiners within the Cork city organisation made a clandestine effort to wrest control from those with past Irish party affiliations.<sup>60</sup> The two Cork seats were held as was Donegal. However, Cumann na nGaedheal failed to defend its seats in Mayo North and Dublin South. Séamus Hughes's defeat to Seán Lemass in the supposedly safe Dublin South constituency came as a surprise at all levels within Cumann na nGaedheal.<sup>61</sup>

The loss of two seats in November, coupled with the National Group secession, added to Cumann na nGaedheal's difficulties. A wounded party now faced new-year by-elections for nine seats it formerly held. These by-elections in particular would prove a crucial test of Cumann na nGaedheal's strength and ability to preserve its identity.

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<sup>56</sup> In the letter, Cosgrave wrote 'I am very much concerned about this split with old personal friends and colleagues. But, as your Lordship says, it may be all for good'. W.T. Cosgrave to Bishop Michael Fogarty, 29 Jan. 1925 (KDA, Bishop Fogarty papers, F/3/A/23).

<sup>57</sup> *Sinn Féin notes*, 8 Nov. 1924 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/18).

<sup>58</sup> Regan, *Counter revolution*, pp 221-2.

<sup>59</sup> De Róiste diary entry, 3 Nov. 1924 (CCCA, Liam de Róiste papers, U271/A/52).

<sup>60</sup> De Róiste diary entries, 30 Oct., 3 Nov., 18 Nov. 1924 (ibid.).

<sup>61</sup> De Róiste diary entry, 19 Nov. 1924 (ibid.).

November's results, and the paltry return from a national appeal for funds,<sup>62</sup> augured ill for its ability to succeed in the task ahead. Yet again, a costly election campaign was foisted upon a party that was in need of convalescence. A crisis meeting of the Standing Committee took place on 27 November 1924 and was attended by O'Higgins, Blythe and Walsh. O'Higgins outlined the serious challenge that faced Cumann na nGaedheal: there were nine by-elections pending and the organisation had no finance with which to meet them. The government and the parliamentary party had considered the matter and decided that:

[There were] three months available in which to remedy the existing lack of organisation and it had been decided, with the substantial agreement of the Party, that the way out was to appoint a vigorous Organising Committee consisting of a selection from the present Coiste Gnoth [Standing Committee], from the Ministers and to co-opt a number of other people who were not at present connected with the Party or the Organisation.<sup>63</sup>

The new committee would be chaired by J.J Walsh. The minutes of the meeting recorded that he:

faced this responsibility from a sense of duty, in order to tide [us] over a position of serious difficulty. There must be radical change or we would go under. We were confronted with a hostile section of the population, well organised, and [with] a large section standing on the ditch, and only a small number of definite supporters of the Government with practically no Organisation behind them. It was a herculean task and he was not too hopeful. After 3 months there would be an Organisation and then a Convention could be held and a new Executive elected.<sup>64</sup>

Essentially, the new committee operated outside the structures of the party. It supplanted the Standing Committee and the National Executive and in mid December changed its name to the 'Executive Organising Committee' betraying what Regan claims

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<sup>62</sup> A meagre £170: 10 shillings was received. Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 21 Nov.1924 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>63</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of special meeting, 27 Nov. 1924 (ibid.).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

was an attempt to subvert the extra-parliamentary Cumann na nGaedheal organisation.<sup>65</sup> Alternatively, the establishment of Walsh's organising committee could be interpreted as a party and government taking action to arrest a decline in their fortunes at a time of national crisis. In 1924, Cumann na nGaedheal had come through an army mutiny which threatened the state from within, the resignation and dismissal of two cabinet ministers, and the secession of nine deputies who constituted themselves as an opposition party. When the National Group resigned their seats, the party knew it would face nine further by-elections, having already lost two supposedly safe seats in November. This was a situation that demanded a strong response if the government was to continue in office. The establishment of Walsh's organising committee actually renewed the party's grass-roots organisation. It had not neutered it. Meanwhile the secessionists received little sympathy within their own constituency organisations.

Cosgrave called all nine by-elections for March 1925 and Walsh's committee immediately took charge of the campaign. Cumann na nGaedheal heeded the lessons of November and a substantial effort to raise funds was launched. The party's guarantors agreed to put up £2,000 for the March by-elections, while efforts were made to solicit funds from business.<sup>66</sup> Coupled with this was an attempt to find a suitable business candidate to run for the party in Dublin North as Cumann na nGaedheal courted middle class votes in the capital. Organisational renewal began immediately under the direction of the committee. Liam Burke was appointed chief organiser and chief executive officer as Hughes was sidelined. Mulcahy and O'Higgins seem to have reflected a general disquiet with the way headquarters was run by Hughes and the appointment of Burke was indicative of a move towards the appointment of 'good personnel and staff'.<sup>67</sup> Hughes remained as general secretary but it was clear Burke was his superior in headquarters. Walsh's committee decided to spend £5 weekly on Saturday advertisements in the three daily newspapers. It also deemed that any profit from the sale of the recently purchased premises on Dawson St.,

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<sup>65</sup> Regan, *Counter revolution*, p. 223. Hughes as general secretary wrote to each member of the national executive, each constituency secretary and each *cumann* informing them of the establishment of the new committee under Walsh's chairmanship. Hughes circular, 6 Dec. 1924 (NLI, Seán Milroy papers, MS 46,846).

<sup>66</sup> Executive Organising Committee, minutes of meeting, 11 Dec. 1924 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>67</sup> Regan, *Counter revolution*, p. 229; Organising Committee, minutes of meeting 16 Dec. 1924 (ibid.).

initially envisaged as a new headquarters, should be spent on Ford cars for the party organisers selected to work the seven constituencies.<sup>68</sup>

Remarkably, the secessionists scarcely inflicted any damage on the party organisation as evidenced by the attendance at selection conventions in the vacated constituencies. Controversially, a Cumann na nGaedheal convention in Cavan selected Milroy as a candidate. A welcome discrepancy between the delegates entitled to vote and the number of votes cast rendered Milroy's selection null and void.<sup>69</sup> A reconvened convention seventeen days later on 21 January selected John O'Reilly, a candidate acceptable to the organising committee. The Cavan constituency committee was caught between its divided loyalties to headquarters and Milroy, placing its secretary P.J. O'Rourke in a 'difficult' position.<sup>70</sup> In Kilkenny, another member of the National Group, Seán Gibbons, could muster a paltry nineteen of the 117 votes cast at the Cumann na nGaedheal convention. In the end Milroy contested Dublin North as an independent, the only National Group member to go forward, the McGrathites playing no further part in the by-elections.<sup>71</sup>

Cumann na nGaedheal officially opened its campaign on 1 February with high-profile government speakers allocated to each by-election constituency. Walsh's committee directed the campaign making decisions on publicity and literature and indicated that grass-roots' initiative would comprise a crucial element of the party's efforts.<sup>72</sup> Numerous organisers were hired for the by-elections. When the votes were counted, it was clear that the Organising Committee had succeeded, as the party won seven of the nine seats on offer. Given that the nine vacancies were spread across seven constituencies, it would have been almost impossible for Cumann na nGaedheal to win all nine seats. Milroy came last in Dublin North showing that the splitters had little sympathy and that Cumann na nGaedheal remained intact (the two losses were offset by the decision of two business deputies to take the party whip). The March by-elections reaffirmed Cumann na nGaedheal's position as the

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<sup>68</sup> Organising Committee, minutes of meeting, 20 Jan. 1925 (ibid.).

<sup>69</sup> It is more plausible that the Standing Committee and the Organising Committee refused to ratify the selection of Milroy which in effect made the split permanent. Organising Committee, minutes of meeting, 5 Jan. 1925 (ibid.); de Róiste diary entry, 9 Jan. 1925 (CCCA, Liam de Róiste papers, U271/A/52).

<sup>70</sup> P.J. O'Rourke to Seán Milroy, 17 Dec. 1924 (NLI, Seán Milroy papers, MS 46,846).

<sup>71</sup> 'The National Group as a body is not taking any part in the elections and I am going forward as an Independent National Candidate'. North City by-election, statement by Mr. Seán Milroy, undated (ibid.).

<sup>72</sup> Organising Committee, minutes of meeting, 13 Jan. 1925 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

largest party and demonstrated that the split in the parliamentary party had not resonated with either the rank-and-file or the wider pro-Treaty electorate. Walsh's committee was acknowledged by the *Manchester Guardian* which put Cumann na nGaedheal's success down to the 'drastic overhauling of its party machinery'.<sup>73</sup> While the secession of the National Group undoubtedly chiselled off part of Cumann na nGaedheal's broad base and weakened the republican, advanced nationalist and protectionist lobbies in the party,<sup>74</sup> it remained the 'government party'. In fact, by 1925, the party was probably more cohesive than ever. Now the Organising Committee turned its attention to building up the party organisation in other parts of the country.

### **Cumann na nGaedheal's organisational apex?**

A meeting on 13 January 1925 decided that organisers hired for the by-elections, 'would be sent to areas that were unorganised' when that hurdle had been successfully navigated.<sup>75</sup> At the same meeting Cosgrave praised Walsh and his committee, asserting that Cumann na nGaedheal would 'make good as a result of its work'.<sup>76</sup> In the chapters that follow, the efforts from the spring of 1925 to build a stronger party organisation can be seen from the perspective of the constituencies themselves. In his diary, de Róiste, a fellow constituent of Walsh, referred to his 'reorganising committee',<sup>77</sup> indicating that the exercise was as much to do with organisational renewal as the March by-elections. Organisational problems had dated from the August 1923 election, were compounded by the tumultuous events of 1924 and reached their nadir with the lacklustre performance in the November 1924 by-elections. However, this low-point proved to be the catalyst for change and with MacNeill serving as the Free State representative on the Boundary Commission, Walsh, as chair of the Organising Committee, became *de-facto* head of the organisation.

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<sup>73</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 17 Mar. 1925.

<sup>74</sup> While there was a considerable protectionist lobby in the parliamentary and extra parliamentary party, support for free trade was often discernable. A *cumann* meeting in Bandon heard grass-root members state that Ireland was not free to trade with any other country without interference from England, *Southern Star*, 13 Dec. 1924.

<sup>75</sup> Organising Committee, minutes of meeting, 13 Jan. 1925 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>76</sup> Organising Committee, minutes of meeting, 20 Jan. 1925 (*ibid.*).

<sup>77</sup> De Róiste diary entry, 27 Jan. 1925 (CCCA, Liam de Róiste papers, U271/A/52).

Again, rigid party rules seemed to stifle enthusiasm by stipulating that the number of Dáil deputies in a constituency was the basis by which it would be represented at the party's annual convention or *Ard Fheis*. For instance, the two-day 1924 convention was attended by a mere 123 delegates. Delegates in 1924 debated resolutions, some of which called for a wider basis of representation at the annual convention.<sup>78</sup> However, things began to change in 1925. As well as reorganising the constituencies, Walsh's committee had suggested various changes to Cumann na nGaedheal's rules and these were to be enacted by the May 1925 annual convention, which had been postponed to facilitate electioneering in the lead-up to the March elections.<sup>79</sup> The new rules gave each *cumann* direct delegate representation at the annual convention. Addressing delegates, Walsh criticised the indirect manner in which branches were represented heretofore, noting that conventions were 'summoned in a peculiar way'.<sup>80</sup> The switch to direct *cumann* representation more than doubled the attendance at subsequent annual conventions, ensuring that they were not just more representative of the Cumann na nGaedheal membership, but were more energetic affairs in general.

In his address, Cosgrave outlined some proposals introduced in that year's budget, including cuts in income tax, reduced duties on tea and sugar (known at the time as the poor man's luxuries, see chapter seven) and improved agricultural grants. In keeping with the ethos of a 'National' party, he claimed the budget was 'calculated to encourage rich and poor alike'. Echoing his speeches of 1922 and 1923, Cosgrave claimed that the party's 'policy has been, and will be, to hold the scales even between all interests, to assist each without injury to the others'.<sup>81</sup> Cosgrave also devoted sections of his speech to party organisation. He claimed that, as a party of government, Cumann na nGaedheal did not have the luxury of devoting as much time as its political opponents to building up its machinery. He added that strong organisation was necessary if the party was to continue implementing its policies and suggested it could become a co-ordinating force between the various sectors of society by appealing to national rather than class interests.

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<sup>78</sup> Minutes of Annual Convention, Jan. 1924 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>79</sup> National Executive, minutes of meeting, 21 Apr. 1925 (ibid.).

<sup>80</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal Annual Convention, Mansion House Dublin (Athlone, 1925) copy in the Richard Mulcahy papers (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy papers, P7b/60/28).

<sup>81</sup> The grassroots agreed. Flyers in the de Róiste papers referred to Cumann na nGaedheal as the 'National Organisation', as a party that was 'not Anti-Farmer, is not Anti-Labour, it is National', Various flyers, undated (CCCA, Liam de Róiste papers, U271/K/ Dáil material).

Acknowledging the organisational progress made since December 1924, an enthusiastic Cosgrave stressed, to prolonged applause, that the push must continue ‘until in every district of every constituency there is a live, active branch of the party’ that was ‘watchful of the national interests in the district’.<sup>82</sup> Clearly the party was still wedded to the idea that it could reconcile the diverse interests of the country by bringing them under an all embracing nationalist banner.

Throughout the summer of 1925, efforts were made to build on the organisational progress that had been made. As *Cumann na nGaedheal* renewed its organisation, Sinn Féin seemed to be in decline. In March 1925 its *Ard Comhairle* heard that it had 375 branches, eighteen of which were in Britain. The report went on to state the position would not improve until members understood that ‘Sinn Fein [sic] should be not merely an election machine, but rather the organised spirit of Republicanism’.<sup>83</sup> Clearly, republicans had their own organisational problems.

Following the 1925 convention Liam Burke wrote to each *Cumann na nGaedheal* T.D. asking that they use the summer recess to maintain and improve the organisation in their constituencies. Deputies were sent the contact details of each *cumann* secretary in their constituency on the understanding that regular contact would be maintained. According to Burke, ‘more remains to be done before we can afford to rest on our oars’.<sup>84</sup> The reorganising effort continued over the summer as is evident in subsequent chapters. Burke was able to tell the National Executive on 30 June that the party now had 520 *cumainn* nationwide, five paid organisers, nine constituencies with paid secretaries and six constituencies with active, voluntary secretaries. Additionally, Burke indicated that *cumainn* would be supplied with materials to encourage political discussion and debate, a pamphlet on the Shannon Scheme and a verbatim report of the 1925 annual convention’s proceedings.<sup>85</sup> Burke’s report also outlined that inaccuracies existed in the electoral register and that securing adequate funds remained a problem for the party. Burke emphasised his desire that each deputy would stay in close touch with their constituency organisation over

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<sup>82</sup> *Cumann na nGaedheal* Annual Convention, Mansion House Dublin (Athlone, 1925) copy in the Richard Mulcahy papers (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy papers, P7b/60/28).

<sup>83</sup> *Ard Comhairle*, report of the honorary secretaries, 19 Mar. 1925 (CCCA, Seamus Fitzgerald papers, PR/6/136/1).

<sup>84</sup> Liam Burke to Richard Mulcahy with enclosed list of *cumann* secretaries in Dublin North, June 1925 (UCDA, Mulcahy papers 7b/60/38).

<sup>85</sup> Liam Burke’s report to the national executive, 30 June 1925 (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy papers P7b/60/74).

the summer break and informed the committee that public meetings were organised in nine constituencies where Cumann na nGaedheal remained weak.

Over 300 delegates attended the 1926 Cumann na nGaedheal annual convention in the Rotunda, where J.J. Walsh was re-elected as party chairman and deputy Margaret Collins-O'Driscoll, a teacher and sister of Collins, replaced Jennie Wyse Power as vice chair.<sup>86</sup> Addressing the convention, Walsh put the total number of Cumann na nGaedheal branches at 797. However, Burke contradicted Walsh when he spoke, putting the figure of affiliated *cumainn* for the year ending 4 May 1926 at 430.<sup>87</sup> As such, Treatyites and anti-Treatyites seem to have been pretty evenly matched in the mid-1920s. Burke's report continued:

immediately after these bye-elections [sic], upwards of 20 organisers were dispatched to those areas where no elections had been held, with a view to re-organising and extending Cumann na nGaedheal there and making the position secure for the Local Elections. These have been working for the past six weeks and the result has been in every way encouraging. Our total of affiliations has risen in those six weeks by 275 to 430 Branches and, on all sides, serious interest [is shown] in their political affairs. The irregulars' weapon of intimidation is definitely blunted, if not broken, once [and] for all, and our supporters now come forward freely and openly to identify themselves with the Organisation.

It is difficult to gauge the precise strength of the organisation at any given time due to the absence of surviving membership records. However, it is likely the actual number of branches lay somewhere between 797 and 430, given that the number of affiliated branches quoted in June 1925 was 520 and that *cumainn* were notoriously slow when it came to re-affiliating.<sup>88</sup> Walsh may have exaggerated organisational strength for propaganda purposes, though he may have been including branches that had not yet affiliated while a figure of 800 has been cited elsewhere.<sup>89</sup> Walsh instructed delegates to 'exert their influence in the localities as an organisation representing the government' before introducing Cosgrave as

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<sup>86</sup> Annual Convention 1926, Minutes (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>87</sup> Annual Convention proceedings 1926 (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy papers, P7b/61/71).

<sup>88</sup> General Secretary's report to National Executive, 30 June 1925 (ibid., P7b/60/74).

<sup>89</sup> Numerous works report the figure of 800, while Burke often quoted this number at local Cumann na nGaedheal meetings he addressed. David Fitzpatrick, *The two Irelands, 1912-1939* (Oxford, 1998), p. 187; Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, 'After the revolution: the formative years of Cumann na nGaedheal' in Audrey S. Eyster and Robert F. Garratt (eds), *The uses of the past: essays on Irish culture* (Wilmington, 1988), p. 132.



the man who had come to the rescue in 1922, to fill ‘the shoes of Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins, and nobody could say that he had not acquitted himself with great ability’.<sup>90</sup> Cosgrave called on members to prepare for the next general election, asking delegates to extend and strengthen their local organisation so that Cumann na nGaedheal’s machinery would be as perfect as possible in time for the contest. Cosgrave used his speech to outline the benefits of the London Agreement of 1925. Cosgrave’s administration has taken a lot of criticism over its handling of the Boundary Commission which culminated in Cosgrave going to London to sign an agreement that eventually left the border between the Free State and Northern Ireland as it was, with the South preferring to leave the border as it was than exchange east Donegal for south Armagh. MacNeill’s honourable conduct on the commission probably cost him his political career.<sup>91</sup> Many Cumann na nGaedheal supporters would have expected the Free State to gain northern territory, especially those adherents of Collins’s ‘stepping stones to freedom’ interpretation of the Treaty.<sup>92</sup> Addressing party members, Cosgrave robustly defended his government’s handling of the affair, stating that once the government realised the commission intended to remove ‘people who had enjoyed the liberty of the Free State’ in exchange for limited northern territory they sought a deal with the British to maintain intact the integrity of the territory ‘we have administered since 1922’. Cumann na nGaedheal was keen to avoid a repeat of the disunity of 1922. In December 1925, each *cumann* secretary was asked in writing to call a meeting where the merits of the deal, including cancellation of the state’s liability for a share of the British war debt, could be discussed by members.<sup>93</sup>

Resolutions debated at all levels within Cumann na nGaedheal’s organisation (see subsequent chapters) dealt with a wide spectrum of problems that touched on various government departments. Others concerned the internal mechanisms of the party. For instance, Fr. Malachy Brennan and Martin Conlon of Roscommon called for the establishment of a weekly party newspaper while another member wanted ministers to use

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<sup>90</sup> Annual Convention 1926, Rotunda Dublin (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy papers, P7b/61/71a).

<sup>91</sup> Collins, *The Cosgrave legacy*, p. 50.

<sup>92</sup> McGarry, *Eoin O’Duffy*, p. 139.

<sup>93</sup> The text of the circular was agreed by the Standing Committee. Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 11 Dec. 1925 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1); Liam Burke to each *cumann* secretary, each constituency secretary and each national executive member [undated, Dec. 1925] (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy papers, 7b/60/1).

cinema to promote ‘national ideals’.<sup>94</sup> Clearly the extra-parliamentary party contained a rich reservoir of energy and ideas. For the most part, this resource remained untapped.

Cumann na nGaedheal’s new organisational strength was offset by political developments in 1926. More damaging to it in the long-term than the National League’s attempt to mobilise old constitutionalists was the formation of Fianna Fáil. A small majority of the 500 Sinn Féin delegates attending the March 1926 *Ard Fheis* changed Irish political history by voting to defeat a motion put down by Eamon de Valera.<sup>95</sup> De Valera’s delicately worded motion asked that the party treat abstention from Dáil Éireann as a political tactic rather than an immovable principle. The pragmatist in de Valera saw that one day he would have to take his opposition to Cosgrave inside the Dáil. De Valera’s motion, not for the first time, placed him in a minority within his own party. Following his defeat, de Valera and fellow moderates split from the Republican die-hards in Sinn Féin. Cumann na nGaedheal did not benefit from the split as de Valera founded a new party that would confound expectations by broadening anti-Treatyite appeal, in the process tempting discontented voters to the polls.<sup>96</sup> De Valera and his supporters moved quickly and decisively. Announced as a new political organisation on 13 April, its objectives outlined on 17 April, Fianna Fáil held its inaugural meeting in the La Scala theatre Dublin on 16 May. Unlike Cumann na nGaedheal in 1923, Fianna Fáil had a deliberate organising strategy that involved its political leaders travelling the country establishing branches. Fianna Fáil’s first *Ard Fheis* in November 1926 was attended by 467 delegates with 435 *cumainn* nationwide.<sup>97</sup> Fianna Fáil continued to build its organisation and within a year of its foundation could boast 1,337 branches,<sup>98</sup> easily outstripping the number Cumann na nGaedheal had mustered during its best period of organisation.<sup>99</sup> By 1933, and having held the reigns of power for the first time, Fianna Fáil could boast almost 1,700 branches.<sup>100</sup> Like Cumann na nGaedheal, the party made contact with community leaders such as priests, teachers and businessmen to help in the organisational drive. Reynolds suggests that

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<sup>94</sup> Resolutions to *Ard Comhairle*, 30 June 1925 (ibid., 7b/60/84).

<sup>95</sup> Rafter, *Sinn Féin*, p. 69.

<sup>96</sup> Meehan, *Cosgrave party*, p. 13.

<sup>97</sup> Brian A. Reynolds, ‘The formation and development of Fianna Fáil, 1926-1932’ (Ph.D dissertation, TCD, March 1976), p. 52.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., appendix vi.

<sup>99</sup> R. K Carty, *Party and parish pump: electoral politics in Ireland* (Ontario, 1981), pp105-7.

<sup>100</sup> Dooley, ‘*Land for the people*’, p. 242.

Cumann na nGaedheal's support was particularly strong in towns and cities, and with Labour too focussing on urban centres, de Valera was free to appeal to rural voters.<sup>101</sup>

### **Attitude to local elections**

Cumann na nGaedheal adopted a decidedly casual approach to local elections. In spite of repeated urgings from the rank-and-file, the party never officially contested local elections. Repeatedly, the National Executive, the Standing Committee and Walsh's Organising Committee concluded that Cumann na nGaedheal should not attempt to control local government and that politicians were not equipped to deliver effective local representation and management. Instead, Cumann na nGaedheal favoured reaching agreement in local politics with parties who were opposed to Sinn Féin or 'those working for the destruction of the government'.<sup>102</sup> In 1924, the party's governing executive vaguely stated that it would only support local election candidates who were 'for construction' and who promised to co-operate with the existing government.<sup>103</sup> For the National Executive, party politics should be confined to the national parliament.<sup>104</sup> In 1925, Walsh's committee reiterated the position. There it was argued Cumann na nGaedheal would not be damaged by withdrawing from local electoral tussles. Once again it was suggested that the weight of the organisation could be thrown behind candidates broadly supportive of the Free State. It was also argued that Cumann na nGaedheal did not need to field local election candidates as the by-election results had shown that the government still had popular support so the party did not need to again test its standing with the people.<sup>105</sup>

There were, of course, numerous instances of Cumann na nGaedhealers standing for election to local authorities. In some areas, Cumann na nGaedheal stood local election candidates where no other pro-Treaty candidate was in the field,<sup>106</sup> while members sometimes sought election under independent or business banners. Cosgrave himself had

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<sup>101</sup> Reynolds, 'The formation and development of Fianna Fáil', p. 67.

<sup>102</sup> National Executive, minutes of meeting, 18 Sept. 1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>103</sup> National Executive, minutes of meeting, 22 Feb. 1924 (ibid.).

<sup>104</sup> National Executive, minutes of meeting, 4 Mar. 1924 (ibid.).

<sup>105</sup> Organising Committee, minutes of meetings, 7, 23 Mar. 1925 (ibid.).

<sup>106</sup> McCarthy, *Kevin O'Higgins*, p. 76.

suggested that prospective local candidates could be interviewed with a view to determining whether or not they would have the party's support.<sup>107</sup> In 1925 a prominent businessman and Cumann na nGaedheal supporter stood for election to Longford county council. In a letter to voters in south Longford, P.J. McCrann, stated that he was not going forward as the nominee of any political party 'believing as I do, that politics should have no connection with the functions of local administrative bodies'. He further claimed to have sought election on 'the invitation of a number of influential ratepayers'.<sup>108</sup> McCrann had addressed a Cumann na nGaedheal meeting in Lanesboro in July 1923 and was later a candidate in the June 1927 general election (see Chapter four).

In not contesting local councils, Cumann na nGaedheal passed a wonderful opportunity to build up local support and to give the *cumann* a purpose between general elections. This deprived it of local influence and the opportunity to stay in close contact with the concerns of ordinary voters. Political organisations thrive on elections and Cumann na nGaedheal's doctrinal opposition to national parties involving themselves in local politics helped give it a reputation for being aloof. By 1933, with the party having lost two general elections in a row, it was finally decided to officially contest the local elections due in June of that year. Deep opposition within Cumann na nGaedheal to the politicisation of local politics was still evident as the official line from speakers throughout the country insisted that they were reluctantly entering the fray because of the Fianna Fáil government's continued insistence on contesting local councils. A statement released by headquarters in April 1933 read that Cumann na nGaedheal felt compelled 'in this time of national crisis to accept the challenge thrown down by the Fianna Fáil party, which has announced its intention of capturing public boards'.<sup>109</sup> As will emerge, the party's new role in opposition forced it to rethink strategy.

## **Two contrasting elections**

Cumann na nGaedheal's preparations for the June 1927 election began in the autumn of 1926. Although it now had a more extensive branch structure across the country,

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<sup>107</sup> Organising Committee, minutes of meeting, 20 Jan. 1925 (ibid.).

<sup>108</sup> P.J. McCrann to the electors of the Ballymahon area, undated [May 1925?] (LCA, Leavy papers, P4/40).

<sup>109</sup> *Clare Champion*, 29 Apr. 1933.

preparations for the election mirrored those of 1923 with the appointment of yet more paid organisers. By 4 February 1927 the party had twenty-four organisers in the field.<sup>110</sup> These organisers were paid from headquarters but the Standing Committee emphasised that in this election, each constituency should bear the brunt of election expenses, a view that was later reiterated by the National Executive.<sup>111</sup> Organisers were busy in the months before the election and their job was to stir existing branches into action and to form new ones where there was no organisation.<sup>112</sup> A Cumann na nGaedheal election handbook was produced, outlining the role the ordinary branch would play in the campaign. It asked constituency committees to meet regularly to consider the views of the paid organiser who was to be referred to as the ‘director of elections’. A faultless scheme of organisation was outlined in the handbook that placed a *cumann* in each parish or ward of every constituency. In rural areas it was advised that the *cumann* ought to be representative of every town-land in its area.<sup>113</sup> Branches were to form committees of four or five to examine the voting register. *Cumainn* were to ensure every voter was canvassed twice, and to arrange transport for supporters who needed it. The booklet advised that after-Mass meetings with ‘able speakers’ be organised in districts where Cumann na nGaedheal support was known to be weak.<sup>114</sup> All this would work very well in constituencies where the local Cumann na nGaedheal organisation was strong. However, in spite of all the progress that had been made, Cumann na nGaedheal remained badly organised in some constituencies.<sup>115</sup>

Cumann na nGaedheal’s election handbook contained a section entitled ‘Points For Canvassers’. Aware that their party represented a state and administration which still faced considerable opposition from a vocal minority outside Dáil Éireann, the booklet asked Cumann na nGaedheal workers to remember that ‘courtesy often disarms opposition’ and to emphasise that ‘Cumann na nGaedheal candidates desire to promote goodwill amongst all

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<sup>110</sup> Fifteen of these had been in place since the previous November. Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 12 Nov. 1926 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>111</sup> It was also decided to emphasise this at the annual convention and local meetings. Moreover, the message was stressed, in bold text, on a handbook produced for party workers. Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 14 Mar. 1927 (ibid.).

<sup>112</sup> Warner Moss, *Political parties in the Irish Free State* (New York, 1933), p. 105.

<sup>113</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal election handbook 1927 (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy papers, P7b/61/1).

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Chairing a convention in Kilkenny, Mulcahy noted that previously affiliated members complained that they had not been sent delegate cards. Failure of branches to affiliate meant there was confusion as to who was a genuine delegate and who was not. Note on Kilkenny convention [undated] (ibid., P7b/60/161).

Irishmen'.<sup>116</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal believed that a grateful electorate would recognise the progress that had been achieved since the dark days of the Civil War. Canvassers were asked to outline the government's establishment of the national army and the garda and its role in reconstruction, house building, industrial development, agriculture and trade. An attempt was also made to link the party to the lost pro-Treaty leaders. As such activists were urged to impress the following message on voters:

Cumann na nGaedheal is the national organisation formed to carry out the policy adopted by Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins and continued by the Government of President Cosgrave. At this General Election it is putting forward candidates with a view to securing for that policy a great majority of seats in Dail Eireann [sic]. The present Dail [sic] and Government have been engaged in establishing peace and order. They have provided a National Army and a National Civic Guard. They have laid [the] foundations of National progress in the Constitution and a number of essential laws and measures of administrative organisation. It has dealt with the problems of reconstruction, house building, industrial development, industrial disputes, domestic and foreign trade and commerce, agriculture, fisheries, manufacturers, transport system etc.<sup>117</sup>

Cosgrave's address to the 325 delegates attending the 1927 annual convention was published as election literature. Whereas in the previous two years he had indicated a positive theme, Cosgrave's address of 1927 reiterated the government's achievements with a little flourish at the end elucidating the purpose of the party. Accordingly, Cosgrave stated that Cumann na nGaedheal believed in an ordered society, hard work, constant endeavour and a definite settled policy of recruitment to the public service on merit alone adding that 'performance, not promise should be the touchstone' by which the party should be judged.<sup>118</sup> It was clear from Cosgrave's speech that his government's policy would remain unchanged.

Although the strength of its organisation had improved, Cumann na nGaedheal's prospects for the June 1927 election were mixed. The Boundary Commission episode provided opposition parties such as the National League and Fianna Fáil with ammunition with which to attack the government. In addition, the overall pro-Treaty vote was now more fragmented than it had been in 1923. The formation of the National League in 1926 posed a

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<sup>116</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal election handbook 1927 (ibid., 7b/61/1).

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> W.T Cosgrave, *Policy of Cumann na nGaedheal* (Dublin, 1927) .

real threat to Cumann na nGaedheal. Redmond's party outflanked Cumann na nGaedheal on the right, appealing to constitutionalists and disgruntled interests which had previously backed Cumann na nGaedheal. Old Irish party elements on which the National League had mobilised continued to regard Cosgrave's party as an offshoot of its old Sinn Féin enemy. Cumann na nGaedheal was dealt another blow in April 1927 when negotiations for a possible merger with the Farmers' Party broke down. Their leader, Dennis Gorey, joined Cumann na nGaedheal, but his organisation opposed fusion. Failure to reach agreement with natural allies left Cumann na nGaedheal vulnerable. Moreover, the government had antagonised a number of interest groups, vintners and old age pensioners among them, while Fianna Fáil could use the language of an irredentist Irish nationalism as part of its identity now that the Boundary Commission had left the border with Northern Ireland untouched. Redmond's National League skilfully opposed O'Higgins's intoxicating liquor legislation while, like Fianna Fáil, also deployed the green card to attack the government.<sup>119</sup>

Cumann na nGaedheal's preparations for the 1927 election followed a similar pattern to those of 1923. However, the party was more careful with its money this time. Sub committees were formed for the purpose of fund raising while overdrafts were secured from a number of banks, bringing the total election fund to over £10,000.<sup>120</sup> Memories of the painful cutbacks left in the wake of the 1923 election, and the acrimony created by party incompetence in the constituencies, helped ensure party funds were managed in a more prudent fashion than before.

In spite of solid preparations, Cumann na nGaedheal was vulnerable on every flank and had not done enough to retain its existing support. It had not offered a constructive policy for the future and the various sectional interest parties were able to both benefit from Cumann na nGaedheal's lack of an edge and capitalise on its unpopularity with the various aggrieved sections of the electorate. Even Cumann na nGaedheal supporters felt the party had failed to offer a constructive policy during the campaign and had simply reiterated its achievements since 1922.<sup>121</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal lost sixteen seats in the election, slumping to forty-seven, only three more than Fianna Fáil which was the success story of

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<sup>119</sup> McCarthy, *Kevin O'Higgins*, pp 276-81.

<sup>120</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meetings, 8, 22 Apr. 1927 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>121</sup> *Nenagh Guardian*, 16 Apr. 1927.

the election.<sup>122</sup> Fianna Fáil was jubilant and believed Cumann na nGaedheal was finished. A letter to its *cumann* stated ‘We have broken the back of Cumann na nGaedheal[original emphasis]. They will never again be even as strong as they are now’.<sup>123</sup> However, Fianna Fáil’s refusal to take the oath and hence their seats in the Dáil allowed Cumann na nGaedheal to form a government with the support of the Farmers’ Party and independents. All would change within a few weeks as Irish politics would once again be rocked to its foundations in a way that would have serious consequences for the two main political parties.

There had been talk within Treatyite circles for some time as to how best to deal with the continued abstention of the anti-Treaty party. Various proposals were put forward, some from grass-root activists, which would compel Dáil candidates to take their seats once elected. The tragic events of 10 July 1927 would provide the catalyst for action.<sup>124</sup> The assassination of Kevin O’Higgins on Booterstown Avenue as he walked to Mass removed from cabinet the minister who had restored law-and-order in the years since independence. While he had shown less interest in the party machine than colleagues such as Mulcahy or Walsh, O’Higgins was nonetheless a crucial figure within Cumann na nGaedheal. He was the intellectual driving force within cabinet and had played a starring role on the international stage and in particular at the 1926 Imperial Conference. O’Higgins’s ability was recognised by his colleagues and just before his death he had been assigned an extra portfolio, External Affairs, in addition to his role as Justice Minister and Vice President.<sup>125</sup> O’Higgins was probably the natural successor to Cosgrave and his death was a blow that both party and state could ill afford. De Róiste noted that while he had been politically opposed to O’Higgins on certain issues, he could still admire his ability. For de Róiste, ‘Griffith was a teacher: Collins a leader: O’Higgins a state-builder’.<sup>126</sup> De Valera’s strong condemnation of the assassination revealed that his revolution had ended and that Fianna Fáil was ready to join with Cosgrave in framing their differences in a parliamentary context.

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<sup>122</sup> McCarthy, *Kevin O’Higgins*, p. 279.

<sup>123</sup> Honorary secretaries to the secretary of each *cumann*, 1 July 1927 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/351/14).

<sup>124</sup> Collins, *The Cosgrave legacy*, p. 50.

<sup>125</sup> McCarthy, *Kevin O’Higgins*, p. 286.

<sup>126</sup> De Róiste diary entry, 14 July 1927 (CCCA, Liam de Róiste papers, U271/A/55).



The government responded to the assassination by introducing public safety legislation, aimed at the gunmen, and the Electoral Amendment Bill, aimed at Fianna Fáil. The latter required that in future all Dáil candidates would have to take the oath as laid down in the Treaty, otherwise their candidature would be ineligible. Cumann na nGaedheal spurned an offer from the Labour party to serve in a national coalition between the two parties that would represent ‘employers, investors and workers’.<sup>127</sup> However, Labour’s opposition to the public safety legislation poisoned relations between Johnson’s party and the government. Numerous Cumann na nGaedheal speakers accused Labour of seeking to capitalise politically from O’Higgins’s assassination. Aware that Fianna Fáil was considering taking its seats in the Dáil, Johnson looked at how the numbers were stacking up for an alternative government. On 12 August 1927 de Valera led his party into the Dáil, taking the oath as an ‘empty formula’ and leaving Cosgrave short of a clear majority inside the chamber. Cosgrave’s administration was in an impossible position. Johnson put down his party’s motion of no confidence in the government. Johnson hoped to lead a Labour/National League coalition which would be supported by Fianna Fáil. However, against all the odds, Cosgrave survived the vote of no confidence on the casting vote of the Ceann Comhairle and the famed disappearance of John Jinks of the National League. Following two by-election victories in August, Cosgrave dissolved the Dáil and called a snap general election for September.

Days after the party’s disastrous electoral showing in June, which had stunned members at all levels of the party,<sup>128</sup> the Standing Committee met to review Cumann na nGaedheal’s poor electoral performance. Its efforts to take immediate corrective action were made easier in that, in stark contrast to the 1923 general election, £967 of the election fund remained unspent. Anticipating an early general election, the committee retained the services of seven organisers to be dispatched to constituencies where Cumann na nGaedheal performed particularly badly in the election. One of these organisers was former

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<sup>127</sup> J. Anthony Gaughan, *Thomas Johnson, 1872-1963: first leader of the Labour Party in Dáil Éireann* (Naas, 1980), p. 294.

<sup>128</sup> The Cork city constituency committee met before the Standing Committee meeting. Their representative Barry Egan wanted to relate the views of the Cork executive to the Standing Committee. In shock at the result, members asked that their opposition to coalition government be relayed. De Róiste diary entry, 17 June 1927 (CCCA, Liam de Róiste papers, U271/A/54).

Wexford Gaelic football captain Seán O’Kennedy.<sup>129</sup> Additionally, a series of public meetings, to be addressed by prominent ministers and deputies, were arranged around the country.<sup>130</sup> A committee of O’Higgins, Mulcahy and Tierney was appointed to examine first preferences and transfers in each constituency as the party looked to recover the lost ground. On 9 July the Standing Committee went further, calling for as many constituency conferences as possible to be held before 1 August to ‘assess the party’s position and make plans for the future’.<sup>131</sup> Keen to develop its organisational structures, the parliamentary party called a special meeting to improve the organisation in the constituencies while the possibility of establishing a weekly party newspaper was also explored at the 9 July meeting. O’Higgins’s assassination interrupted these plans and the next meeting was adjourned in sympathy with the deceased minister’s family.<sup>132</sup> Nonetheless, the corrective measures made an impact and the party machine was in a more healthy state by the time the September election came about. Even *The Times* commented on the improvement of the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation since the June election.<sup>133</sup>

With Fianna Fáil’s entrance to the Dáil, there was finally a viable alternative government on offer which would not involve a coalition of parties of the right and left. Only three seats separated the two main parties going into the September 1927 contest and the polarisation of the state’s politics benefitted Cumann na nGaedheal at the expense of smaller pro-Treaty parties and independents. On the eve of the general election, J.J. Walsh delivered a devastating blow by resigning from the government and party.<sup>134</sup> Walsh was disgruntled with Cumann na nGaedheal’s informal alliance with the Farmers’ Party and argued that followers of ‘Arthur Griffith’s economic teachings will now be forced, if they still desire to adhere to Cumann Na Ngaedheal [sic], to subordinate their life-long convictions’.<sup>135</sup> From the letter, it is clear that Walsh had become exasperated with his

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<sup>129</sup> *Nenagh Guardian*, 2 July 1927.

<sup>130</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 17 June 1927 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>131</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 9 July 1927 (ibid.).

<sup>132</sup> Standing Committee, minutes, 22 July 1927 (ibid.).

<sup>133</sup> *The Times*, 31 Aug. 1927.

<sup>134</sup> Walsh had long been frustrated with the government’s policy on tariffs and a split was anticipated by de Róiste for some time. De Róiste diary entries, 13 July 1926; 19, 22 Feb. 1927 (CCCA, Liam de Róiste papers, U271/A/54); Regan, *Counter revolution*, p. 275.

<sup>135</sup> J.J. Walsh to W.T. Cosgrave, 2 Sept. 1927 (NAI, Department of Taoiseach, s 5470).

colleagues' refusal to adopt an avowedly protectionist programme. However, the letter also reveals that Walsh retained much respect for senior figures in the party:

Apart from these matters which are honest differences of opinion, and the privilege of every individual, I must conclude by saying that I have never met a more honest or fearless body of men in any walk of life than the men I have worked with over these trying years, and my only regret is that which I conceive to be [the] national duty compels me to take the action I have now taken.

Drafts prepared by Cosgrave in response reveal his disappointment with Walsh's decision. The tetchy tone of the reply he finally settled on shows that Walsh's announcement came as a surprise. Cosgrave had 'not the honour of seeing your letter to me until 48 hours after reading it in the Press'.<sup>136</sup> Margaret Collins-O'Driscoll filled in as head of the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation until the election of a successor to Walsh at the 1928 party convention. Walsh's resignation significantly weakened the protectionist lobby within the government party still further but more importantly deprived Cumann na nGaedheal of the services of one of its best organisers. However, public life never sat easy on Walsh's shoulders,<sup>137</sup> and writing in 1944 he recalled that he had resented depending on the public for a livelihood.<sup>138</sup>

In the second election of 1927, Free State supporters rallied to the government as Cumann na nGaedheal clawed back much of the support lost in June. The party won 38% of the vote, regaining fifteen of the seats lost earlier that year to bring its total to sixty-two. Cumann na nGaedheal hired the O'Kennedy-Brindley advertising agency to arrange a dynamic press campaign. A brochure containing twenty of the 300 advertisements used was produced by the agency.<sup>139</sup> Ciara Meehan cites the party's use of the advertising agency as evidence of an innovative style of electioneering not previously highlighted by historians.<sup>140</sup> Fianna Fáil also performed well in the election, increasing its seat total by thirteen to fifty seven. Just five seats separated the two main parties. With an emboldened

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<sup>136</sup> W.T. Cosgrave to J.J. Walsh, 7 Sept. 1927 (ibid.).

<sup>137</sup> A sense that Walsh disliked the travelling, arguments with colleagues and the amount of time he had to spend in Dublin is revealed in his personal correspondence to his wife. J.J. Walsh to his wife, 6 June 1923; 7 July 1926 (CCCA, J.J. Walsh papers, U355/7).

<sup>138</sup> Walsh, *Recollections of a rebel*, p. 68.

<sup>139</sup> 'Making History. The story of a remarkable campaign'. Brochure issued by O'Kennedy-Brindley advertising agency to commemorate the Cumann na nGaedheal campaign, Sept. 1927 (UCDA, Desmond FitzGerald papers, P80/1134).

<sup>140</sup> Meehan, *Cosgrave party*, pp 113-38.

Fianna Fáil snapping at its heels, and a global economic collapse just around the corner, Cumann na nGaedheal faced what proved its most difficult period in government.

### **Organisational growth halts**

In opposition, Fianna Fáil gained the experience necessary to portray itself as a viable alternative government.<sup>141</sup> Inside the Dáil Fianna Fáil served its apprenticeship and availed of the opportunity to develop its organisation further while concentrating on the development of a distinctive policy to set it apart from the government party. Fianna Fáil's fundraising efforts utilised its strong grassroots machine from 1927 onwards. That year's Fianna Fáil *Ard Fheis* decided to organise an annual Church gate collection. In addition to raising funds, the collection gave Fianna Fáil branches an annual event for which to prepare and keep itself oiled.<sup>142</sup> Returns from the collections had the additional bonus of providing the Fianna Fáil leadership with a good indication of the party's strength or weakness in any given part of a constituency. Cumann na nGaedheal continued to carry out its fundraising in a quite chaotic manner, writing letters to supporters and organising collections in some constituencies.

Cumann na nGaedheal stalled somewhat after the September 1927 victory. By 1928 the vibrancy of earlier Standing Committee meetings had abated (although there is a paucity of surviving records from 1927 onwards). At one such meeting Gearóid O'Sullivan pointed out that a number of committee members were absent and that something should be done to address the problem.<sup>143</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal's annual convention of 1928 was the first to take place since the resignation of party chairman J.J. Walsh. As Walsh's deputy, Margaret Collins-O'Driscoll presided as acting chair in 1928. Addressing delegates, Collins-O'Driscoll said that they all appreciated Walsh's work for the party and wished him well in the future. Canon Masterson of Mohill proposed the Minister for Education J.M. O'Sullivan for the now vacant position of chairman. O'Sullivan's proposer believed the post should be filled by 'a person of ministerial rank and that he should belong to a

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<sup>141</sup> Keogh, *Twentieth-century Ireland*, p. 50.

<sup>142</sup> Carty, *Party and parish pump*, p. 107.

<sup>143</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 17 Apr. 1928 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

department that did not excite anything like controversy or deep feeling'.<sup>144</sup> Quite clearly the position of Cumann na nGaedheal chairman was to become a largely ceremonial one once more, much like it had been under Eoin MacNeill. O'Sullivan discharged his duty in an understated fashion, chairing committee meetings and party conferences and attending constituency meetings around the country. O'Sullivan lacked Walsh's energetic organisational style. In his address to delegates, Cosgrave reported on the satisfactory results of the two general elections and four by-elections since the previous conference. Cosgrave also noted with satisfaction that the Dáil was fully representative of the country now that Fianna Fáil had taken their seats.

### **Party newspapers and social functions**

In 1922 newspaper propaganda was all important. Most national, provincial and local newspapers were supportive of the Treaty and tended to endorse the Provisional Government. For a time, *The Free State* and *United Irishman* were organs of the pro-Treaty party. However, after 1923 with the government enjoying the support of most national newspapers, there was little need to continue with distinct Cumann na nGaedheal party publications. At various intervals, the grass-roots called for the establishment of a dedicated party newspaper. These appeals were largely unheeded. As general secretary, Liam Burke was enthusiastic about the use of newspapers (as revealed by him to US political scientist Warner Moss) to convey party propaganda. In December 1926 he asked each minister to prepare a new year's message for the provincial press. Burke required fifty lines from each minister and was at pains to point out 'the very great importance to the government of starting the new-year with such a flourish of publicity trumpets'.<sup>145</sup> As part of the Standing Committee's efforts to instigate reform within Cumann na nGaedheal after the disastrous general election of June 1927, it was finally decided to establish a regular party newspaper. Within a month of this decision *The Freeman*, clearly drawing on the title of the sympathetic *Freeman's Journal* which was closed down in 1924, emerged as the Cumann na nGaedheal organ in August 1927. *The Freeman* made little effort to appeal to a non

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<sup>144</sup> *Irish Independent*, 16 May 1928.

<sup>145</sup> Liam Burke to Desmond FitzGerald, 18 Dec. 1926 (UCDA, Desmond FitzGerald papers, P80/1105).

Cumann na nGaedheal audience and was dominated by articles praising the government, lauding Collins and Griffith and carrying news of party activities around the country.

In a further innovation, the Cumann na nGaedheal constituency organisations began to place a much greater emphasis on the need to provide social entertainment for party members. This type of activity corresponds with the efforts of mass-organised parties to create ancillary bodies to reinforce the political identity of grass-root members and supporters.<sup>146</sup> Such efforts aimed at maintaining existing members and attracting new ones. As pointed out by Duverger, ‘a man who is bored at the branch meetings of the party will enjoy its sports club’.<sup>147</sup> We shall discover in chapter five, that within Cumann na nGaedheal, this effort was spearheaded by the Dublin North constituency organisation. Established in November 1927, the Dublin North constituency social club drew the praise of the Cumann na nGaedheal newspaper. Indeed, *The Freeman* encouraged the organisation in other constituencies to emulate the success of the Dublin North social club. *Cumainn* were also encouraged to ensure the party newspaper was circulated to branch members and to retain activists in the winter months by arranging social events under the auspices of Cumann na nGaedheal.

*The Freeman* struggled to achieve the levels of circulation necessary and went from a weekly to a monthly publication before being wound up. In 1929 *The Freeman* was replaced as an official organ by *The Star*. A more highbrow publication, *The Star* tried to appeal to a wider audience and was less partisan than its predecessor. However, the intellectual nature of this publication made it difficult to achieve mass circulation and it too became a monthly publication in September 1930.<sup>148</sup> Desmond FitzGerald, a veteran when it came to propaganda, assisted the newspaper’s editor M.J. Sweeney as a member of its directing committee which also included Professor Tierney, T.F. O’Higgins, Blythe, (J.N. Dolan the editor) and Liam Burke. *The Star* ran into further difficulties when Sweeney resigned as editor in 1931 to take up a position with the *Irish Independent*.<sup>149</sup> During its existence, *The Star* carried the party message and provided Ministers with column space for articles on their policy initiatives. Christmas and Easter editions were another highlight.

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<sup>146</sup> Maurice Duverger, *Political parties: their organization and activity in the modern state* (London, 1969), pp106-7.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>148</sup> M.J. Sweeney to Desmond FitzGerald, 26 Aug. 1930 (*ibid.*, P80/1138).

<sup>149</sup> Liam Burke to Desmond FitzGerald, 8 Aug. 1931 (*ibid.*).

However, *The Star* was replaced by another familiar title, *United Irishman* in 1932. *United Irishman* was the most vitriolic Cumann na nGaedheal newspaper to emerge and gave a great deal of column inches to a section called ‘Organisation notes’, which encouraged *cumainn* to inform the wider organisation of their activities. The paper was in existence until the foundation of Fine Gael in 1933, at which point *United Ireland* became the name of the party newspaper.

### **Holding its own as Depression hits**

By 1930 the Treatyite position had evolved considerably from the original coalition of Griffithite Sinn Féiners and militarist republicans. This was acknowledged at the 1930 party convention which took place on 6 and 7 May 1930 in the Mansion House. As usual, Cumann na nGaedheal leaders participated in a commemoration of 1916 at Arbour Hill on the morning of the convention. O’Sullivan, adopting a more staid style than his predecessor, told delegates that Cumann na nGaedheal’s greatest achievement was that there was now a general desire for peace among all parties.<sup>150</sup> Blythe, as Vice President of the Executive Council, stepped in for an ill Cosgrave. Blythe’s speech stressed the disparate origins of Cumann na nGaedheal. He described it as the most important organisation in Irish history since it had been the first to elect a government and maintain it in power. Blythe discussed the party’s roots in the 1916 Rising, Sinn Féin and the War of Independence before acknowledging that there were people in the organisation who had not been republicans during the revolutionary period but had simply accepted the new state in 1922 and were loyal citizens. Blythe also paid tribute to the Irish party, describing them as ‘sterling Nationalists’.<sup>151</sup> Blythe said Cumann na nGaedheal did not care about the theoretical views of party members so long as they accepted the principle of Nationalism, the sovereignty of the Irish people and their right to be free and in control of their own affairs.

There were seven by-elections between 1927 and 1932. Each of these by-elections indicated that the prospect of an alternative government under de Valera was having a polarising affect on the electorate. Cumann na nGaedheal won two separate by-elections in

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<sup>150</sup> *Irish Independent*, 7 May 1930.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

Dublin North, while General Seán MacEoin announced the resumption of his political career in spectacular fashion by gaining a seat in Leitrim/Sligo following the death of the sitting Fianna Fáil deputy. MacEoin's desk diary indicates that the General had been keen to get out of the army. He had become frustrated as his role in the higher echelons of the army had required of him to be 'too much confined to [my] office'.<sup>152</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal fought a negative campaign in Leitrim/Sligo, and spent much time highlighting perceived weaknesses in Fianna Fáil's economic policies.<sup>153</sup> MacEoin increased the Cumann na nGaedheal vote in the constituency by winning 28,445 first-preference votes. *The Star* was particularly pleased with MacEoin's victory, being sure that he 'will continue to be a tower of strength to the Government party in the Dail and in the country'.<sup>154</sup>

Given the tight Dáil arithmetic, party discipline came to dominate Cumann na nGaedheal parliamentary party meetings. In March 1930 the party discussed the problem of government backbenchers missing Dáil votes. A resolution was adopted requesting deputies who had recently missed important divisions to promise to attend more regularly in future. Furthermore, the party resolved that deputies could not raise matters 'likely to injuriously affect the interests of the Party' until it had been discussed at a parliamentary party meeting.<sup>155</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal actually lost a Dáil vote later that month forcing Cosgrave to resign. However, the failure of the opposition to form an alternative resulted in Cosgrave's re-election by the Dáil. Party discipline remained an issue, particularly as the party's vote declined in by-elections (see chapters four and five). In June 1931 a motion was adopted by the parliamentary party to expel any deputy who voted against any measure introduced by a minister without Cumann na nGaedheal's written permission.<sup>156</sup>

In two further by-elections, the two big parties held seats following the death of a sitting T.D. However, the result of the Kildare by-election in 1931, brought about by the death of Hugh Colohan of Labour, would provide a clue as to the type of campaign that might be expected in the upcoming general election, and indeed the result hinted at its outcome too. Cumann na nGaedheal's candidate John Conlon, previously a member of the

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<sup>152</sup> Seán MacEoin diary entry, 31 Dec. 1928 (UCDA, Seán MacEoin papers, P151/1948).

<sup>153</sup> Leaflets from the campaign including a conversation between 'Leitrim man' and 'Sligo man' can be found in the Mac Eoin papers (UCDA, Seán Mac Eoin papers, P151/598/838).

<sup>154</sup> *The Star*, 18 May 1929.

<sup>155</sup> Meeting of the Cumann na nGaedheal party, 13 Mar. 1930 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/3).

<sup>156</sup> Meehan, *Cosgrave party*, p. 160.



National League, battled it out with Fianna Fáil's Tom Harris in an intense and bitter campaign. The government party's propaganda was negative and offered little by way of a discernible new policy programme. As had been the case in Leitrim/Sligo, Cumann na nGaedheal's campaign merely reiterated its achievements over the past nine years while calling various Fianna Fail policies into question. Fianna Fail on the other hand was able to successfully portray Cumann na nGaedheal as an out-of-touch government, with one Harris poster calling on voters to 'sack the lot', a slogan that would be repeated in the subsequent general election.<sup>157</sup> The pro-Treaty vote was slipping as the anti-Treaty vote was solidifying, and Harris comfortably won the seat for Fianna Fáil.

### **Government party to opposition party**

By 1932 Cumann na nGaedheal had come full circle. The anti-Treatyites had been defeated in the Civil War but they were now snapping at the heels of the government party at the ballot box. Speculation was rife towards the end of 1931 that the Dáil would be dissolved early in the new year and an election called in the spring. On 30 December, the *Irish Press* speculated that Cumann na nGaedheal's Standing Committee had instructed the constituencies to complete selection conventions by 24 January. According to the paper, Cumann na nGaedheal had been assessing its organisational strength in the constituencies and its team of workers would be augmented through the appointment of more salaried organisers. Cumann na nGaedheal, continued the paper, was keen to inject some new blood into its party by dropping older backbenchers in favour of more energetic candidates.<sup>158</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal's organisation lagged behind that of the new anti-Treaty party. Fianna Fáil was a well oiled machine better prepared than ever to unseat Cosgrave and his colleagues. In response Cumann na nGaedheal came up with some eye catching propaganda posters that portrayed its rival as gunmen and communists while emphasising the government's law-and-order credentials.

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<sup>157</sup> Fianna Fáil by-election literature, Kildare by-election 1931 (UCDA, Michael Tierney papers, LA30/392).

<sup>158</sup> *Irish Press*, 30 Dec. 1931.

Cumann na nGaedheal again produced a guide for its grass-root activists. This time a substantial 160 page book was published. Titled *Fighting Points for Cumann na nGaedheal speakers and workers General election 1932*, it focussed on national policy positions and the perceived frailties of the opposition's policy. Unlike the 1927 booklet, it devoted little space to organisational matters.<sup>159</sup> Going into the election Cumann na nGaedheal deputies were also asked to question the ability of Fianna Fáil to win the election and to trot out the achievements of the Treaty party since 1922.<sup>160</sup> As the country grappled with the economic problems stemming from the Wall Street crash, the party's promise to continue on with the same policies as before did little to excite an electorate itching for change in 1932. Fianna Fáil offered radical policies to improve the country's economy and fought an energetic campaign that again asked voters to 'sack the lot'.<sup>161</sup> Voters responded by putting Cosgrave and his party on the opposition benches. However, Cumann na nGaedheal had not been routed. Its organisation performed well in the election (see subsequent chapters) and it dropped a mere 3,000 votes nationally, showing that it still had a substantial base to build upon.

Cumann na nGaedheal's period of soul-searching began. There was a level of frustration at all levels of the party that power had slipped from its hands by such a slight margin. Barry Egan in Cork told Liam Burke that Cumann na nGaedheal had 'laid the foundations' only to watch Fianna Fáil 'capitalise'.<sup>162</sup> Such navel gazing betrayed the fact that some Treatyites had not accepted the shortcomings of their own party. In Cork there was frustration that party activists had not been listened to, either by the local constituency committee or the government, and that the organisation had not been as strong as it could have been.<sup>163</sup> However, there was even at this stage a realisation that the policy agenda of the new Fianna Fáil government would provide an opportunity for Cumann na nGaedheal to rebuild from the opposition. Egan anticipated that the 'flood' of tariffs would lead to the

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<sup>159</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal, *Fighting Points for Cumann na nGaedheal speakers and workers general election 1932* (Dublin, 1932).

<sup>160</sup> Template speech for use by Cumann na nGaedheal deputies, general election 1932 (UCDA, Seán Mac Eoin papers, P151/598/838).

<sup>161</sup> Notes for a specimen speech, undated [Jan. 1932?] (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/351/65).

<sup>162</sup> Barry Egan to Liam Burke, undated [Mar. 1932?] (CCCA, Barry Egan papers, U404/3).

<sup>163</sup> Barry Egan to Liam Burke, 9 June 1932, enclosing a letter to him from local party workers 4 June 1932 (ibid., U404/4).

formation of a new, united opposition and that Cumann na nGaedheal should throw its weight ‘tactfully and manfully, for the uniting of national Ireland’.<sup>164</sup>

Mulcahy spearheaded Cumann na nGaedheal’s efforts to reorganise in 1932 and particularly in 1933 after the party’s defeat in the snap election of January 1933. De Valera’s decision to go to the country ten months into his premiership caught Cumann na nGaedheal off-guard and it slumped a further nine seats. Most commentators expected Cumann na nGaedheal to lose seats and the party seems to have been putting on a brave face in predicting gains of seven seats.<sup>165</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal was demoralised and confused after the loss of nine seats and set about reviving its fortunes. At an ex-ministers meeting in February 1933, a new organisation committee of Mulcahy, Blythe and John A. Costello was formed to ‘consider and report on the reorganisation of the constituencies’.<sup>166</sup> Mulcahy worked on a new scheme of organisation for the party which placed particular emphasis on reaching the young, labourers and women voters.<sup>167</sup> In March Burke circularised each deputy with a copy of the new scheme of organisation that Mulcahy had been working on. Minimum branch membership was reduced from twelve to six, while it was proposed to reduce branch affiliation fees to ten shillings.<sup>168</sup> Moreover, district committees were put on a more formal footing within the organisation and were envisaged as a link between individual branches and constituency committees. Increased social functions were to be encouraged and meetings of units were to be more regular and it was recommended that at least twelve copies of the party newspaper *United Irishman* be circulated in each *cumann* area. Moreover, as indicated above, the decision taken at this time to contest local elections showed that Cumann na nGaedheal was serious about using its base to mobilise a strong opposition to the Fianna Fáil government. However, other Treatyites were already mobilising a more potent force through the auspices of the Blueshirts.

Cumann na nGaedheal’s organisation served it quite well in the decade 1923-33. On its foundation, it had the appearance of a national coalition of diverse elements who had supported the Treaty. Organisational progress halted in 1924 as funds dried up. The split

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 24 Jan. 1933.

<sup>166</sup> Ex-ministers, minutes of meeting, 25 Feb. 1933 (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy papers, P7b/90/27).

<sup>167</sup> Untitled and undated draft for a revised Cumann na nGaedheal scheme of organisation (ibid., P7b/90/40).

<sup>168</sup> Liam Burke to each deputy, 22 March 1933, includes new scheme of organisation (ibid., P7b/90/37).

with the National Group in 1925 was the catalyst for reorganisation and a new cohesiveness within Cumann na nGaedheal. Walsh's reorganising committee improved the organisation in 1925 and the constituencies were well prepared for the election of 1927. However, Cumann na nGaedheal's right flank was exposed and it suffered its most severe electoral setback in June 1927 only just managing to hold onto power. Again, remedial action was taken to correct deficiencies evident during the campaign. A strong performance in the September 1927 election showed that the efforts to recover the lost ground bore fruit. In 1932 Cumann na nGaedheal dropped a mere 3,000 votes but lost power as Fianna Fáil mobilised support among previously apathetic voters. Economic decline from 1930 combined with the radical policy agenda and organisational prowess of Fianna Fáil were the main factors behind Cumann na nGaedheal's defeat rather than the perceived shortcomings of its own party machinery. In opposition, the party made real efforts to use a revitalised grass-roots' structure to take on the new government. In advance of September's merger, Cumann na nGaedheal was in good shape in the constituencies and Fine Gael inherited a rejuvenated organisation from its parent party. The next three chapters will shed more light on Cumann na nGaedheal's constituency machinery and will help us to define it as either a loosely affiliated cadre style entity or mass organised party.

## Cumann na nGaedheal organisation in Clare

This chapter will examine the structures, strengths and weaknesses of the Cumann na nGaedheal party organisation in the south-western, single county constituency of Clare. Clare's Dáil representation increased by one in 1923, and it returned five deputies to parliament throughout the period under review. This chapter aims to provide a flavour of pre-independence politics in Clare before analysing the Cumann na nGaedheal party organisation in the county from its inception until its eventual submersion within the new Fine Gael party in September 1933.

### Background

In Clare, as elsewhere, some IRB members began to support and join Griffith's new party upon its foundation in 1905 and branches of Sinn Féin existed in the county from an early stage in the party's life. An IRB member, Thomas O'Loughlin, established the county's first Sinn Féin branch in 1907, while clubs soon cropped up in Crusheen and Cranny. Parts of north and west Clare were classified as congested and land agitation was common.<sup>1</sup> Agrarian violence was so widespread in the county in the first decade of the twentieth century that in 1910 RIC garrisons throughout Clare were strengthened to the extent that only Cork and Galway possessed a stronger RIC force. On the eve of the Great War, Clare was an unsettled county. This was accentuated during the European war as numerous emigration outlets were closed off creating the potential for political and social unrest.<sup>2</sup> Much of this frustrated generation were later attracted to the ranks of the IRA, often in the hope that the

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<sup>1</sup> Terence Dooley, *'The land for the people': the land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

revolution would result in land re-distribution. Many IRA leaders such as Clare's Michael Brennan sometimes used land hunger to tempt men into the revolutionary army.<sup>3</sup>

Companies of the Irish Volunteers were established throughout Clare in the months after the movement's inception in 1913. Sinn Féin's decline from 1909/1910 onwards, as depicted by Michael Laffan, was evident in county Clare. In 1916, the authorities noted that members of the Sinn Féin branch in Carron only ever met on Sundays when they talked to each other on the road before Mass.<sup>4</sup> As noted previously, all that changed after 1916. East Clare was the scene of an important by-election in 1917 caused by the death of Major William Redmond, brother of nationalist leader John Redmond, and an Irish party M.P. since 1892. Over 200 people, including sixty priests, attended the convention to select Sinn Féin's by-election candidate<sup>5</sup> Eamon de Valera, having been selected, won the seat for Sinn Féin. Arthur Griffith, Laurence Ginnell and Eoin MacNeill all campaigned in Clare on de Valera's behalf while Sinn Féin supporters waved tricolours and organised parades and street rallies in celebration of their victory.<sup>6</sup>

Clare saw much violence and bloodshed during the War of Independence. The Clare Volunteers had been among the first to reorganise after 1916 and Richard Mulcahy travelled to Clare in January 1919 to preside over the division of the county into three separate brigade areas. This division was necessary due to intense rivalries between the Brennans in east Clare, the Barretts in mid-Clare and the O'Donnells in west Clare.<sup>7</sup> Ernie O'Malley was later dispatched to the county to further organise these three brigades.<sup>8</sup> The conflict in County Clare followed much the same pattern as elsewhere with raids for arms and ammunition in early 1919 followed up by attacks on the RIC, before tactics of guerrilla war were developed to counter the effectiveness of an increasingly mobile British response. In Clare, attacks on police barracks began as early as August 1919.<sup>9</sup> These proved successful from the outset in driving the RIC from the more peripheral barracks in the county. For the duration of the war, the IRA

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Laffan, *The resurrection of Ireland: the Sinn Fein party, 1916-1923* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 70.

<sup>5</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *Judging Dev: a reassessment of the life and legacy of Eamon de Valera* (Dublin, 2007), p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Dinan, *Clare and its people : a concise history* (Cork, 1987), p. 103.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Hopkinson, *Irish War of Independence* (Dublin, 2002), p. 129.

<sup>8</sup> Pádraig Óg Ó Ruairc, *Blood on the banner: the republican struggle in Clare* (Dublin, 2009), pp 90-2.

<sup>9</sup> Hopkinson, *War of Independence*, p. 129.

in County Clare grappled with the Black and Tans and Auxiliaries but they were unable to maintain their early successes. The failure to inflict a heavy blow in Clare towards the end of the war was a source of disappointment among members of GHQ in Dublin.

Tensions within the Clare IRA during the War of Independence were a factor in shaping attitudes to the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Just before the July Truce, Michael Brennan whose brothers Austin and Paddy were also prominent during the war, was appointed O/C of the new 1<sup>st</sup> Western Division and when he declared support for the Treaty, the majority of his men fell in line.<sup>10</sup> Frank Barrett of mid-Clare, believed by some to have resented Brennan's status in the IRA, took the opposite side. In the summer and autumn of 1922 Brennan, now in the Free State army, led his men in fierce fighting in Limerick and Kerry. While Brennan's units were in Limerick and Kerry, anti-Treaty forces gained a foothold in mid-Clare and west-Clare. However, they were dislodged by Brennan on his return in mid autumn 1922.<sup>11</sup>

Political reaction to the Treaty was mixed in Clare. While the county's most prominent politician led the political opposition to the settlement, there was support for the Treaty too. Clare County Council passed a motion urging acceptance of the Treaty. Leading up to the 'Pact' election, Michael Collins and Seán MacEoin addressed a large pro-Treaty demonstration in Ennis on 30 April 1922. Indeed, Tom Garvin cites the enthusiastic welcome given to the Free State army in west Clare and other western counties as evidence of the public's exasperation with the antics of the anti-Treaty IRA.<sup>12</sup> Despite de Valera's opposition, numerous Clare Sinn Féiners took a pro-Treaty stance. At the height of the Civil War, Clare Sinn Féiners Canon William O'Kennedy of St. Flannan's college, Ennis, and Commandant Paddy Brennan attended the preliminary conference of Cumann na nGaedheal in December 1922.<sup>13</sup> O'Kennedy would play an active role in Clare Cumann na nGaedheal.

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Hopkinson, *Green against green: the Irish Civil War*, (Dublin, 2004), p. 43.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>12</sup> Tom Garvin, *1922: the birth of Irish democracy* (Dublin, 2005), p. 109.

<sup>13</sup> John M. Regan, *The Irish counter revolution, 1921-1936: Treatyite politics and settlement in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), p. 141; Preliminary conference of Cumann na nGaedheal, minutes of meeting, 7 Dec. 1922 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

## Establishment of Cumann na nGaedheal in Clare

Three days before the party's official launch in April 1923, Treaty supporters gathered in the county courthouse Ennis to elect officers for a new *cumann* that had been formed in March.<sup>14</sup> Cannon O'Kennedy, a 'pillar' of revolutionary Sinn Féin, presided. His involvement with the revolutionary movement resulted in his internment for six months in 1921 during which time he was made Canon by Bishop Michael Fogarty, also a Sinn Féin sympathiser.<sup>15</sup> Other members of the clergy attended the Ennis Cumann na nGaedheal meeting reflecting the widespread clerical support for the government in county Clare. Ennis Treatyites elected a committee and elected delegates to attend the convention in Dublin. Underlining the state of turmoil that Ireland was in at the time the party was established, Clare man Patrick O'Mahony was executed on 26 April for his part in an ambush that resulted in the death of Private Stephen Canty of the Free State army, in Ennis, on 21 April. On 2 May 1923 Christopher Quinn and William O'Shaughnessy were also executed at Ennis jail for their part in the same ambush. All three had been sentenced to death by military tribunal.<sup>16</sup> Quinn and O'Shaughnessy were the last of the seventy-seven Civil War executions.<sup>17</sup>

In June 1923 Cumann na nGaedheal began organising for the August 1923 election. According to the *Clare Champion*, on 17 June a number of supporters from Clare attended a Cumann na nGaedheal rally in Limerick. Addressing the Limerick meeting, Cosgrave asserted that his party was 'as old as the hills' and had 'the same objects, built on the same foundation and achieving the same purpose as the very best national organisations they [the Irish people] ever had'.<sup>18</sup> Cosgrave clearly wished to link the new party with various shades of Irish nationalism, from the moderate constitutionalists of the Irish party to revolutionary Sinn Féiners. Cumann na nGaedheal was always eager to expand beyond its pro-Treaty Sinn Féin base. Cosgrave urged people who were prepared to subordinate their personal interests to

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<sup>14</sup> Provisional national executive, minutes of meeting, 16 Mar. 1923 (ibid.).

<sup>15</sup> Clergy Files, Canon William O'Kennedy (KDA, Clergy files).

<sup>16</sup> *Clare Champion*, 5 May 1923.

<sup>17</sup> Ó Ruairc, *Blood on the banner*, p. 319.

<sup>18</sup> Sinn Féin claimed the Cumann na nGaedheal meeting was 'poor' and that more interest was shown in a hurling match later that day. 'Report on Limerick', undated [July 1923?] (NAI, Sinn Féin and Cumann na Poblachta papers, 1094/11/3); *Clare Champion*, 23 June 1923.



those of the country to join the new party. O’Kennedy also addressed the Limerick meeting, insisting Clare voters did not want a ‘sectional government’.<sup>19</sup> The best organised political organisation in Clare at this time was that of the Farmers’ Party which held regular meetings across the county and would compete with Cumann na nGaedheal for the farming vote. Rivalry between the two was intense.<sup>20</sup>

On 28 July an advert appeared in the *Clare Champion* which for ‘want of organisation’ simply invited Treaty supporters to the courthouse Ennis on 30 July to select the Cumann na nGaedheal candidates for the upcoming election. Clearly, the organisation had not yet spread outside Ennis to the outlying rural districts. Invited to the Convention were:

1. All priests in the county.
2. All County, District and Urban councillors
3. All officers of Sinn Féin Executive east and west
4. All former officers of Sinn Féin Cumainn
5. All pre-Truce Volunteers not attached to the National Army
6. Representative Famers, Businessmen and workers<sup>21</sup>

On the one hand, the list reveals the esteem in which priests were held at the time of the state’s foundation, and the lengths to which the local Cumann na nGaedheal organisation went to capitalise on their influence. Also evident is the practical application at a grass-roots level of the party’s stated aim to bring about the cooperation of as many sectors of society as possible, in this case farmers, businessmen and workers. Also evident is a tacit identification with pre-schism Sinn Féin, as the party claimed continuity with its revolutionary progenitor and welcomed lapsed members into the Cumann na nGaedheal fold. On the other, the list also demonstrates something of a hierarchical view of society. Clare’s community leaders, the local notables characteristic of cadre style parties,<sup>22</sup> would come together to select the party’s candidates and presumably their flock would follow with their votes.

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<sup>19</sup> *Nenagh Guardian*, 23 June 1923.

<sup>20</sup> The chairman of the north Tipperary Farmers’ Union wrote to the *Nenagh Guardian* rebutting Cumann na nGaedheal claims it was a sectional organisation. *Ibid.*, 30 June 1923.

<sup>21</sup> *Clare Champion*, 28 July 1923.

<sup>22</sup> David M. Farrell, ‘Ireland: centralization, professionalization and competitive pressures’, in Richard S. Kratz and Peter Mair (eds), *How parties organize: change and adaptation in party organizations in western democracies* (London, 1994), p. 219; Susan E. Scarrow, *Parties and their members: organizing for victory in Britain and Germany* (New York, 1996), p. 14.

Certainly the invitation to representative farmers, businessmen and workers showed that Cumann na nGaedheal was serious about reconciling diverse elements through the guise of a 'National' party. The invitation to former Sinn Féin officers also demonstrates something of the confused nature of the split, with Cumann na nGaedheal in Clare sending out a general invitation to former members and perhaps waiting to see who exactly would follow them into the government party. As a further expression of the party's need to identify with the revolution, the official report of the selection convention went on to say that the meeting included 'a majority of the men who have borne the brunt of the struggle for independence for many years past'.<sup>23</sup> Séamus Hughes chaired the convention and, as was standard practice during 1923, outlined the aims and programme of the new party. Five candidates were selected including Eoin MacNeill, who was not in attendance, and had already been chosen as a candidate for the National University panel. Having selected the Cumann na nGaedheal candidates the meeting then established a constituency committee comprising members from across Clare.

An election headquarters for the county was established in the Queens Hotel Ennis and a busy programme of election meetings was arranged. Cumann na nGaedheal's campaign opened on 5 August, with a public meeting in Kilkee addressed by all five candidates.<sup>24</sup> At this meeting MacNeill said he was only standing as a candidate on the invitation of the people of Clare, while one of the candidates, Michael Hehir, was introduced as having been Michael Brennan's right-hand man during the War of Independence.<sup>25</sup> The meeting in Kilkee was chaired by Fr. Charles Culligan, another former member of Sinn Féin,<sup>26</sup> who said the people had a right to free speech and that any interference with that right was a 'worse tyranny' than the one they had just 'put an end to'. While subjected to interjections, the meeting was able to conclude its business. Cumann na nGaedheal's campaign in Clare gathered momentum as its election machinery grew stronger. Writing to his wife on 14 August, MacNeill, who had been staying with O'Kennedy before moving to the Queen's Hotel, praised the county's organisation and expressed his optimism

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<sup>23</sup> *Clare Champion*, 4 Aug. 1923.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 Aug. 1923.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 Aug. 1923.

<sup>26</sup> List of Sinn Féin branch personnel, West Clare, undated (NAI, Sinn Féin and Cumann na Poblachta papers, 1094/13/3).

that the party would perform well in the constituency.<sup>27</sup> After a tame start, the election in Clare was ‘getting more lively every day’. The campaign took a decisive turn on 15 August when de Valera was arrested by Free State troops in Ennis as he rose to address a Sinn Féin meeting.<sup>28</sup> While de Valera’s arrest was a propaganda victory for Sinn Féin, *The Economist* supported the action on the grounds that his followers had been executed, killed and interned while their leader had been safely hid away.<sup>29</sup> However, endorsements from the pro-British magazine were not what the Free State government needed. Evidence suggests the arrest caused a discernible backlash against Cumann na nGaedheal in Clare. Writing to MacNeill, Séamus Hughes talked of a reaction against the party in the county following the arrest.<sup>30</sup>

On 19 August Cosgrave attended a Cumann na nGaedheal rally in Ennis chaired by Fr. John Meade, a native of Mullagh.<sup>31</sup> Meade elucidated his usual aversion to attending such meetings but that he now saw it as his duty to ‘declare openly’ that he was on the side of law-and-order, opposed war and stood for peace.<sup>32</sup> Meade went on to introduce Cosgrave as the ‘deliverer of our people, the protector of our rights, and the liberator of our country’. During his address, Cosgrave used the analogy of the family to describe Cumann na nGaedheal’s basic philosophy. A family’s resources would be dissipated if a son wanted to ‘attend race meetings and dances...[to] see the world at the cost of the rest of the family’ and so it was with the country. Cosgrave implied that his party would prudently husband Ireland’s resources in the same way in which good parents managed the family’s resources. In de Valera’s heartland, Cosgrave attacked his one-time comrade for not attending the Treaty negotiations and recalled how he had urged de Valera to go to London in 1921. Collins, according to Cosgrave, had been a straight talker who did not have to re-write his sentences ‘unlike some of the apostles of metaphysics that we have on the other side’.<sup>33</sup> Addressing the same meeting, MacNeill also attacked de Valera. Replying to a question about the Civil War executions, MacNeill stated that nobody

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<sup>27</sup> Eoin MacNeill to his wife, 14 Aug. 1923 (UCDA, Eoin MacNeill papers, LA1/G/269).

<sup>28</sup> Newsreel footage of the scenes in Ennis can be found on the British pathe website, available at: [www.britishpathe.com/record.php?id=20100](http://www.britishpathe.com/record.php?id=20100) [accessed on 20 April 2011].

<sup>29</sup> *The Economist*, 18 Aug. 1923.

<sup>30</sup> In the Letter Hughes talks of a ‘re-action [sic] against us which followed De Valera’s [sic] arrest’, Séamus Hughes to Eoin MacNeill, 28 Apr. 1924 (UCDA, Eoin MacNeill papers, LA1/H/64/17).

<sup>31</sup> Clergy files, Rev. John Meade (KDA, Clergy files).

<sup>32</sup> *Clare Champion*, 25 Aug. 1923.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

had liked them but that they had saved Ireland and, more pointedly, that his answers would not be ‘wrapped up in mystifying phrases’.

Cumann na nGaedheal’s election result in Clare proved particularly disappointing. Despite the *Clare Champion’s* assertion that the party’s organisation had gained strength in the county as the campaign progressed,<sup>34</sup> MacNeill was the sole Cumann na nGaedheal T.D. returned for Clare, while his four party colleagues performed poorly. MacNeill had been expected to elect a running mate.<sup>35</sup> In spite of de Valera’s strong vote, and the publicity surrounding ‘the chief’s’ arrest, Sinn Féin failed to increase its representation in the constituency, again returning two anti-Treaty deputies. Terence Dooley has observed that Clare was one of just three congested areas where Cumann na nGaedheal was outpolled by Sinn Féin. Both main parties languished behind the Farmers’ Party in Cork North, a constituency dominated by large dairy farmers. Dooley suggests that such constituencies were weaned off irregularism by the promises held out in the 1923 Land Act.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, he points out that the fortunate Sinn Féin candidate Brian O’Higgins, elected on de Valera’s transfers, had a track record of opposing agrarian participation. Clare was an exception in that Sinn Féin outpolled the combined vote of Cumann na nGaedheal and the Farmers’ Party. It seems likely that de Valera’s influence was the main reason for Sinn Féin’s strong performance in Clare, as shown in the table below. Labour and the Farmers’ Party each gained a seat showing that sectional interests were well represented in the county. Indeed, writing in 1933, the American political scientist Warner Moss remarked that Clare was part of a Labour party stronghold stretching across a belt of counties to Wicklow in the east.<sup>37</sup> Having also been elected by the National University constituency, MacNeill had a choice to make. He decided to give up the University seat rather than force a by-election in Clare, one that would have been almost impossible for Cumann na nGaedheal to win.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 1 Sept. 1923.

<sup>35</sup> Kieran Sheedy, *The Clare elections* (Dublin, 1993) p. 356.

<sup>36</sup> Dooley, ‘*Land for the people*’, pp 53-5.

<sup>37</sup> Warner Moss, *Political parties in the Irish Free State* (New York, 1933), p. 39.

*Figure 1: First preference vote obtained by successful Clare candidates in 1923.*<sup>38</sup>

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Preference Vote</b>
Eamon de Valera	Sinn Féin	17,762
Prof Eoin Mac Neill	Cumann na nGaedheal	8,196
Patrick Hogan	Labour	2,083
Conor Hogan	Farmers' Party	1,914
Brian O'Higgins	Sinn Féin	114.

### **Post election difficulties in Clare**

In the aftermath of the August election, the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation in Clare disintegrated. By contrast, the party machinery in nearby Limerick remained active in 1924, continuing to form new branches through to July.<sup>39</sup> Activism in Clare was not helped by the fact that the constituency committee was £630 in debt after the election, with headquarters initially able to contribute only £150 towards the alleviation of the liability. Harry Guinane, Clare constituency secretary requested £500 to cover the election deposits of the five candidates.<sup>40</sup>

John Regan notes a pre-Treaty culture of profligacy in Clare with the Sinn Féin organisation there in a precarious financial position as early as 1919. This trait was inherited by Cumann na nGaedheal in Clare, although it was by no means the only political organisation or body guilty of extravagance. Clare Cumann na nGaedheal certainly seems to have fought the election in quite an extravagant manner. Bills for dinners, teas and apartments with William's Hotel Kilrush went unpaid as did electrical work carried out on party offices in Kilrush. Acrimony between headquarters and Clare rumbled on until 1925 with the constituency secretary Harry Guinane, having to bombard the Standing Committee and MacNeill with letters. The constituency executive was unable to meet its financial obligations after the Standing Committee reneged on its commitment to meet the cost of election deposits. Injured parties in Clare themselves were forced to join Guinane in raising the matter with

<sup>38</sup> Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918-92* (Dublin, 1992), p. 113.

<sup>39</sup> *Limerick Leader*, various issues Jan. to July 1924.

<sup>40</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 26 Oct. 1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

MacNeill when informed there were no funds locally. Only two candidates, Hehir and MacNeill had received enough votes to secure their deposits and the amount furnished by the Standing Committee still left the constituency £200 in arrears, or the deposits put down for two candidates. Guinane agreed that only three candidates should have been selected in Clare and that those who wanted to field a full team had ‘on a most extravagant and irresponsible manner run the election’.<sup>41</sup>

The failure of the machine in Clare to effectively manage its resources, and the less than speedy resolution of the matter by the Standing Committee, ensured that the party’s organisational strength in Clare melted away. O’Kennedy and Guinane were left to pick up the pieces. Unsurprisingly given the mishandling of the situation, Clare was unrepresented at the 1924 Cumann na nGaedheal annual convention.<sup>42</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal paid the price for its shoddy handling of party funds in Clare. Similarly, in 1929, a Fianna Fáil branch in Cork would lapse having been left to foot bills incurred by the constituency committee. There, enthusiasm had also waned due to local members having to pay for constituency level extravagance.<sup>43</sup> Clare Cumann na nGaedheal was moribund, largely through the constituency committee’s own alienation of local support and the inability of the Standing Committee to cover the losses in time. As already stated these difficulties were compounded by the fact that de Valera’s arrest during the election campaign had not gone down well.

In 1925, facing into a metaphorical stiff-wind in Clare, Cumann na nGaedheal would have to begin the work of organising the constituency from scratch. However, the dearth of organisation in Clare was somewhat balanced by the close friendship between Cosgrave and Bishop Michael Fogarty. The two men maintained a regular correspondence throughout Cosgrave’s period in government and Fogarty often wrote directly to Cosgrave about local problems. Although he donated to the party, Fogarty was unprepared to support Cumann na nGaedheal publically, intimating to the Standing Committee in 1923 that the time for overt political involvement by the hierarchy had passed now that the country had gained independence.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Bishop Charles O’Sullivan of Kerry declined an invitation to address a Tralee

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<sup>41</sup> Harry Guinane to Seán Mac Giolla Fhaolain, 3 Nov. 1925 (UCDA, Eoin MacNeill papers, LA1/H/66/29).

<sup>42</sup> Regan, *Counter revolution*, pp 152-3.

<sup>43</sup> Séamus Fitzgerald to Martin Corry, 5 Mar. 1929 (CCCA, Séamus Fitzgerald papers, PR/6/200).

<sup>44</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 25 May 1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

Cumann na nGaedheal meeting. In a letter to the branch president, Bishop O’Sullivan talked of the tenacity, firmness, self-sacrifice and courage of Cosgrave and his colleagues and wished the Tralee *cumann* well.<sup>45</sup>

### **Reorganisation effort of spring 1925: Purcell to the rescue**

In the spring of 1925 action was taken to re-establish Cumann na nGaedheal in Clare as part of the wider renewal of the party organisation discussed in chapter two. R.J. Purcell arrived in Clare to direct efforts to reform the constituency’s structures. In April, a new *cumann* was formed in Ennis with Fr. P.J. Vaughan as President. Vaughan, renowned for his height, would one day replace O’Kennedy as President of St. Flannan’s College.<sup>46</sup> Purcell told the meeting that encouraging reports from around the county indicated there would be an active branch in every parish within weeks.<sup>47</sup> *Cumainn* were subsequently established in Kilrush and Kilmala while steps were taken to form branches in Clarecastle, Miltown Malbay, Kilkee and Ennistymon. At this time new branches were also formed at Killaloe and Tulla.<sup>48</sup> The new Ennis *cumann* met again on 29 April to select its delegates to the annual convention. Members passed three resolutions for debate at the party conference, and urged their delegates to argue strongly for their adoption by the convention. The first resolution dealt with the need to drain the river Fergus, the second called for a loan to be made available to farmers who had suffered loss of livestock to fluke while the third argued that lands on the banks of the Fergus were ‘in every way’ suitable to the growing of sugar beet.<sup>49</sup> Members were also informed that the party’s reorganising efforts had produced new branches in Clarecastle and Ennistymon. At this time Clare was one of Sinn Féin’s best organised counties. In 1925, there were twenty-four Sinn Féin clubs in the county.<sup>50</sup>

The drive to organise Cumann na nGaedheal in county Clare continued apace during the summer of 1925. Adverts appeared in May asking those interested in

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<sup>45</sup> Bishop Charles O’Sullivan to Dr. Brian MacMahon, 19 July 1923 (UCDA, Desmond FitzGerald papers, P80/1099).

<sup>46</sup> Clergy files, Patrick J. Vaughan (KDA, Clergy files).

<sup>47</sup> *Clare Champion*, 25 Apr. 1925.

<sup>48</sup> *Saturday Record and Clare Journal*, 9 May 1925.

<sup>49</sup> *Clare Champion*, 2 May 1925.

<sup>50</sup> Ard Comhairle, report of the honorary secretaries, 19 Mar. 1925 (CCCA, Seamus Fitzgerald papers, PR/6/136/1).

establishing *cumann* to contact Purcell,<sup>51</sup> while the Ennistymon branch enrolled new members at a public meeting on grants and land division.<sup>52</sup> New branches were also established at Lahinch and Corafin while the attendance of Cosgrave at a county convention at the end of May was widely publicised. Addressing the convention, Cosgrave claimed it did not matter to him who was in government so long as the Treaty was maintained and the country's best interests were served. Cosgrave was confident that Cumann na nGaedheal's pledges of a self-reliant state would be realised at the time of the next general election. Dealing with partition, Cosgrave displayed a degree of political maturity by claiming that the south had to attract their 'Northern countrymen' by showing them that 'the Government of the Free State is a well-balanced Government, acting in the best interests of the people'.<sup>53</sup> Clearly, Cosgrave did not see the language of a jingoistic, irredentist nationalism as a solution to partition. The speech implied that only Cumann na nGaedheal could bring about Irish unity. On the same day as the meeting in Ennis, Cosgrave also addressed meetings in Lahinch and Kilrush. Cosgrave spent a week in Clare as part of the reorganising effort and he was accompanied by Fisheries minister Fionán Lynch and Liam Burke.<sup>54</sup> Cosgrave's visit to Clare at a time when the local organisation was re-establishing itself after a lengthy hiatus, suggests that he did in fact take an interest in building the party organisation in places where it was weak. Minister Patrick Hogan also travelled to Clare in May 1925. Cumann na nGaedheal advertisements boasted that his 'Land Act is his credentials' as the party's reorganising efforts made a play for the support of smallholders.<sup>55</sup>

Local elections were due in the summer of 1925 and while Cumann na nGaedheal had decided not to contest these, they still occupied a great deal of the party's time. On 11 June, toeing the party line, the Sixmilebridge *cumann* president James O'Regan told members that the branch had decided not to interfere with local government other than to recommend that electors choose candidates who would work economically and efficiently 'regardless of State politics'.<sup>56</sup> He advised Cumann na nGaedheal members that they were free to support Labour or Farmer

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<sup>51</sup> *Saturday Record and Clare Journal*, 16 May 1925.

<sup>52</sup> *Clare Champion*, 30 May 1925.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 June 1925.

<sup>54</sup> Sheedy, *The Clare elections*, p. 359.

<sup>55</sup> Dooley, 'Land for the people', p. 204.

<sup>56</sup> *Clare Champion*, 20 June 1925.



candidates but not anti-Treatyites who might receive orders to ‘smash and destroy as – a political move – all the work of local Government’. In the event, numerous Cumann na nGaedhealers stood for election as independents.<sup>57</sup>

Local elections were not the only item discussed at the Sixmilebridge meeting. O’Regan, an election candidate for the party in 1923, was keen that the branch cooperate with the clergy and others to ensure the Estate Commissioner would receive the best local advice on land division when inspecting the district. Land Commissioners, when assessing an area, were often subjected to intimidation from various categories of claimants. Clare was such an example.<sup>58</sup> Earlier in the summer there had been a number of outrages, particularly in the area surrounding Ennis. In March a seventy-two year old man died as a result of multiple wounds sustained in a shooting incident.<sup>59</sup> In May, a gory notice in red ink was found in the vicinity of 250 acres of land for sale near Ennis. In addition, there had been destruction of stone walls and illegal trespassing on property near Ballyvaughen, and hay burning and outhouse burning in Rathlahine and Ennistymon.<sup>60</sup> These incidents point to continued agrarian unrest in county Clare in the mid-1920s. Independence had not solved rural Clare’s problems.

Aware that portions of land were about to be divided in Sixmilebridge and its environs, the Cumann na nGaedheal branch wanted to secure building sites for houses, a new school and a sports field. The sites would ‘improve and beautify the town of Sixmilebridge’.<sup>61</sup> The *cumann* subsequently passed a resolution calling for the formation of a committee representative of Sixmilebridge Cumann na nGaedheal ‘none of whom are claimants for allotments of land’ to help guide the Commissioner in his work. In like manner, on 21 June, the Ennistymon Cumann na nGaedheal branch discussed the division of the Ennistymon House lands. However, Ennistymon party members were not quite as civic minded as their colleagues in Sixmilebridge. The *cumann* made four appeals. The first three called for the acquisition of the lands in question, their immediate distribution and that due consideration be given to townspeople and uneconomic land holders. However, the fourth appeal asked that

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<sup>57</sup> Sheedy, *The Clare elections*, p. 633.

<sup>58</sup> Dooley, ‘*Land for the people*’, p. 83.

<sup>59</sup> *Munster News*, 25 Mar. 1925.

<sup>60</sup> *Clare Champion*, 23 May 1925.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 June 1925.

preference be given to applicants who were members of Cumann na nGaedheal.<sup>62</sup> A party did not have to be in power to exert this type of influence and numerous associations gave structure to the lobbying process.<sup>63</sup> Under both Cumann na nGaedheal and Fianna Fáil governments, inspectors called on ‘local politicians, clergymen, schoolteachers and other notables of the community’ for direction.<sup>64</sup> Fianna Fáil would prove more successful in exploiting land issues for organisational gain.

By August 1925 Cumann na nGaedheal was quite well organised across county Clare with branches in Barefield, Clarecastle, Ennis, Ennistymon, Kilmally, Kilrush, Sixmilebridge, Tulla, Corafin and Lahinch.<sup>65</sup> These branches did not have much contact with their local T.D. who, as Minister for Education and delegate to the Boundary Commission, had little spare time for constituency work. However, MacNeill had some time off towards the end of September and, responding to Liam Burke’s 22 June circular, arranged to liaise with the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation in Clare. Constituency secretary Harry Guinane informed Liam Burke that MacNeill would address supporters attending a constituency committee meeting in Ennis on 23 September.<sup>66</sup> Clare *cumainn* were asked to forward resolutions by 21 September so that MacNeill could respond at the meeting. Following the Ennis meeting, MacNeill spent a couple of days travelling around county Clare. He spent 24 September in west Clare hearing deputations from locals, while on 26 September he inspected lands in Clarecastle which had been subject to flooding. He also heard deputations from the ratepayers of Ennis who had been angered by the spendthrift tendencies of Ennis Urban Council, a recurrent theme in Clare’s politics it seems. MacNeill was also informed that the town’s roads, housing, sewerage and water supply needed attention. MacNeill pledged to deal with these issues.

Cumann na nGaedheal activism in Clare again declined in the winter of 1925. Aside from a rare Cumann na nGaedheal branch meeting in Ennis in November, the organisation appeared to have slipped back to the dormant position of 1924 and early 1925. Cumann na nGaedheal in Clare failed to capitalise on the progress it had made

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 27 June 1925.

<sup>63</sup> Dooley, ‘*Land for the people*’, p. 217.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp 210- 3.

<sup>65</sup> List of *Cumainn* in Clare, June 1925 (UCDA, Eoin Mac Neill papers, LA/M/17/11).

<sup>66</sup> Harry Guinane to Liam Burke, 15 September 1925 (UCDA, Eoin Mac Neill papers, LA/M/17).

in 1925. Sinn Féin remained strong in Clare and organised a demonstration in Ennis to denounce the London Agreement.<sup>67</sup> It is probable that further negative feelings were generated against the organisation in Clare by MacNeill's involvement with the failed Boundary Commission. On 28 December, an unarmed garda, Thomas Dowling, was killed in north county Clare by a party of ambushers lurking behind a wall. At this time Clare was possibly the most 'incorrigibly republican county in the state' and deeply unsettled. Republicans ambushed gardaí and intimidated their families. This cycle of violence intensified as the decade wore on.<sup>68</sup>

Perhaps the political structures in place were failing to deal adequately with social and economic problems that existed in the more peripheral constituencies such as Clare. It is likely the 'government party' machine was guilty by association. Certainly, Terence Dooley attributes Cumann na nGaedheal's declining fortunes in western constituencies in the late 1920s with the failure of the government's Land Act 1923 to relieve congestion or match people's expectations.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, from its inception, Cumann na nGaedheal in Clare was associated with: the arrest of de Valera; an austere policy of balanced budgets; incompetent management of local party finances and from December 1925 with the shattering of nationalist dreams of a united Ireland. Given that Clare was de Valera's constituency, the county had a talisman through which to channel its disenchantment with the government. Furthermore, the perception that MacNeill devoted little time to his constituency can scarcely have benefitted the local party organisation. Furthermore, the financial mess left in the wake of the August 1923 election had alienated middle class voters whom Cumann na nGaedheal needed to attract.

Cumann na nGaedheal inactivity in Clare continued throughout 1926. Meanwhile, the Clare Farmers' Union remained the most active political organisation in the county. However, it too was in financial difficulty and, in keeping with the theme running through this chapter, was accused of profligacy by the local press. The *Clare Champion* also lamented the apathy of the county's farmers, claiming that of 18,000 farmers in the constituency, only 1,000 gave the organisation any form of support. Sinn Féin showed signs of sporadic activity in some parts of the county but it

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<sup>67</sup> *Clare Champion*, 12 December 1925.

<sup>68</sup> Fearghal McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy: a self-made hero* (Oxford, 2005), pp180-1.

<sup>69</sup> Dooley, 'Land for the people', p. 102.

too lagged behind the Farmers' Union.<sup>70</sup> There was strong criticism of MacNeill's performance at a Farmers' Union meeting in May. There appears to have been a prevailing view in the county, even within Cumann na nGaedheal circles, that MacNeill spent too much time in Dublin and was disinterested in the concerns of his constituents.<sup>71</sup> Evidently the effects of the minister's September 1925 visit had quickly worn off.

Despite his popularity in the county, de Valera's new Fianna Fáil party was slow to appear in Clare. Fianna Fáil branches appeared in August and had spread throughout the county by the end of the month.<sup>72</sup> Like Cumann na nGaedheal, Fianna Fáil too would encounter organisational problems in Clare. For example there were complaints in 1929 that the Fianna Fáil organisation in Clare had operated without a constituency executive for over two years.<sup>73</sup>

### **Cumann na nGaedheal prepares for electioneering**

By early 1927, the financial difficulties of the Farmers' Union in Clare had become such a problem that dissolution of its local organisation was given serious consideration. A slight improvement in its finances enabled it to continue in existence but, to the chagrin of the *Clare Champion*, apathy prevailed among the county's farmers with only twenty five of 112 entitled delegates attending its constituency AGM in January 1927.<sup>74</sup> The Farmers' Union was generally perceived as the party of large, commercial farming interests whilst county Clare was a county dominated by smaller farmers and labourers. In many constituencies, the Farmers' Party and Cumann na nGaedheal competed for the votes of commercial farmers.<sup>75</sup> However, in Clare, Cumann na nGaedheal did not benefit from the difficulties experienced by the Farmers' Union. In terms of organisation and support, the two would remain less than the sum of their parts in Clare. In February 1927 Labour and the National League

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<sup>70</sup> *Clare Champion*, various issues Jan.-May 1926.

<sup>71</sup> This view was also expressed later at Cumann na nGaedheal meetings, but here it is reported from a Farmer's Union gathering. *Ibid.*, 22 May 1926.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, various issues Aug. 1926.

<sup>73</sup> Liam Butler to Eamon de Valera, 25 Mar. 1929 (UCDA, Fianna Fail papers, P176/31/10).

<sup>74</sup> *Clare Champion*, 22 Jan. 1927.

<sup>75</sup> Dooley, *'Land for the people'*, p. 55.

formed new branches in the constituency as both main parties remained somewhat mute.<sup>76</sup>

In early March Cumann na nGaedheal in Clare finally awoke from its slumber. Fr. Smith chaired a party meeting at Cross on 6 March. Cumann na nGaedheal organiser for Clare, a Mr. McCarthy, told the meeting at Cross that there was a place in the party for every member of the community.<sup>77</sup> Various government policies were outlined as were the benefits that would come in the future from the Shannon Scheme, the Carlow sugar factory and the improvement of Irish agricultural produce. Councillor James O'Flynn, officially a Farmers' Party representative, chaired a meeting to reorganise Cumann na nGaedheal in Sixmilebridge.<sup>78</sup> O'Flynn acknowledged the important role of the Farmers' Party in representing agricultural interests but had come to realise that 'a purely National organisation [...] best suited to the interests of all classes' now warranted his endorsement. O'Flynn told the meeting that he had at times found fault with Cosgrave's government but realised they were men of vision and enterprise and that any future amalgamation concerning the Farmers' Party should be with Cumann na nGaedheal. Presumably the party hoped that O'Flynn's supporters would transfer their allegiance to Cumann na nGaedheal in the election. A new *cumann* was also formed in Feakle.<sup>79</sup>

On 23 March Minister for Agriculture Patrick Hogan addressed a large meeting, chaired by Canon O'Kennedy, in the Ennis Courthouse. Hogan did not sugar-coat his address in rhetoric, stating that he was in Ennis to 'talk business' and was unable to find a short-cut to wealth for any farmer in the country.<sup>80</sup> Hogan stated firmly that 'tariffs were of no use to Irish agriculture'.<sup>81</sup> In response to the emerging National League organisation, and in recognition of the constitutional tradition of Clare, Hogan paid tribute to John Redmond for the service he had given his country but argued that the old Irish party policy had no relevance now that self-government was achieved in 1922. Liam Burke accompanied Hogan to Ennis in an attempt to improve organisation. Burke openly made reference to the weakness of the party in Clare and stated that in re-organising the constituency, he did not intend it to remain active for

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<sup>76</sup> *Clare Champion*, various issues Feb.1927.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 Mar. 1927.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 Mar.1927.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 Mar.1927.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

election purposes only, intimating that Cumann na nGaedheal had to function between elections. Burke suggested that two district executives should be formed in the county, one in west Clare and one in the east.<sup>82</sup>

Clare Cumann na nGaedheal was criticised for failing to elect a new constituency committee or to send delegates to National Executive meetings. In a pointed attack on MacNeill, one rank-and-file member enquired as to the point in forming constituency executives if ‘we do not get a deputy that will take orders from the executive?’.<sup>83</sup> There remained considerable disappointment in Clare with the performance of MacNeill. O’Kennedy joined in the attack, stating to applause that it was up to the people to elect a better Dáil deputy and that he hoped in future Cumann na nGaedheal would select candidates from within ‘its own shores and not go outside for them’. Burke told the meeting that headquarters would provide organisers and supply them with all they needed to do their job. He also warned that the constituency organisation would be responsible for any additional expenses incurred. Local party personnel would have to husband party finances competently. With a selection convention looming, haste was required to reorganise existing branches, and to form new ones where *cumann* had fallen away.

On 3 April a *cumann* was formed at Doonaha with Fr. Madden, formerly of the Farmers’ Union, presiding. Fr. Madden called on the farmers’ organisation to merge with Cumann na nGaedheal to provide the country with a ‘better government’.<sup>84</sup> In this the speaker echoed the statements of Dennis Gorey, who resigned as leader of the Farmers’ Party to join Cumann na nGaedheal.<sup>85</sup> Gorey failed to bring the rest of his party with him. McCarthy told the meeting of policies that would bring prosperity to farmers while suggesting Cumann na nGaedheal did not hope to remain in power indefinitely. The same day a *cumann* was formed in Monmore where there were calls for all members of the community to work together in building up the country so that it could hold its own in the markets of the world. On 4 April a *cumann* in Miltown Malbay was reorganised. Dr. Dan MacClancy, presiding, informed those gathered that Cumann na nGaedheal offered hope for the country and that ‘Nationality for us

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 2 Apr. 1927.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 9 Apr. 1927.

<sup>85</sup> Meehan, *Cosgrave party*, p. 86.

all is a spiritual thing, an immortal thing and all should endeavour to make the most of the freedom we have gained'.<sup>86</sup>

It is interesting to note the numerous calls made by speakers at Cumann na nGaedheal meetings in Clare for a merger with the Farmers' Party. The presence of Farmers' Union representatives on Cumann na nGaedheal platforms is also significant.<sup>87</sup> Clearly people were prepared to put aside their differences as they could see that in a constituency such as Clare, the best way to counter de Valera's alternative was to form a united front of those broadly supportive of the government's economic policy. Nonetheless, the Clare Farmers' Union formally rejected Cumann na nGaedheal's overtures in mid April.<sup>88</sup> Advocates for fusion remained a minority.

The Clare Cumann na nGaedheal selection convention took place on 1 May with over 100 branch delegates in attendance.<sup>89</sup> The frantic efforts to create a new branch structure in Clare over the previous months had paid off. George Nicholls, T.D. for Galway and parliamentary secretary to the minister for Defence, chaired the convention and explained to members the directions issued to him by the Standing Committee. Three candidates were subsequently selected as headquarters ensured Clare did not repeat the mistakes of 1923. In a further indicator of Clare Cumann na nGaedheal's desire to unite with the farmers' organisation, O'Flynn, was selected as a reserve candidate and eventually replaced Patrick Brennan on the party's ticket.<sup>90</sup> The Labour party had been reorganising in Clare since the summer of 1926 and continued to meet regularly in Ennis in the lead up the election. Before the Cumann na nGaedheal convention, O'Kennedy told members that it had been decided to proceed in forming one executive for the county rather than two as Burke had suggested in Ennis on 23 March. Instead the new executive would select three vice Presidents representing east, west and mid-Clare. Thomas McGrath and Dennis McMahon were appointed as the new constituency committee's representatives on the National Executive. Later, the constituency organisation formed election and finance committees to oversee the election campaign and ensure the purse strings were well

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<sup>86</sup> *Clare Champion*, 9 Apr. 1927.

<sup>87</sup> Elsewhere, Cumann na nGaedheal members addressed Farmers' Union meetings. De Róiste addressed a Farmers' Union meeting in Cork in the spring of 1927. De Róiste diary entry, 28 Feb. 1927 (CCCA, Liam de Róiste papers, U271/A/54).

<sup>88</sup> *Clare Champion*, 16 Apr. 1927.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 May 1927.

<sup>90</sup> Sheedy, *The Clare elections*, p. 361.

guarded.<sup>91</sup> On 8 May meetings took place in Lisdoonvarna and Cratlae. One of the candidates, H.J. Hunt,<sup>92</sup> told the meeting in Lisdoonvarna of his support for lower rates. More laudable was his assertion that every elector should use their vote even if to vote against him.<sup>93</sup> A *Clare Champion* editorial on 14 May was critical of MacNeill saying that he had displayed little interest in his constituency and that he had not visited Clare once ‘since the Boundary fiasco’. The editorial implied government party weakness in the constituency by suggesting that Cumann na nGaedheal supporters had requested prominent speakers for meetings in Clare. MacNeill’s performance as a T.D. caused difficulties for the organisation even though he was no longer a candidate in Clare having decided to seek election for the National University. Fianna Fáil was active from early April and its meetings in the build up to the election were characterised by stinging criticism of the government and its continuous attempts to play the ‘green card’.<sup>94</sup> At one such meeting, it was claimed that under Cumann na nGaedheal, ‘Freemasonry and Imperialism have got a worse hold than ever in the country’.<sup>95</sup>

### **Promoting an unpopular government**

Cumann na nGaedheal government remained a difficult product to pitch to Clare voters. With little prospect of making a gain,<sup>96</sup> the party focussed on retaining MacNeill’s seat. Ennistymon Fair on 16 May showed up the fraught relationships that existed between the main parties on the eve of the June 1927 election. Cumann na nGaedheal, Fianna Fáil and the National League all attempted to hold public meetings at the fair. Willie Redmond and the National League candidate courteously decided to wait until Desmond FitzGerald concluded his address to a Cumann na nGaedheal crowd before commencing their own meeting. However, when the Fianna Fáil

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<sup>91</sup> *Clare Champion*, 14 May 1927.

<sup>92</sup> Hunt’s background was pro-Treaty Sinn Féin. However, like many Cumann na nGaedheal members of local councils, he was officially listed as a Farmers’ Party councillor in 1925. Sheedy, *The Clare elections*, p. 632.

<sup>93</sup> *Clare Champion*, 14 May 1927.

<sup>94</sup> Fanning describes this as an attempt to portray Fianna Fáil as ‘the most quintessentially nationalist and anti-English of parties’ in a system which ‘revolved around the British connection embodied in the treaty’. Ronan Fanning, *Independent Ireland* (Dublin, 1983), p. 100.

<sup>95</sup> *Clare Champion*, 14 May 1927.

<sup>96</sup> Given that MacNeill was not seeking re-election, the *Irish Times* predicted one Cumann na nGaedheal seat in Clare. *Irish Times*, 11 Jan. 1927.



candidates arrived, they were not as cordial. Fianna Fáil's meeting began immediately. FitzGerald tried to continue speaking over the noise emanating from the Fianna Fáil meeting. According to FitzGerald, Cumann na nGaedheal had given the Irish people the right to change their government while alleging that de Valera's followers had tried to prevent the people from registering their votes.<sup>97</sup> He also implied that de Valera's recent trip to the United States had secured funds to enable Fianna Fáil organisers travel around Ireland in 'motor cars'. All parties were prone to sensational accusations in the throes of an electoral battle, it would seem.

Cumann na nGaedheal's separatist roots, and the reason why it had not been able to fully integrate Home Rulers, soon became apparent as FitzGerald launched a scathing broadside at Redmond's party. FitzGerald said the Irish party leaders had promised Irishmen Home Rule if they fought for Britain in Flanders but instead the country was handed the Black and Tans. Now, Captain Redmond had the 'd----d cheek' to come to Clare asking for votes after 'tens of thousands of Irishmen had left their bones in Flanders'.<sup>98</sup> FitzGerald also addressed meetings in Ennis and Miltown Malbay the previous day.<sup>99</sup> At those meetings FitzGerald countered claims made by the opposition. Indeed Cumann na nGaedheal spent much of this campaign on the back foot, rebutting accusations made by Fianna Fáil.

Some Cumann na nGaedheal meetings in Clare were interrupted, such as that at Kildysart, while other meetings received an 'excellent hearing', according to the *Clare Champion*.<sup>100</sup> Richard Mulcahy successfully addressed meetings in Kilmally and Mullough. On 5 June another big personality, Kevin O'Higgins, spoke at various Cumann na nGaedheal meetings in Clare. Again, some of these meetings were characterised by bitter attacks on the National League. It seems that Cumann na nGaedheal feared the presence of the National League in Clare and decided on a strategy of attack to counter the threat of the new party. Speaking in Ennis, O'Higgins described voting as the 'supreme act of citizenship' and the Cumann na nGaedheal

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<sup>97</sup> *Clare Champion*, 21 May 1927.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Disappointed with Cumann na nGaedheal's performance in June 1927, O'Higgins said the result in his own county Dublin constituency had not been bad 'considering the amount of time FitzGerald and myself had to spend in other areas'. Kevin O'Higgins to Frank MacDermott, 17 June 1927 (NAI, Frank MacDermott papers, 1065/1/2).

<sup>100</sup> *Clare Champion*, 28 May 1927.

government as a ‘Committee of the People’.<sup>101</sup> O’Higgins reviewed the policy of the government and asked voters to choose the best team to run the country and to consider carefully the policies of all the parties. O’Kennedy concluded the meeting by attacking Fianna Fáil, for having no policy on unemployment or agriculture.

*Figure 2: First preference vote obtained by successful Clare candidates in June 1927.*<sup>102</sup>

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Preference Vote</b>
Eamon de Valera	Fianna Fáil	13,029
Thomas Falvey	Farmers’ Party	5,140
Patrick Hogan	Labour	4,147
Patrick Michael Kelly	Cumann na nGaedheal	3,612
Patrick Houlihan	Fianna Fáil	1,500

Cumann na nGaedheal’s overall popularity in the constituency declined dramatically from 11,748 votes in 1923 to 7,321 in June 1927. Patrick Kelly held the party’s seat with a modest share of the vote. However, Cumann na nGaedheal was nowhere near catching Fianna Fáil, which won the bulk of the Republican vote in Clare. The Political scientist Warner Moss noted that Cumann na nGaedheal voters in Clare transferred heavily in favour of the National League candidate,<sup>103</sup> indicating that party supporters there identified with its constitutional credentials and that the two competed for votes from the same pool. Brian O’Higgins, carrying the flag for uncompromising Republicans, polled 1,412 votes for Sinn Féin, which retained at least the semblance of an organisation in Clare, while the National League obtained 2,830 votes.<sup>104</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal support was now dangerously weak in Clare and had slipped substantially since 1923. Over the summer the Farmers’ Union’s difficulties continued in Clare as the organisation struggled to pay its bills. The *Clare Champion* lamented its lack of an ‘active, numerous and determined membership’.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>101</sup> *Clare Champion*, 11 June 1927.

<sup>102</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary election results*, p. 118.

<sup>103</sup> Moss, *Political parties*, p. 157

<sup>104</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary election results*, p. 118.

<sup>105</sup> *Clare Champion*, 23 July 1927.

Cumann na nGaedheal failed to capitalise on the difficulties that beset the farmers' movement in Clare.

Soon after the murder of Kevin O'Higgins in July, the Doonbeg *cumann* passed a resolution recording their 'utter abhorrence of the dastardly murder of Mr. Kevin O'Higgins, Minister of Justice' who had 'added such lustre to Ireland by his dazzling brilliancy [as] displayed in the Council Chamber of the Commonwealth and in the deliberations of the League of Nations'.<sup>106</sup> Given that O'Higgins appeared in so many parts of the country at election time, he no doubt was a popular figure with Cumann na nGaedheal supporters, as the resolution from the Doonbeg *cumann* shows.

The government party campaign for the September 1927 election began at the end of August in Quin. The reorganising efforts of the spring and summer meant that Cumann na nGaedheal was at least spared the ignominy of having to manufacture a party machinery in the county in advance of the election. Cumann na nGaedheal speakers in Quin portrayed the upcoming election as a two-horse race between two rival governments. Clearly the strategy in Clare, as elsewhere, was to limit the potential damage smaller parties could inflict on Cumann na nGaedheal. In the event, the National League did not field a candidate in Clare, while the Farmers' Union's standing as a national organisation was effectively ended in June.<sup>107</sup> If ever there was an opportunity to gain a seat in Clare, this was it, as the snap election caught the opposition parties off guard. Clare Cumann na nGaedheal had an opportunity to attract the wider constitutional vote. Dr. Seán O'Dea, eventually selected as a party candidate, addressed the meeting in Quin. O'Dea said he did not hate England but loved Ireland, a message designed to differentiate his party from Fianna Fáil in the quest for nationalist votes.<sup>108</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal devoted more time to portraying Cosgrave in a positive light ever before. One such advert in the *Clare Champion* contrasted de Valera's record with that of Cosgrave. Cosgrave was 'All For Ireland' while de Valera was 'All For Empty Formula'.<sup>109</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal used the snap election to its advantage by attacking the other parties. In June it had been forced on the defensive by opponents.

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Moss, *Political parties*, p. 7.

<sup>108</sup> *Clare Champion*, 3 September 1927.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

The attendance at the Cumann na nGaedheal selection convention was much higher than it had been in May. While the quoted figure is probably an exaggeration, a report of the convention proceedings claimed that 350 delegates, including twenty-five clergymen, met in Ennis to select the party's candidates on 31 August. Whether the figure quoted is accurate or not, we can be reasonably certain that the second convention of the year was better attended, unless of course the reporter miscounted by over 200.

However, Fianna Fáil too had an opportunity to gain a seat. Whether the possibility of a gain for de Valera compelled him or not, Cosgrave addressed a Cumann na nGaedheal demonstration in Ennis on 4 September. Cumann na nGaedheal's weakness in Clare had always been a factor in attracting Cosgrave and high profile ministers to the constituency during elections. Cosgrave's tone was defiant and he spent much of his speech aggressively contrasting his approach to leadership with that of de Valera. According to Cosgrave, an empty formula had stopped de Valera from doing his duty earlier and forming a stronger and better opposition to the government inside the Dáil. As he had done in Ennis four years earlier, Cosgrave referred to de Valera's refusal to lead the Irish delegation at the Treaty talks. He stated 'My policy has always been that if there is a post of danger the man to take it is the man at the head of affairs'.<sup>110</sup> Cosgrave's speech went down well with party supporters as he rounded on de Valera for dividing the country. He went further:

It is little satisfaction to this country that Mr. de Valera has learned political sense now that we have lost three giant statesmen, whom this country could ill afford to lose - [voters] bring home to Fianna Fail [sic] the enormity of their political nonsense during the last five years in their own interests, in the interests of the country and in the interests of your own families.

Cosgrave was quite obviously in no mood to surrender power, and if the party had appeared defensive and weak in June, the snap election provided the organisation with a welcome opportunity to go on the offensive. Clare's former T.D. Eoin MacNeill also addressed the meeting in Ennis. Aggressively denouncing de Valera, MacNeill said Cumann na nGaedheal was not afraid of Fianna Fáil, and warned their policy would not succeed. O'Higgins's assassination seems to have further polarised

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 10 Sept. 1927.

relations between the two main parties and MacNeill's remarks at this rally should be considered in light of the fact that he had witnessed, first hand, the attack on O'Higgins in July.<sup>111</sup>

On the weekend before polling, a Cumann na nGaedheal meeting in Kilrush was interrupted by Republicans, some of whom had to be removed by the police. Old prejudices were again dragged up as Joseph Clancy, an IRA and National army veteran, told the meeting that he had received no help in fighting the Black and Tans from 'the heroes who were now anxious to distinguish themselves by interrupting the meeting'.<sup>112</sup> This type of exchange was typical of election meetings in this period.<sup>113</sup> O'Dea told supporters that a win for the Cosgrave government was the only hope for the country. At Crusheen, Bourke described Cumann na nGaedheal as a farmers' party and a labour party, the 'true all Ireland Party in the Free State'.<sup>114</sup> This meeting was reported in the *Irish Independent* under the heading 'A strenuous effort by government party'. Meetings took place right across the county, in much the same vein as previous electoral contests, with the organisational structure developed earlier in the year serving the party well for the September election.

**Figure 3: First preference vote obtained by successful Clare candidates in September 1927.**<sup>115</sup>

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Preference Vote</b>
Eamon de Valera	Fianna Fáil	13,902
Patrick Michael Kelly	Cumann na nGaedheal	5,646
Patrick Hogan	Labour	4,683
Martin Sexton	Fianna Fáil	3,506
Patrick Houlihan	Fianna Fáil	3,003

Cumann na nGaedheal's vote increased to 11,983 from its poor showing in June. However, yet again the party returned just one deputy from Clare. Fianna Fáil, the party pitching for the votes of smallholders, capitalised on the weakness of the Farmers' Party to gain a third seat in the constituency. Bonfires were lit in Miltown

<sup>111</sup> Regan, *Counter revolution*, p. 272.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 17 September 1927.

<sup>113</sup> Gardaí drew their batons to restore order to a Cumann na nGaedheal meeting in Cork city the previous June. *Irish Independent*, 8 June 1927.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 12 Sept., *Clare Champion*, 17 Sept 1927.

<sup>115</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary election results*, p. 125.

Malbay by Fianna Fáil supporters celebrating the election of Martin Sexton. In Clare, Fianna Fáil had broadened its appeal beyond its traditional anti-Treatyite base. While Cumann na nGaedheal had increased its vote, it had been presented with a golden opportunity to gain a second seat and had failed. Clare remained barren territory for Cumann na nGaedheal organisers.

### **Another slump in Clare activism**

Political organisations in Clare remained inactive for the remainder of 1927. Two elections in a matter of months had exhausted reserves of energy and finance. Those parties contesting local elections began to select candidates in the spring of 1928. Cumann na nGaedheal was not officially contesting these elections and activism was sporadic where it was not non-existent. In 1928 Clare Cumann na nGaedheal lost two members in early summer. When Canon Burke, the constituency treasurer, passed away in April the Clare executive met to pass a resolution of sympathy to his relatives.<sup>116</sup> Similarly, on 13 May the Bodyke *cumann* met to express its condolences to the family of a deceased activist, P.J. Hogan. The branch had lost ‘one whose sound advice and generous purse had always been at its disposal’.<sup>117</sup> These meetings aside, Cumann na nGaedheal activism in Clare plummeted again.

As his correspondence with Cosgrave shows, Bishop Fogarty tried to use his influence to procure information.<sup>118</sup> Enquiring about the division of lands at Claureen in Co. Clare, Fogarty was assured by Cosgrave that they would be redistributed as ‘expeditiously’ as possible. Bishop Fogarty continued to show great loyalty to Cosgrave. In November, he warned Cosgrave of disparaging remarks that had been made by American visitors to Ennis. The visitors alleged that Cumann na nGaedheal had secured funds from the British government for party and election purposes. Later, on being rumbled, the two Americans claimed to have been misrepresented by Fogarty. A furious Cosgrave wrote to each man to refute the original suggestion: ‘I doubt if you fully realise my feelings in this matter. I know of course that my opponents have made charges of this kind against me, but I had hoped that my friends

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<sup>116</sup> *Irish Independent*, 1 May 1928.

<sup>117</sup> *Clare Champion*, 19 May 1928.

<sup>118</sup> W.T. Cosgrave to Bishop Fogarty, 24 Oct. 1928 (KDA, Bishop Fogarty papers, 4/28/i).

[.] before being satisfied that such charges were true [.] would have given me the opportunity of refuting them'.<sup>119</sup>

Cumann na nGaedheal's organisation in Clare again disintegrated. It was largely dormant in Clare during 1929 and 1930 although, as has been pointed out, other political organisations also showed a lack of activity in the constituency. However, given the strength of the Fianna Fáil vote in Clare, de Valera's party at least had a rich reservoir of support to tap into if required. In early 1931 Cumann na nGaedheal yet again had to begin the arduous task of rebuilding its organisation across county Clare as it had failed to grow and develop independently following previous efforts to establish the party machine.

### **Reorganising in 1931**

In January, the new party organiser for Clare, J.J. Dineen, participated in the revival of the old branch in Doonaha. Dineen oversaw the election of a new committee and told the branch it was important that each district was in close touch with the party through strong organisation.<sup>120</sup> Meetings addressed by the minister Fionán Lynch also took place in Quilty and Kilrush. Patrick Kelly T.D., Liam Burke and Batt O'Connor joined Lynch for the meetings.<sup>121</sup> The minister used his visit to hear the concerns of fishermen in the district, before asking them to continue supporting the government party.<sup>122</sup> At Kilrush, there was criticism of the opposition while Burke, realising that the party faced problems in Clare, emphasised the importance of having a strong organisation in west Clare. To that end the services of an organiser would be made available in the district. Lynch heard a number of deputations before departing. On 8 February Doonbeg Cumann na nGaedheal met to select its delegates for the newly formed Kilrush area executive. The well attended

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<sup>119</sup> W.T. Cosgrave to Judge Campbell, 9 Nov.1928 (ibid., 5/28/ii).

<sup>120</sup> *Clare Champion*, 24 Jan. 1931.

<sup>121</sup> For a discussion of the evolution of Cumann na nGaedheal policy towards the fisheries see Micheál Ó Fathartaigh, 'Cumann na nGaedheal, sea fishing and west Galway, 1923-32' in *IHS*, xxxvi, no. 141 (May 2008), pp 72-90.

<sup>122</sup> *Clare Champion*, 7 Feb. 1931.

meeting also passed a resolution calling on the Land Commission to repair two ‘impassable’ roads in the district.<sup>123</sup>

Burke again travelled to Clare in March, to attend a well attended Kilrush executive meeting. If the strength of a party in an area depended on the success of its organisers,<sup>124</sup> then the frequent visits of the party’s general secretary to Clare indicated Cumann na nGaedheal’s continued weakness in the constituency. Officers for the executive were elected and a report on organisational progress was read in the presence of Burke. Based on the report, it was decided to continue the work of forming branches in as yet unorganised parishes.<sup>125</sup> There was praise for Lynch from the Chairperson of Kilrush Urban Council, who was present to thank the Minister for the sympathetic hearing he had given locals during his visit and for allocating the sum of £1,500 for the rebuilding of the market house. The frequent visits of Lynch reflected the party’s desire to court the fishermen’s vote in the constituency. The process of branch formation continued on 19 April with officers elected to the committee of a new *cumann* in Kilkee.<sup>126</sup>

In early 1931, there was an urgency about Cumann na nGaedheal attempts to organise county Clare that had not been seen in the county before. In 1925 a strong branch structure had been put in place only to wither away. On the eve of the June 1927 election the organisation was hurriedly patched but again disintegrated and became dormant after the contest. Now the party was laying down firm organisational roots in the Clare constituency. May brought a further intensification of Cumann na nGaedheal political organisation in Clare. On 1 May delegates representing Scariff, Bodyke, O’Gonnelloe, Whitegate and Tuamgraney met to form an executive for east Clare. Regrets were expressed that Cumann na nGaedheal had no active organisation in east Clare but expressed hope that this was about to change. An organising committee was formed to arrange details for a public meeting in Scariff with Minister for Agriculture, Patrick Hogan.<sup>127</sup>

In the weeks following the meeting, there were further Cumann na nGaedheal organisational efforts in east Clare, while the Bodyke Farmers’ Union resolved to

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 14 Feb. 1931.

<sup>124</sup> Moss, *Political parties*, p. 99.

<sup>125</sup> *Clare Champion*, 28 Mar. 1931.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 25 Apr. 1931.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 9 May 1931.



present an address of welcome to the Minister for Agriculture on his visit to Scariff. According to the *Clare Champion* report, over 500 people gave Hogan an attentive hearing in Scariff. Dr. O'Connor introduced Hogan as the 'best Minister for Agriculture in Europe' while Kelly optimistically assured his audience Cumann na nGaedheal would gain a seat in Clare at the next election. The deputy urged supporters to 'get ready from now onwards in the work of organisation'. The government party was clearly on an election footing and determined to improve its electoral machinery in the county. In his address, Hogan nodded to the party's revolutionary heritage noting that many east Clare men prominent in the War of Independence and Civil War had played an important role in establishing a 'decent civilised State'.<sup>128</sup> Dr. T.F. O'Higgins accompanied Hogan on his visit to Clare and described Fianna Fáil policy as the very antithesis of Republicanism which, he suggested, should be about the 'purest and broadest form of democracy' before stating that the army and police were 'emblems of Irish nationality'. Fianna Fáil, alleged O'Higgins, would prove a 'shield and barrier between the criminal and justice'. Referring to the onset of the Great Depression, O'Higgins assured those present that the country's credit still stood high and would do so long as the Cosgrave government continued implementing sensible policies. Cumann na nGaedheal's artillery was focussed on the one party that could remove it from power. Cumann na nGaedheal tried to shore up support by attacking Fianna Fáil's law-and-order credentials and by portraying their alternative economic policies as a gamble at a time of economic depression. Cumann na nGaedheal was attempting to sell itself as a safe bet as the state sailed into stormy waters. This went hand in hand with an all pervasive red scare in the early 1930s.

In the autumn there was further Cumann na nGaedheal organising activity in Clare. New branches were formed while existing ones began to hold meetings again after a quiet summer. In September Kelly addressed a well attended meeting in Miltown Malbay. Miltown had been at the forefront of the struggle for independence and had 'stood solidly behind the Cumann na nGaedheal party' since, according to Kelly. Again the party tried to claim a direct lineage with the revolutionary period.

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

Dineen, the constituency organiser was in attendance in Miltown Malbay and a new committee was elected.<sup>129</sup>

Clare's continued state of disturbance was illustrated on 14 September in two shootings. The IRA remained strong in west Clare much to the chagrin of Eoin O'Duffy.<sup>130</sup> William McInerney, a prominent supporter of Cumann na nGaedheal, was lucky to survive having been shot by attackers just outside his home in the early hours of 14 September. On the same night, an attempt was made on the life of Mr. James Lynch, state solicitor for county Clare.<sup>131</sup> Lynch was due to participate in a case at Kilrush District Court on 15 September where the Land Commission were plaintiffs.<sup>132</sup> The incidents played on Cumann na nGaedheal fears that a communistic conspiracy was afoot with Fogarty's condemnation of the outrages on 20 September suggesting that a group in the country were adopting the methods and principles of Soviet Russia.<sup>133</sup> Whatever about the motives of the attackers, the outrages had the effect of hardening Cumann na nGaedheal attitudes in Clare. On his second visit to Clare in less than a year, Lynch described the outrages as being part of a widespread Communist conspiracy aimed at intimidating the people and overthrowing the state.<sup>134</sup> A Cumann na nGaedheal west Clare executive meeting on 27 September was dominated by the outrages. Prominent Cumann na nGaedheal member Fr. Michael Breen, a former revolutionary Sinn Féiner and fishermen's representative,<sup>135</sup> presiding made reference to the absence of McInerney because he 'had raised his voice in condemnation of an illegal organisation'. Breen said it was only thanks to God that McInerney had not been killed in the attack.<sup>136</sup> The executive went on to pass a motion condemning the attempted murder of McInerney and recent hay burnings in the area. A resolution was passed calling on the government to 'quench' the 'evil campaign of terror' that threatened Church and state.<sup>137</sup> At this time

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 12 Sept. 1931.

<sup>130</sup> McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy*, p. 181.

<sup>131</sup> Moss, *Political parties*, p. 175.

<sup>132</sup> *Clare Champion*, 19 Sept. 1931.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 26 Sept. 1931.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> List of Sinn Féin branch personnel, undated (NAI, Sinn Féin and Cumann na Poblachta papers, 1094/13/3).

<sup>136</sup> *Clare Champion*, 3 Oct. 1931.

<sup>137</sup> The Clare shootings were a source of national newspaper comment in the latter half of 1931. In addition, the outrages were discussed by other constituency organisations of Cumann na nGaedheal. At a south Sligo meeting of Cumann na nGaedheal Martin Roddy T.D. criticised local councils who had 'not

supporters of the party believed the government was guiding the country through the Depression with some success. Breen ‘could not understand the mentality of those who, at a time when other Governments were falling in financial ruin, could attempt to bring about the ruin of this little island, which so far had at least been able to weather the gale of depression’.<sup>138</sup> The Clare outrages fed into the ‘red scare’ which would form the backdrop to the 1932 general election.

Liam Burke had accompanied Lynch on his trip to Miltown Malbay. Burke believed the party had won enough votes in September 1927 to secure two seats but had not done so due to inadequate organisation in the constituency. He suggested that improved structures and activism were the key to securing two seats at the next election. Perhaps Cumann na nGaedheal believed an alliance with farming interests could see it take one of the Fianna Fáil seats; after all, there had been a Farmers’ Party seat in the constituency before it ran into difficulties in 1927. Various grass-root activists were of a more pessimistic view, with a Mr. F. Maloney suggesting that keeping the organisation alive in Clare would in itself prove difficult in the face of a de Valera onslaught. A meeting of the recently reorganised Ennis branch took place on 8 October. Kerrin, chairing the meeting, urged those present to increase party membership while it was also brought to the meeting’s attention that a party of men had visited deputy Kelly’s home to warn him about the forthcoming Dáil vote on the Public Safety Bill.<sup>139</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal seemed to be under siege.

In October and November Cumann na nGaedheal branches at Barefield and Newmarket were reorganised with seventy members enrolling at Newmarket. At their next meeting Newmarket Cumann na nGaedheal passed a resolution asking for a grant to repair damaged roads in the district.<sup>140</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal seems to have genuinely believed it could finally win two seats in the long problematic constituency of Clare. Various meetings of the party bemoaned the fact it was under-represented in the county. Such sentiments were in evidence at meetings of the west Clare and mid Clare executives where members expressed their determination to work for a second

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the courage to condemn the shootings in Clare’. *Irish Press*, 12 Oct. 1931. The west Clare executive meeting was also reported on. *Irish Press, Irish Independent*, 2 Oct. 1931.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Clare Champion*, 10 Oct. 1931.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 Nov. 1931.

seat.<sup>141</sup> Sensing that an election was imminent, given the levels of Cumann na nGaedheal activism,<sup>142</sup> Fianna Fáil branches in Clare began to organise more effectively around this time. Fianna Fáil's organisation in Clare had declined in 1929 and 1930. In 1928 Clare came under the heading 'good activity' and the party had fifty-seven branches in the county. However this number declined to thirty-seven in 1929 and twenty-six in 1930.<sup>143</sup> Like Cumann na nGaedheal, Fianna Fáil activism declined in non election years, albeit from a stronger position. Reorganised or newly established Cumann na nGaedheal *cumainn* selected delegates to the party's selection convention throughout December and January 1932.<sup>144</sup>

### **February 1932 general election**

Cosgrave addressed a large Cumann na nGaedheal meeting in Ennis on 10 January 1932. The meeting aroused great interest in the county, partly for the novelty that microphones and loudspeakers were deployed for the occasion.<sup>145</sup> New technology was now being utilised for electoral purposes. A social function to coincide with Cosgrave's visit was also organised by Cumann na nGaedheal. Such events, as we will see later, became ever more a feature of the party's life from 1927 onwards. Mulcahy chaired the Clare selection convention the previous day and stayed in the county to address Cosgrave's rally in Ennis. Banners and streamers welcomed Cosgrave to Ennis while, in a pitch for the votes of the constitutional tradition, he shared the platform with Redmond, whom Desmond FitzGerald had denounced so venomously in 1927. Cosgrave's speech contrasted sharply with that delivered during his previous visit to Ennis. This time he focussed on the economic Depression facing the world. Cosgrave predicted far-reaching changes over the coming five years and pointed out that the policies of the past were being 'laid aside' in many countries. Cosgrave continued by saying that Ireland could not 'plough a lonely furrow' but would have to adapt and take advantage of whatever opportunities changing

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 Nov., 5 Dec. 1931.

<sup>142</sup> Moss notes that the two main parties watched each other closely and that public meetings were often organised so as to counter one already arranged by the other party. Moss, *Political parties*, p. 68.

<sup>143</sup> Brian A. Reynolds, 'The formation and development of Fianna Fáil, 1926-1933', (Ph.D dissertation, TCD, 1976) appendix vi-vii.

<sup>144</sup> *Nenagh Guardian*, 9 Jan. 1932.

<sup>145</sup> *Clare Champion*, 10 Jan. 1932.

conditions may afford.<sup>146</sup> Cosgrave asked voters to select a government which had proved itself one of action. Admitting he disagreed with captain Redmond on minor issues, and that both came from different political traditions, Cosgrave said they both now recognised the danger of Fianna Fáil and both stood for ordered government at home and ‘straight dealing in our relations abroad’. Redmond himself went on to say that he was answering his country’s call by appearing on a Cumann na nGaedheal platform and that the men of the now defunct Irish party would have responded similarly. Cumann na nGaedheal was portraying itself as the heir to the revolution in some quarters and as the inheritor of John Redmond’s legacy in others, a synthesis of diverse national traditions. In this there was a clear continuity with the founding objectives of Cumann na nGaedheal as expressed by Cosgrave in Limerick in 1923. Michael Tierney also addressed the meeting in Ennis while the dance organised to coincide with Cosgrave’s visit was attended by 150 couples.

In 1932, Cumann na nGaedheal focussed its election campaign on the western constituencies knowing that Fianna Fáil’s message was resonating in those areas. Cosgrave toured all the western counties and, when not working their own constituencies, ministers were asked to travel westwards in support of the party.<sup>147</sup> Meetings followed right across Clare for the duration of the election campaign. Party candidates addressed meetings at Tulla, Kilmally and Connolly at the end of January. At Tulla, Kerrin criticised Fianna Fáil policy and said his party was underrepresented in the constituency.<sup>148</sup> At Ennistymon, Redmond again spoke from a Cumann na nGaedheal platform, this time stating that he was answering Cosgrave’s call to cooperate in doing the nation’s work and that as a lifelong constitutionalist he saw Cumann na nGaedheal as the one national and constitutional party fighting the election. Cumann na nGaedheal, he said, was the party that had built up the country, carried out its work for all sectors of the community and stood for the forces of law-and-order.<sup>149</sup> At the same meeting Kerrin was subjected to interruptions while Kelly, hand firmly grasping the parish pump, listed out all that he had achieved for the county in his time as a T.D. At Doonbeg, Cumann na nGaedheal had the audacity to criticise the Fianna Fáil controlled county council even though they had not officially

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 16 Jan. 1932.

<sup>147</sup> Moss, *Political parties*, p. 179.

<sup>148</sup> *Clare Champion*, 30 Jan. 1932.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 6 Feb. 1932.

contested the elections themselves. On 7 February further Cumann na nGaedheal meetings took place with Kelly advising a meeting in Quilty that they would be better served by increasing Cumann na nGaedheal's representation in the county.<sup>150</sup> Was this a return to zero-sum electioneering? Bishop Fogarty,<sup>151</sup> known to dislike de Valera intensely, made a generous contribution of £25 in private to the Cumann na nGaedheal election fund and was thanked by Cosgrave, on behalf of the government, for doing so.<sup>152</sup> Highlighting the vacuous nature of Cumann na nGaedheal's attacks on its credentials, Fianna Fáil demonstrated its commitment to Catholicism during the 1932 election campaign. De Valera affirmed his belief in Catholic doctrine at numerous meetings and it was reported in the *Irish Press* that the would-be President silently recited the Angelus on being interrupted by the Church bell during an election meeting in Tulla Co. Clare. His supporters followed their leader's example by silently praying in unison in what must have been quite a spectacle.<sup>153</sup>

Cumann na nGaedheal's machine held its own in the constituency of Clare, but the party's vote remained static. Cumann na nGaedheal's overall vote in Clare declined by little more than 600 votes since September 1927, while Fianna Fáil seems to have benefitted most from the absence of a Farmers' Party candidate with its vote increasing by over 3,000.<sup>154</sup> Small farming interests in the former Clare Farmers' Union seem to have aligned themselves with de Valera - former Farmers' Party T.D. Conor Hogan appeared on a Fianna Fáil platform during the campaign.<sup>155</sup> The failure to successfully court the farming vote in Clare scuppered Cumann na nGaedheal's hopes of a gain. Patrick Kelly lost his seat to party colleague Patrick Bourke.

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 Feb. 1932.

<sup>151</sup> Dermot Keogh, *The Vatican, the bishops and Irish politics* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 133.

<sup>152</sup> W.T. Cosgrave to Bishop Fogarty, 9 Feb. 1932 (KDA, Bishop Fogarty papers, 34/32/iii).

<sup>153</sup> D. George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (New York, 1996), p. 348.

<sup>154</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary election results*, p. 132.

<sup>155</sup> *Clare Champion*, 30 Jan. 1932.

*Figure 4: First preference vote Obtained by successful Clare candidates in February 1932.<sup>156</sup>*

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Preference Vote</b>
Eamon de Valera	Fianna Fáil	12,504
Patrick Hogan	Labour	5,701
Martin Sexton	Fianna Fáil	5,444
Patrick Burke	Cumann na nGaedheal	5,254
Sean O'Grady	Fianna Fáil	4,002

### **Party of opposition**

Fianna Fáil's organisation in Clare benefitted from its ascent to power. Fianna Fáil branches became much more active during 1932 and on 10 April over 1,000 people greeted de Valera in Ennis on his return as the new President of the Executive Council.<sup>157</sup> Meanwhile, at the Cumann na nGaedheal annual convention in May, Fr. Breen was elected to the National Executive as the party adjusted to its new role in opposition. Clare branches of Cumann na nGaedheal remained quiet immediately after the loss of power although the Army Comrades Association (ACA) spread through the county from March 1932.

As noted previously, the dissolution of the Dáil in January 1933 came as a surprise at every level in Cumann na nGaedheal. In Clare, the organisation awaited instructions from Dublin before simply calling on all those who had attended the previous selection convention to gather in the Queens Hotel Ennis on 7 January to select the party's candidates for this election.<sup>158</sup> On 7 January, 120 Cumann na nGaedheal delegates turned up at short notice to select candidates. Only two were selected, with Thomas Falvey, formerly of the Farmers' Union joining Burke on the party ticket. This time Cumann na nGaedheal sought to secure the support of disgruntled farmers, though the new Farmers' and Ratepayers' League had already found its niche there, particularly among larger farmers. Continued ill health stopped Kelly seeking re-election. In Clare, T. Brown acted as the party's director of

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<sup>156</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary election results*, p. 132.

<sup>157</sup> *Clare Champion*, 16 Apr. 1932.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 Jan. 1933.

elections, while an election meeting took place on 8 January at Kilkee as the party's campaign took on much the same character as before.<sup>159</sup> Blueshirts, or the 'white army' as they were known in the international press,<sup>160</sup> were visible at a Cumann na nGaedheal meeting in Ennis on 15 January. Disturbances between this new Treatyite force and Fianna Fáil sympathisers were common across the country as emboldened Republicans sought to disrupt the meetings of their political opponents (see chapters four and five). Some interrupters had to be removed from the meeting in Ennis but the speakers, including Michael Tierney, were able to conclude the meeting.<sup>161</sup> Centre Party meetings in Clare were also interrupted. Rival Fianna Fáil and Cumann na nGaedheal public meetings took place in Killaloe on 16 January. Cumann na nGaedheal advised farmers not to part with their stock until after the election when they would get a better price under a Cosgrave-led government. The Fianna Fáil supporting *Irish Press* claimed that Cumann na nGaedheal's meeting ended with cheers for De Valera.<sup>162</sup> Moreover, the paper reported a breathtaking display of Orwellian *doublethink* by Fianna Fáil's Patrick Houlihan. He apparently told his supporters in Killaloe that the Economic War had been dragged out as a result of the 'traitorous opposition of the Cumann na nGaedheal Party'.<sup>163</sup> Meanwhile, as he toured Clare, de Valera claimed that many Cumann na nGaedheal supporters had switched allegiance to Fianna Fáil.<sup>164</sup> This was the era before opinion polls and exit polls so it is impossible to corroborate the Fianna Fáil leader's statement. Cumann na nGaedheal's vote in the constituency dropped by a staggering 4,000 votes, though this figure corresponds with the 4,041 votes obtained by the Centre Party. Cumann na nGaedheal had fallen between two stools in Clare. Small farmers and smallholders favoured de Valera while the commercial farmers found a home in the Centre Party. Divided, the two parties fell with Cosgrave writing to Fogarty 'the result is disappointing, no one knows what the cost may be'.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 14 Jan. 1933.

<sup>160</sup> *New York Times*, 10 Jan., *Manchester Guardian*, 9 Jan. 1933.

<sup>161</sup> *Clare Champion*, 21 Jan. 1933.

<sup>162</sup> *Irish Press*, 17 Jan. 1933.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> *Clare Champion*, 28 Jan. 1933.

<sup>165</sup> W.T. Cosgrave to Bishop Fogarty, 31 Jan. 1933 (KDA, Fogarty papers, 50/33/i).



*Figure 5: First Preference vote obtained by successful candidates in Clare 1933.*<sup>166</sup>

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Preference Vote</b>
Eamon de Valera	Fianna Fáil	18,574
Patrick Burke	Cumann na nGaedheal	5,254
Patrick Hogan	Labour	4,307
Patrick Houlihan	Fianna Fáil	3,289
Sean O'Grady	Fianna Fáil	3,079

On 11 February a letter appeared in the *Clare Champion* from Liam Burke thanking Cumann na nGaedheal followers for their support and efforts on behalf of the party. Burke expressed hope that the party would one day form a government again and add to its achievements in the first decade of independence.<sup>167</sup> In April the Cumann na nGaedheal fight-back in Clare began. Mulcahy, spearheading efforts to remodel the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation,<sup>168</sup> travelled to the county on the weekend of 8 April to oversee root and branch reform of the organisation in the Clare constituency. The need to address the party's weakness in Clare was given serious attention by a new organisation committee formed in February 1933. The plan was to establish four district executives in the county and to reorganise all *cumainn*. A convention was arranged for 29 April where the best means of contesting the upcoming local elections would be discussed.<sup>169</sup> It was decided that an annual constituency convention should take place in Clare each April.<sup>170</sup>

There was no shortage of gusto as Mulcahy addressed a constituency convention in Clare at the end of April. Mulcahy claimed that the party was steeped in the spirit of the old national organisations of the past. According to Mulcahy, 'the spirit that enabled the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation' to do the work it had done 'had been a combination of the spirits that came together in 1916 [to raise] the flag of

<sup>166</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary election results*, p. 138.

<sup>167</sup> *Clare Champion*, 11 Feb. 1933.

<sup>168</sup> See chapter two; Revised scheme of organisation, Feb. 1933 (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy papers, P7b/90/10).

<sup>169</sup> *Clare Champion*, 15 Apr. 1933.

<sup>170</sup> Plan for organisation of Cumann na nGaedheal in County Clare, undated, [Mar. 1933?] (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy papers, P7b/90/23).

Irish nationality'.<sup>171</sup> The convention called for a strong party performance in the local elections and the need to cooperate with the Centre Party was recognised. The reorganising efforts continued over the summer of 1933 as a much more dynamic Cumann na nGaedheal party organisation developed in Clare. In June, Longford T.D. Seán MacEoin addressed a meeting in Ennis which dealt with the Economic War, the issue that helped mobilise opposition to Fianna Fáil in the summer of 1933. MacEoin, disingenuously claimed that Cumann na nGaedheal had been defeated in the election by a well organised minority and stressed the importance of developing a strong party organisation. At a time when Treatyite politicians were looking enviously at the organisational reach of the ACA. MacEoin also called on young men to join the Blueshirts so as to 'voluntarily support a State depleted of resources'.<sup>172</sup> Burke, addressing the same meeting, said that Fianna Fáil's main policy was to 'exterminate Cumann na nGaedheal'. Various speakers paid tribute to the work of the Blueshirts before the meeting adjourned. Mulcahy returned to Clare at the end of June to oversee the new scheme of organisation for the Clare constituency. Mulcahy urged Cumann na nGaedheal supporters to 'shake off' their apathy and work to return the party to government. Numerous people attended the meeting in their blue shirts, showing the degree of overlap in membership between the two organisations at that time.<sup>173</sup>

The evidence to hand suggests that the January 1933 election defeat spearheaded a revitalisation of the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation in county Clare. Perhaps the increase in activity can be put down to the fact that supporters had been stirred to action by the party's stint in opposition. National efforts to reform the party machine must not be overlooked and as mentioned, the problems in Clare exercised much of the new organising committee's thoughts. Unless it reformed, the party risked having no representation in Clare. Meetings in Clare were frequent throughout the summer of 1933 as de Valera's Economic War gave the party a significant issue to take a stand on. Thomas Crowe, the new constituency organiser, helped to develop a live organisation throughout the county. Despite a strong vote in the January election, the Centre Party's machine was quiet in Clare during 1933 with the result that in this constituency, most of the impetus for the establishment of Fine

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<sup>171</sup> *Clare Champion*, 6 May 1933.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 June 1933.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 July 1933.

Gael came directly from Cumann na nGaedheal. The party machine had been rejuvenated by the summer of 1933, displaying new structures, energy and heightened enthusiasm. Party meetings showed the extent to which membership overlapped with the Blueshirt movement. When Fine Gael was launched in September, in Clare, it picked up where Cumann na nGaedheal had left off in being a reenergised opposition party machine.

## **Longford/Westmeath Cumann na nGaedheal**

The following chapter will examine the strength of the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation in the midland constituency of Longford/Westmeath. This constituency comprised the small, north-midland county of Longford nestled into the bigger county of Westmeath lying to its south and east. As a study of the party apparatus in a two-county constituency, this chapter highlights some interesting points of contrast in the approach of the organisation within each county, and the effectiveness of party structures across a large and diverse geographical area. Accordingly, the chapter will detail the workings of the party's structures from branch to constituency level across the two counties, while examining party activism between the years 1923 to 1933.

### **Political background**

During the War of Independence, Longford was the most violent county outside Dublin or Munster, with Seán MacEoin ranking amongst the best-known guerrilla commanders of the period. Volunteer activity was centred on the village of Ballinalee in the northern portion of the county with the North Longford flying column under MacEoin's command exploiting the region's more rugged terrain effectively in their encounters with crown forces. Westmeath, like south Longford, played a somewhat more muted role in the conflict. There, farming was more prosperous, with better land, bigger farms, and a substantial, rural bourgeoisie having been created through the various land purchase schemes of the previous three decades. Dairying was practiced in both counties, particularly Longford, while in Westmeath there was also a considerable social gap between smallholders and those farmers occupying larger,

grazing ranches.<sup>1</sup> Antagonism between the two strata was evident in many parts of the country, sometimes resulting in outrages being perpetrated against the occupiers of the larger, grazing farms (though much less prevalent than in Clare).

It is worth pointing out that the only political organisations of significance in the two counties before 1917 had been those associated with Home Rule. Longford and Westmeath are among the five counties of ‘middle Ireland’ chosen by Michael Wheatley in his study of the supporting grass-root organisations of the Irish party.<sup>2</sup> The United Irish League (UIL) became in effect the local, rural, organisation of the Irish party and had twenty-two Longford branches in 1901.<sup>3</sup> However the UIL was in a state of decline by the time the Great War broke out in 1914, with most believing that Ireland would soon achieve a form of self government given that the Home Rule Bill was on the statute books. Moreover, Wheatley argues that land purchase resulted in organisational decay as farmers became less likely to become politically active.<sup>4</sup> The Irish party failed to adapt to the changes that were taking place in Irish society and, as in Clare, it began to lose followers to Griffith’s monarchical Sinn Féin party as early as 1907. In spite of a decline in UIL activism and some defections to Griffith’s party, most notably William Ganly, who in 1907 was involved in the first Sinn Féin branch formed in the county,<sup>5</sup> the Home Rule movement remained dominant in Longford and Westmeath. UIL membership fluctuated in both counties between 1904 and the outbreak of the Great War. By 1910, UIL branches nationwide had declined from 1,357 in 1905 to 1,076. There were fourteen affiliated branches in Longford and nine (including a ladies branch) in Westmeath although the actual number was probably higher with units slow to pay their fees.<sup>6</sup> While the UIL declined, another Irish party-supporting organisation flourished.<sup>7</sup> There were fourteen Ancient Order of Hibernians branches in Longford at this time. As such, with Sinn Féin in decline by 1914, it seemed that numerous internal divisions posed the only threat to the continued dominance of the Irish party.

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<sup>1</sup> Terence Dooley, *‘The land for the people’: the land question in Independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish party: provincial Ireland, 1910-1916* (New York, 2005), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Marie Coleman, *County Longford and the Irish revolution, 1910-1923* (Dublin, 2003), p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish party*, pp 22-3.

<sup>5</sup> Coleman, *County Longford and the Irish revolution*, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> National Directory, minutes of meeting, 10 Feb. 1910 (NLI, UIL, minute book of the National Directory, MS 708).

<sup>7</sup> Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish party*, p. 50.

It is apparent that there was considerable annoyance at the prolonged postponement of Home Rule and in the aftermath of the 1916 Rising defections from the movement as a whole increased. After the rebellion, disappointment with Redmond's party was exploited by a rejuvenated Sinn Féin, whose growth around this time has been described in the opening chapter. A shift from the Irish party to Sinn Féin was manifest in county Longford, as prominent Home Rulers like the McGuinness brothers Frank and Joseph switched to Sinn Féin. Indeed Joseph McGuinness, formerly J.P. Farrell M.P.'s right-hand man, became leader of Sinn Féin in north Longford.<sup>8</sup> Conscription was exploited by Sinn Féin during the South Longford by-election of May 1917, an election which proved indicative of a transformation that was taking place in nationalist politics across Ireland. MacEoin believed that the 'Conscription crisis' compelled many Home Rulers, disillusioned with the Irish party, to join the ranks of Sinn Féin. Gradually, Sinn Féin replaced the Irish party as the voice of nationalist Ireland.<sup>9</sup> A number of Sinn Féiners had served their apprenticeship in the Home Rule movement, and would take lessons learned from their involvement with the Irish party into Sinn Féin and the parties that emerged from it after the Civil War. Sinn Féin rather than the Irish party now represented the disaffection of a new generation of nationalists radicalised by the Great War, the 1916 Rising and the threat of conscription.<sup>10</sup>

The 1917 South Longford by-election itself was contested on behalf of Sinn Féin by Joseph McGuinness, who at the time, was imprisoned in Lewes jail for his part in the Rising. Sinn Féin posters depicted a jailed McGuinness, clad in prison uniform, alongside the imaginative slogan 'Put Him In To Get Him Out'. The result showed that the tide was on the way out for the Irish party. Not even the Union-Jack waving wives of Longford men fighting for Britain in the Great War could prevent the Sinn Féin candidate from emerging victorious. In the 1918 general election, McGuinness successfully defended his seat from the Irish party challenger, J.P. Farrell, founder of the nationalist *Longford Leader*. The relationships forged during the by-election campaign proved lasting and were important during the War of Independence. Ballinalee and the surrounding area became the scene of fierce battles between Seán MacEoin's flying column and the Black and Tans and Auxiliaries

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>10</sup> Richard English, *Irish Freedom: the history of Nationalism in Ireland* (London, 2006), p. 282.

stationed in the county. In the 'Battle of Ballinalee', the IRA successfully prevented the Black and Tans' effort to burn the village. In 1921 in what became known as the Clonfin ambush, MacEoin's column took the surrender of two lorry loads of Auxiliaries. MacEoin was strongly supported by the parish priest in Clonbroney, Fr. Patrick Markey. His support of MacEoin and his men attracted the unwelcome attention of the crown forces.<sup>11</sup>

Westmeath was represented in the Dáil by staunch Republican Laurence Ginnell. Ginnell was appointed director of propaganda in the second Dáil and was a well respected figure. Ginnell's background was in Home Rule politics, where he had been regarded as a rebel for speaking out on the plight of tenant farmers in the late nineteenth century. He was expelled from the Irish party in 1910 and formed his own machine in North Westmeath in opposition to the UIL branches there. He lived up to the rebel tag by defecting to Sinn Féin at a time when the party had few followers,<sup>12</sup> and brought his supporters with him.<sup>13</sup> During the War of Independence the south Westmeath and south Roscommon volunteers co-operated as the Athlone brigade. Westmeath saw little republican action during the revolutionary war. Its terrain was unsuited to ambushes and its largest town was dominated by the British garrison. Even in 'such a superficially quiet area, the Black and Tan and Auxiliary presence resulted in burnings and lootings'.<sup>14</sup> Volunteers saw active service during the conflict and a well planned ambush at Parkwood near Moate was not so well executed. Volunteers intended to capture the lorries, arms and ammunition of a Black and Tan patrol before using the dark green and khaki uniforms of the defeated 'tans' to get inside the barracks in Moate. However, the patrol contained a larger contingent of crown forces than anticipated and the volunteers retreated from the ambushade without suffering any casualties.<sup>15</sup>

Ginnell strongly opposed the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The high profile deputy's opposition to the settlement did not stir widespread violence in county Westmeath, although a Free State soldier was killed in Glasson during a skirmish with anti-Treaty forces in the autumn of 1922.<sup>16</sup> Ginnell died in the United States in 1923 and became

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<sup>11</sup> Information kindly supplied by Father Tom Murray.

<sup>12</sup> Liam Cox, *Moate, county Westmeath: a history of the town and district* (Athlone, 1981), p. 178.

<sup>13</sup> Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish party*, p. 117.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence* (Dublin, 2004), p. 144.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.180.

a martyr-like figure for Republicans across the two counties with numerous commemorative events taking place in the years that followed. In Longford, where the IRA had been active during the War of Independence, there was near unanimous support for the Treaty with most people in the county being desirous of peace after witnessing so much bloodshed. Longford County Council passed a motion urging acceptance of the settlement as did other public bodies such as the Granard rural district council.<sup>17</sup> In Longford, the military and political leadership of the separatist movement, MacEoin and McGuinness, rowed in behind the deal. Joe McGuinness died soon after being selected as a pro-Treaty candidate for the June 1922 'Pact' election by delegates attending a pro-Treaty convention in Edgeworthstown on 20 May.<sup>18</sup> The Treatyite General Election Committee approached his brother Frank to stand in his place in the Longford/Westmeath constituency.<sup>19</sup> The anti-Treaty IRA was not a significant force in county Longford with most men who had fought with MacEoin following his lead. In spite of Ginnell's opposition to the settlement, there was considerable support for the Treaty in Westmeath also. In December 1921, the secretary of the Westmeath Farmers' Union informed MacEoin of his organisation's unanimous support for the Treaty as expressed at a recent meeting in Mullingar.<sup>20</sup> As such, there was quite a solid pro-Treaty base across the two counties and the events described above provide the background to efforts to establish a pro-government political machine in the constituency of Longford/Westmeath from 1923 onwards.

### **Branch formation in Longford/Westmeath**

As has been described in previous chapters, the August 1923 election got in the way of efforts to bed down firm Cumann na nGaedheal roots in the constituencies in the aftermath of the party's official launch in April. That was especially true in Longford/Westmeath where Longford was energetically organised in early 1924 while Westmeath had to wait until 1925 before Cumann na nGaedheal properly took root. This reflects part of a theme that will emerge in this chapter: the

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<sup>17</sup> John Kiernan, clerk of Granard District council to Seán MacEoin, 31 Dec. 1921 (UCDA, Seán MacEoin papers, P151/81).

<sup>18</sup> Election sub committee, minutes of meeting, 18 May 1922 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>19</sup> Election sub committee, minutes of special meeting, 1 June 1922 (ibid.).

<sup>20</sup> Michael Ronan to Seán Mac Eoin, 31 Dec. 1921 (UCDA, Seán MacEoin papers, P151/83).



Longford/Westmeath Cumann na nGaedheal organisation rarely acted as a single, constituency unit. Cumann na nGaedheal's organisation behaved more or less independently in each county in spite of the party's official organisational structures and rules. For example, in considering a request for an advance on his election expenses from defeated Longford candidate Frank McGuinness's election agent, the Standing Committee decided that it could only deal with Longford as part of the constituency of Longford/Westmeath. As such, the committee summoned a joint meeting of its candidates across the constituency to discuss the matter.<sup>21</sup> Early in the party's life, there was scant evidence of organisational unity between the two counties comprising this constituency.

As in Clare, Cumann na nGaedheal's organisation in Longford/Westmeath was patchy in August 1923. That is not to say that branches were not formed; some were in the big towns, but they were established hurriedly and would need to be worked on after the election. Labour, anti-Treatyites, and the Farmers' Union were all better organised than the government party. In July a branch of Cumann na nGaedheal was launched in Longford town where 'a fairly large attendance of townspeople' gathered in the courthouse for the purpose of establishing a *cumann*.<sup>22</sup> Mr. Michael O'Hara, party organiser for Longford/Westmeath,<sup>23</sup> outlined to the assembled gathering the objects of Cumann na nGaedheal by stating that the party wished to 'combine the divergent elements of the nation in a common bond of citizenship in harmony with national security'.<sup>24</sup> To applause, the Cosgrave government was praised for their efforts before branch officers were elected. Steps were taken to form branches in 'Granard, Ballinalee, and other central districts in the county'.<sup>25</sup> By 29 July Cumann na nGaedheal had appeared in Lanesboro in south County Longford. At an after-Mass Cumann na nGaedheal election meeting in the town, various speakers including businessman P.J. McCrann, formerly active in the local Gaelic League,<sup>26</sup> boasted of their exploits during the War of Independence.<sup>27</sup> Clearly the Treatyites of County Longford were keen to identify with the revolution, reflecting the residual influence

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<sup>21</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 28 Sept. 1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>22</sup> *Longford Leader*, 14 July 1923.

<sup>23</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 22 June 1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>24</sup> *Longford Leader*, 14 July 1923.

<sup>25</sup> *Irish Independent*, 7 July 1923.

<sup>26</sup> Rathcline branch of the Gaelic League, 1 May 1919 (LCA, Leavy papers, P4/3).

<sup>27</sup> *Longford Leader*, 4 Aug. 1923.

of it in shaping their political beliefs post independence. It is clear that these meetings in the summer of 1923 had more of an electoral purpose than an organisational one. Cumann na nGaedheal was still a work in progress and of paramount importance now was securing a vote of confidence from the public rather than bedding down a strong branch structure.

Cumann na nGaedheal's appearance in county Westmeath was somewhat belated. A *Westmeath Examiner* editorial around the time of the party's launch in April 1923 stated that the old political organisations belonged to the past and warned voters to exercise caution when turning to the new ones that were emerging.<sup>28</sup> It would be August before the people of Westmeath were introduced to the new government party's machine. By 20 July, county Westmeath was allocated its own organiser with the appointment of Laurence Kelly.<sup>29</sup> On Sunday 5 August a Mullingar town branch of Cumann na nGaedheal was established, the first *cumann* to appear in the county. This was a more significant affair than the launch in Longford town had been and was attended by Kevin O'Higgins. Echoing the statements of party leaders, the meeting heard that Cumann na nGaedheal wanted each man, regardless of his class, to realise that he was first and foremost an Irishman. In his speech, O'Higgins summarised the events of the previous few years before declaring that his main objection to the anti-Treaty party was their attempt to dictate their views to the majority.<sup>30</sup> A priest, Fr. Macken was elected president of the new branch. As in Clare, numerous *cumainn* in Longford/Westmeath reserved a lead role for the local clergyman. Before independence the Church was the strongest organisation in provincial Ireland and priests played a significant role as community leaders, placing themselves at the heart of clubs and societies.<sup>31</sup> As witnessed in the previous chapter, priests often played a role in advising visiting land commissioners.

Further meetings took place in the run-up to the election. In Athlone, a burgeoning Cumann na nGaedheal branch was chaired by solicitor H.J. Walker. Walker presided at a successful rally in the town on 19 August.<sup>32</sup> In Kinnegad, the local priest presided at an election meeting, while the Mullingar town *cumann* organised a great rally in the town on 21 August. The Mullingar rally proved quite a

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<sup>28</sup> *Westmeath Examiner*, 28 Apr. 1923.

<sup>29</sup> Chief organiser's report, 20 July 1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>30</sup> *Westmeath Examiner*, 11 Aug. 1923.

<sup>31</sup> Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish party*, p. 70.

<sup>32</sup> *Irish Independent*, 20 Aug. 1923.

spectacle. A motor lorry decorated with tricolour flags was fitted out as a platform from which Cumann na nGaedheal speakers could address the townspeople.<sup>33</sup> P.W. Shaw, the Mullingar-based Cumann na nGaedheal candidate, stated that voters would choose between ordered government and anarchy, while reiterating that Cumann na nGaedheal stood for the interests of every class of the people. The Shaw family were well connected and close to the clergy. In pre-independence politics, Wheatley describes the Shaws as having attempted to remain neutral within the divided Irish party machine of north Westmeath.<sup>34</sup> On 22 August, an application from the constituency for a grant of £50 was accepted by the Standing Committee, but with the recommendation that a greater effort should be made to raise funds locally.<sup>35</sup> Funding the election campaign proved quite a challenge for the fledgling organisation although greater prudence was displayed by party workers in the midland constituency than was the case in Clare.

As in Clare, the Farmers' Union was well organised in both Longford and Westmeath with active branches in most parishes and regular meetings. Anti-Treatyite activism was less evident in Westmeath than in Longford, suggesting that the biggest threat to the Cumann na nGaedheal vote across the entire constituency, as elsewhere, was the actual fragmentation of pro-Treaty support. Of course, the decision of General Seán MacEoin to concentrate on his career in the army rather than seek re-election was a further blow the party could ill afford.<sup>36</sup> In June 1922 MacEoin won over 10,000 first preference votes. Much of that personal vote was now lost to the government party. In the event, Cumann na nGaedheal's performance in the 1923 election did not compare favourably with that of pro-Treaty Sinn Féin in 1922. Despite Longford/Westmeath increasing from a four-seat to a five-seat constituency, the anti-Treatyites almost doubled their vote, in the process of gaining a seat, while the new Treatyite party actually managed to lose a seat.

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<sup>33</sup> *Westmeath Examiner*, 25 Aug. 1923.

<sup>34</sup> Wheatley *Nationalism and the Irish party*, pp 123-9.

<sup>35</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting 22 Aug. 1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>36</sup> Coleman, *County Longford and the Irish revolution*, p. 146.

*Figure 1. First preference vote obtained by successful Longford/Westmeath candidates 1923.*<sup>37</sup>

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First preference vote</b>
Conor Byrne	Sinn Féin	5, 299
Patrick Walter Shaw	Cumann na nGaedheal	5,147
John Lyons	Independent Labour	4,452
Patrick J. McKenna	Farmers' Party	3, 274
James Joseph Killane	Sinn Féin	2, 757

As can be gauged from figure 1 above, feelings had changed over the course of the Civil War in Longford/Westmeath. The mood had switched from one of overwhelming support for the Treaty to mild approval and a desire, especially in county Westmeath, to simply return to bread-and-butter politics. As in Clare, farming and labour interests each succeeded in winning a seat. With no big vote winner like MacEoin in the field to share out a large surplus, the Cumann na nGaedheal party had been humbled in Longford/Westmeath. Frank McGuinness narrowly failed to retain the seat he had won as a Treatyite Sinn Féiner in 1922 but would play an active role in the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation in Longford throughout the 1920s, and eventually served on the party's *Ard Comhairle* or National Executive.

### **Seán Scanlon arrives in Longford**

Seán Scanlon, a Cumann na nGaedheal organiser during the 1923 election, was despatched to Longford in early 1924. He worked throughout the year to build up a strong organisation in the county and appeared in every corner of Longford, establishing *cumainn*, arranging meetings and writing press reports. Scanlon brought a rigorous work ethic to the task of organising branches and his efforts were successful as a vibrant Cumann na nGaedheal organisation emerged in county Longford in early 1924. By mid March, meetings to establish branches had been held with varying degrees of success in most parishes in Longford. This was done in a systematic way, usually on a Sunday after Mass, and would be advertised well in advance. Longford town, being the first area organised, was usually the venue for county executive meetings in this period, although later they would rotate around

<sup>37</sup> Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918-92* (Dublin, 1992), p. 113.

various centres in the county such as Ballinalee and Edgeworthstown.<sup>38</sup> In March, the Longford town branch organised a St. Patrick's night banquet and dance for 300 people in the Temperance Hall. Originally, somewhat naively, it was hoped Cosgrave would be in attendance.<sup>39</sup> In the end the event went ahead without the President and showed that the organisation could have a purpose besides holding political meetings.

Part of Scanlon's success, however, lay in his ability to dangle the prospect of patronage in front of prospective party members. Moreover, the organiser's efforts in Longford correspond with Séamus Hughes's expansion scheme outlined by John Regan.<sup>40</sup> Such tactics did not curry support with the party leadership.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, Scanlon's antics in Longford piled pressure on the government. Joe McGrath, answering on behalf of Minister Patrick Hogan, had to deny in the Dáil that land claims filed at Cumann na nGaedheal headquarters would receive first attention after the Farmers' Party alerted him to claims made by Cumann na nGaedheal organisers in Longford. McGrath's response made it clear that party members would not receive preferential treatment and that 'all applications of uneconomic holders and landless men will be considered on their merits in the re-distribution of untenanted land, irrespective of whether they belong to any political organisation or not'.<sup>42</sup> However, Scanlon continued undeterred. At a meeting of the Killoe branch of Cumann na nGaedheal on 6 April 1924, Scanlon again used the prospect of patronage as an inducement to join. He told the meeting that people who wanted to see the young landless men benefit from the break-up of the grazing ranches should join Cumann na nGaedheal.<sup>43</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal leaders were not as attuned as their party workers to the potency of promised patronage as a means of building support.<sup>44</sup> By then, branches had also appeared in Clonguish and Drumlish, with meetings called to organise *cumainn* in Ballymahon, Purth and Colmcille. The Farmers' Union remained active at this time, while Sinn Féin branches met sporadically across the constituency.

In April 1924 Scanlon published the details of estates that were soon to be acquired in county Longford and advised that parishes not yet organised should avail

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<sup>38</sup> *Longford Leader*, 9 Feb. 1924.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 Feb. 1924.

<sup>40</sup> John M. Regan, *The Irish counter revolution, 1921-1936: Treatyite politics and settlement in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), pp 204- 6.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Dáil Debates, vol. 6, col. 1422, 27 Feb. 1924 (McGrath).

<sup>43</sup> *Longford Leader*, 12 Apr. 1924.

<sup>44</sup> Dooley, 'Land for the people', p. 210.

of his services.<sup>45</sup> Again the implication was clear; party members' claims would receive first attention. Overall Scanlon's efforts were successful with a large number of branches sending delegates to the county executive meeting in Clonbroney on 4 May. At this time the County Longford executive usually met once a month. It is unclear from the reports of these meetings if they took place in the type of austere surroundings of the Cork city executive. De Róiste noted in his diary that the Cork executive met in the whitewashed ground floor of a back room in Cook Street that reminded him of revolutionary days.<sup>46</sup> In Longford, notices of upcoming meetings continued to stress the need to inform the organiser of the land claims in the area covered by each *cumann*. Scanlon, in targeting new members, wanted them to believe that the local Cumann na nGaedheal branch was an essential part of the land-division process, although, as we have seen, this ran contrary to the views of the government and party hierarchy. In July Scanlon claimed personal credit for having advance notice of lands to be distributed in county Longford, again reinforcing an image of an organisation capable of divvying up the spoils of office among friends and supporters.<sup>47</sup> This approach left Scanlon open to criticism when patronage was not forthcoming, and as time passed, party members in Longford, as in other constituencies, did express disappointment that, if anything, they were disadvantaged in their dealings with the state by virtue of their membership of the government party. Scanlon's actions risked losing active recruits to disillusionment when promised preferment was unforthcoming. Scanlon was the consummate politician, making representations on behalf of members and *cumainn* and in September 1924 he was part of a deputation to the Minister for Agriculture Patrick Hogan, where he no doubt pressed the land issues then prevalent in county Longford.<sup>48</sup>

Fifteen branches from across Longford were represented at July's county executive meeting in Longford town as the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation continued to grow. Reports of meetings sometimes carried criticism of the Cumann na nGaedheal government. A meeting in August drew sharp condemnation from

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<sup>45</sup> *Longford Leader*, 19 Apr. 1924.

<sup>46</sup> De Róiste diary entry, 30 Mar. 1925 (CCCA, Liam de Róiste papers, U271/A/52).

<sup>47</sup> *Longford Leader*, 5 July 1924.

<sup>48</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 22 Aug. 1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

Frank McGuinness of the government's decision to reduce old age pensions.<sup>49</sup> Such criticism was also evident in Cumann na nGaedheal branches in other constituencies.

All the while Scanlon was making inroads in county Longford, nothing happened in Westmeath. No organiser worked that county during 1924. Again, it seems strange that there could be such discrepancies existing in one constituency. Why Scanlon was busy organising *cumainn* in Longford and nobody fulfilled the same function in Westmeath is unclear. It seems that the blame for Cumann na nGaedheal's disappointing election performance was shouldered by Longford given that Shaw came from Westmeath. This probably explains the party's decision to focus its energies on organising County Longford, while a degree of complacency seems to have crept in within Westmeath Cumann na nGaedheal. In addition, there was a greater degree of political fragmentation in County Westmeath, with John Lyons representing a Labour tradition there and graziers gravitating towards the Farmer's Party. Any basic Cumann na nGaedheal branch structure that had existed in Westmeath during the election had disintegrated by mid 1924. Interestingly, the July meeting of the Longford executive decided that efforts to establish a constituency committee should be left in the hands of Scanlon.<sup>50</sup> This suggests Scanlon bore some responsibility for the failure to organise Westmeath, though the lack of party records make it difficult to establish why Longford was focussed on. This is appears even more unusual given that in 1924 Cumann na nGaedheal was making great progress in neighbouring counties Offaly and Roscommon, but was dormant in county Westmeath.<sup>51</sup> In January 1924 R.J. Purcell was busily organising branches in neighbouring Roscommon where a concerted effort was then being made to extend the party's machine.<sup>52</sup>

Despite Cumann na nGaedheal's lack of structures in Westmeath, it enjoyed the support of the county's main newspapers. Both the *Westmeath Examiner*, and more particularly the *Westmeath Independent*, gave favourable coverage to the party in their columns. The November 1925 by-elections in Cork Borough, Cork East, Donegal, Dublin South and Mayo North seem to have spiked the two papers' interest in Cumann na nGaedheal's organisation in Westmeath. A December 1924 post mortem on the by-elections in the *Irish Independent* reported the *Westmeath*

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<sup>49</sup> *Longford Leader*, 2 Aug., 6 Sept. 1924.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 Aug. 1924.

<sup>51</sup> *Westmeath Independent*, various issues May to June 1924.

<sup>52</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 8 Jan. 1924.

*Independent*'s strong criticism of the party's approach to organisation.<sup>53</sup> A November 1924 editorial in the *Westmeath Independent* was tantamount to an appeal to Cumann na nGaedheal to become better organised in the county. The editorial stated that Cumann na nGaedheal's policy was that of Collins and Griffith and reminded people of their duty to 'subscribe to this splendid organisation which is doing so much to help the country. All genuine supporters of the Treaty should become members'.<sup>54</sup> Critical of Cumann na nGaedheal's performance in the by-elections, the *Westmeath Independent* welcomed the formation of J.J. Walsh's new Organising Committee. On 6 December the paper's editorial stated that there should be a branch in every parish and criticised the manner in which the *cumann* had lapsed in Westmeath since the 1923 election. The editorial speculated that there was not a single active branch of Cumann na nGaedheal in the county, a conclusion that was accurate.<sup>55</sup> The *Westmeath Independent* remained supportive of the party throughout its existence as noted by the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation in neighbouring Roscommon in 1933. Roscommon's county secretary urged Cumann na nGaedhealers to buy the *Westmeath Independent* so as 'to support those papers who support us'.<sup>56</sup>

In January 1925, it was the turn of the *Westmeath Examiner* to criticise Cumann na nGaedheal's failure to maintain and build an organisation in the county. This newspaper, like the *Longford Leader* and *Westmeath Independent*, had supported the Irish party but now favoured the Free State. An opinion piece by former Irish party M.P. William O'Malley in early 1925 showed that it was more concerned with practical politics than questions that remained unanswered by the revolution. O'Malley praised the Cosgrave administration, but lamented the fact most of its leadership was associated with the defeat of the Irish party in 1918. The piece speculated as to why Cumann na nGaedheal had not 'caught on' to the extent that had been expected by most observers. O'Malley proposed the establishment of a new Conservative party in Ireland and stated that Cumann na nGaedheal's very name proved a hindrance as most people could not 'pronounce it or understand exactly what it means'.<sup>57</sup> As these editorials suggest, the government party had made little effort to organise in Westmeath even though it ought to have been fertile territory for

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<sup>53</sup> *Irish Independent*, 1 Dec. 1924.

<sup>54</sup> *Westmeath Independent*, 15 Nov. 1924.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 Dec. 1925.

<sup>56</sup> Roscommon county secretary to each *cumann* secretary, June 1933 (UCDA, Martin Conlon papers, P97/22/5).

<sup>57</sup> *Westmeath Examiner*, 3 Jan. 1925.



Cumann na nGaedheal organisers. In neighbouring counties the party machine was strong with regular meetings and occasional social functions.<sup>58</sup>

Cumann na nGaedheal remained active in Longford, with live branches and members prepared to speak out on the issues of the day. Meetings discussed national and local problems while supporters did not shy away from criticising the performance of the government. Reports from various branch meetings indicate that unpopular measures were open to criticism. One such example was the *cumann* in Clonbroney where Fr. Markey was a long-standing branch president. It passed resolutions calling for a drainage bill, preference in land division for men who fought in the War of Independence, and criticised the decision to reduce old age pensions.<sup>59</sup> Most branches in Longford were critical of the reduction in the old age pension, with some members suggesting the salaries of higher paid officials could have been reduced instead. As for the party's main opponent, in March 1924 Sinn Féin was quite unorganised in the constituency with no affiliated branch in Longford and thirteen in Westmeath, mostly in the north of the county.<sup>60</sup>

### **Westmeath reorganised: 1925**

More than a year passed between Seán Scanlon's efforts to mobilise supporters in Longford before Westmeath was hit by an organisational drive that finally saw the establishment of *cumainn* right across the county. In March the Mullingar *cumann* came back to life. At a meeting in the town on 30 March, Shaw asked his constituents to 'rally to our assistance and to form branches of Cumann na nGaedheal in every town and village'. New members would be sought after-Mass the following Sunday after which efforts to form branches in other parts of the county would be made.<sup>61</sup> On 5 April Shaw addressed the after-Mass meeting. As occurred elsewhere, Shaw said that members of the Farmers' Union or Labour could join Cumann na nGaedheal without prejudicing their free action. Cumann na nGaedheal was a national, pro-Treaty party. One of Shaw's constituents, Mrs Daly of Tyrrellspass, mother of one of

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<sup>58</sup> Dances seem to have been organised in various parts of the country. As we know, there was a St. Patrick's night dance in Longford in 1924 and the Tullamore branch organised a New Year's Eve dance in 1926. *Westmeath Independent*, 2 Jan. 1926.

<sup>59</sup> *Longford Leader*, 29 Nov. 1924.

<sup>60</sup> Ard Comhairle, report of the honorary secretaries, 19 Mar. 1925 (CCCA, Seamus Fitzgerald papers, PR/6/136/1).

<sup>61</sup> *Westmeath Examiner*, 4 Apr. 1925.

the executed Connacht Rangers mutineers in 1916, was also in attendance. Shaw seems to have helped her obtain a grant.<sup>62</sup> On 11 April the *Westmeath Independent* announced that Archdeacon Thomas Langan would preside at a meeting to establish a branch of Cumann na nGaedheal in Moate. The advertisement went on to invite all those interested in ‘the stability and future of Ireland’ to attend.<sup>63</sup> On the day of the meeting, Langan was elected president of the *cumann* and a committee was formed. The Archdeacon was a native of county Longford who had been educated in St. Mel’s college Longford before being ordained in Rome in 1878. Langan taught in St. Mel’s before transferring from Abbeylara in north county Longford to Moate as parish priest in 1913.<sup>64</sup> He had been active in the UIL and the Gaelic League while in Abbeylara and Moate.<sup>65</sup> By mid-May, Cumann na nGaedheal had a branch in Athlone town with a committee in place by the end of the month.<sup>66</sup> Again the local clergy took a leading role on the committee. A *cumann* in Ballynacargy in north Westmeath was revived at this time with branch secretary Thomas O’Regan, seeking new members in June.<sup>67</sup> Mullingar’s revived branch also sought out new members at this time while Joseph McEvoy, *cumann* secretary, arranged for a meeting of delegates of each affiliated branch to form a county executive for Westmeath.<sup>68</sup> Further south, it was the Moate *cumann* that became the focus of the burgeoning south Westmeath Cumann na nGaedheal organisation. A convention representative of South Westmeath Cumann na nGaedheal was held in Moate in October with P.W. Shaw and Liam Burke in attendance. Burke, possibly exaggerating, claimed that there were over 800 branches of Cumann na nGaedheal nationwide (see chapter two), and that many new *cumainn* had been formed recently. A temporary executive for the district was set up, as the organisation was extended in the area.

The drive to organise Cumann na nGaedheal in county Westmeath was part of the wider efforts, discussed in chapters two and three, to improve the organisation in constituencies where it remained weak. In November 1925 Liam Burke was able to inform the Standing Committee of thirty-six new *cumainn* that had recently been

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> *Westmeath Independent*, 11 Apr. 1925.

<sup>64</sup> Information kindly supplied by Father Tom Murray.

<sup>65</sup> Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish party*, p. 71.

<sup>66</sup> *Westmeath Independent*, 16, 30 May 1925.

<sup>67</sup> *Westmeath Examiner*, 18 June 1925.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 30 May 1925.

formed nationwide.<sup>69</sup> Burke further informed the committee that there were three organisers employed in the task of forming new branches, and that successful public meetings had taken place in previously problematic areas such as Mullingar, in county Westmeath. Cosgrave addressed the meeting in Mullingar where he had been escorted to the podium by a band before making a speech that touched mainly on taxation and trade.<sup>70</sup> During this period of organisational renewal Seán Scanlon and Archdeacon Langan of Longford/Westmeath sat on the Cumann na nGaedheal National Executive. Scanlon was as vocal as ever, pressing Minister Patrick Hogan for information relating to the division of the Bond estate in Longford. He also succeeded in securing agreement from Blythe that new grants were necessary for the relief of distress in rural Ireland during the winter months.<sup>71</sup>

November brought a flurry of Cumann na nGaedheal organising activity in Westmeath. Branches were subsequently formed in Ballymore, Castledaly, Drumraney, Mount Temple, Tubberclair, Kilbeggan and Horsleap while steps were taken to form *cumainn* in areas such as Ballynahowen, Tang, and Toher. The newly formed south Westmeath executive was content with the organisational progress made. A meeting in Moate in November was attended by former Irish party M.P. William O'Malley and by Burke. Trade was discussed at the meeting and the mutual dependence of Britain and Ireland was noted. Langan also told the meeting Cumann na nGaedheal was 'not an organisation for jobbery'.<sup>72</sup> Joseph McCormack, party organiser, emphasised Cumann na nGaedheal's democratic credentials while addressing supporters in Athlone. In an interesting contrast with the approach of Seán Scanlon a year earlier, McCormack did use the organisation's support of the government as an inducement to join, but crucially, did not suggest it would use that power to further the interests of its own supporters. Instead, McCormack suggested branches could discuss local matters and bring grievances to a level in the party whereby leaders could be alerted. In McCormack's view of the political system he was part of, members of Cumann na nGaedheal had an opportunity to *shape* policy by virtue of their support of the government. In Scanlon's view, members could *benefit*

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<sup>69</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 6 Nov.1925 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>70</sup> *Westmeath Independent*, 1 Aug. 1925.

<sup>71</sup> National Executive, minutes of meeting, 1 Dec.1925 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>72</sup> *Westmeath Examiner*, 7 Nov. 1925.

from their association with the government party by receiving preferential treatment. It would seem that organisers despatched to the country in 1925, in the wake of the National Group's secession and the rise of O'Higgins and Liam Burke within Cumann na nGaedheal, used quite different methods than did the class of 1923/24,<sup>73</sup> when Séamus Hughes was general secretary. In spite of McCormack's stance on the issue, there is evidence that some branches took it upon themselves to forward the land claims of their own members to Cumann na nGaedheal headquarters in the hope of gaining an advantage. However, it is unclear how successful the Tubberclair *cumainn* was in forwarding on the claims of 'deserving members' of its branch.<sup>74</sup>

### **Cumann na nGaedheal's zenith in microcosm**

Cumann na nGaedheal was probably at its most active across Longford/Westmeath during 1925 and 1926. As stated in previous chapters, this corresponds with what might be regarded as the peak of Cumann na nGaedheal's organisational reach across the Free State. As the organisation was growing in most parts of Westmeath, it remained strong in Longford, particularly so in the County's main town. Edgeworthstown and Ballinalee in north Longford, areas that had been associated with IRA activity during the War of Independence, were also Cumann na nGaedheal strongholds. Interestingly, in 1925 the chairman of the Longford town branch travelled to Dublin on a fact-finding mission of sorts and on his return, updated members on the way *cumainn* around the rest of the country operated.<sup>75</sup> In April, the Longford town branch advertised for new members, and asked supporters of the government to enrol after Mass on Sunday 12 April.<sup>76</sup> As is true of any organisation, those involved in Cumann na nGaedheal were keen to see it grow.

While branches were active across county Longford, plans were made to organise in those few places where *cumainn* had failed to take root. In June 1925 after-Mass meetings were organised to that end in Legan, Carrickedmond, Ardagh and Moydow. It seems that of these meetings, only Legan and Carrickedmond were successful. However, there was a historical precedent for the lack of activism in

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<sup>73</sup> Regan, *Counter revolution*, p. 204.

<sup>74</sup> *Westmeath Independent*, 16 Jan. 1926.

<sup>75</sup> *Longford Leader*, 31 Jan. 1925.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 Apr. 1925.

Ardagh and Moydow, given that even the UIL had struggled to stir the people of Ardagh, with a delegate to that organisation's south Longford executive meeting in 1914 stating that 'it would take an earthquake shock to move them into a proper position at the present time'.<sup>77</sup> A Sinn Féin branch in Ardagh had been chaired by the parish priest Fr. Guinan,<sup>78</sup> later pro-Treaty and leader of a Cumann na nGaedheal club by 1932. A cursory glance at the UIL National Directory minute book suggests too that north Longford was much more of a stronghold of that organisation than the southern part of the county.<sup>79</sup> On 18 July 1925 the push to increase membership continued. An advertisement in the *Longford Leader* stated 'our country is ours for the making. Join your parish branch of Cumann na nGaedheal'.<sup>80</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal marketing in county Longford during 1925 mirrored the language used in Westmeath, and was evidently placing much less emphasis on the availability of patronage than had been the case in 1924.

In 1926, Cumann na nGaedheal activism in county Westmeath was, if anything, even more pronounced than in Longford where things had quietened somewhat. South Westmeath was now the most active part of the constituency machinery. On 16 January, following the move to direct *cumann* representation, branches were asked by the district executive to select delegates to the annual convention.<sup>81</sup> In the following weeks, various branches in the district met as requested and selected their delegates. In addition, the south Westmeath executive submitted two resolutions for debate. Both resolutions reflected the rural background of the organisation in south Westmeath, with one calling for the swift passage of the 1926 Land Act, and the other asking that the government immediately begin work on schemes submitted under the Arterial Drainage Act.<sup>82</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal branches in Moate, Tubberclair, Mount Temple and Athlone continued to meet regularly and there was an AGM of the Tyrellspass branch in March. Occasional meetings took place in Drumraney while a new *cumann* was established in Clonmacnoise on 13 March.<sup>83</sup> Branches were less

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<sup>77</sup> Coleman, *County Longford and the Irish revolution*, p. 39.

<sup>78</sup> List of Sinn Féin personnel, undated, (NAI, Sinn Féin and Cumann na Poblachta papers, 1094/13/3).

<sup>79</sup> The attendance of the south Longford representative on the National Directory was much more sporadic than that of the north Longford delegate. In addition, north Longford was more densely covered in UIL branches than was south Longford. National directory, minutes of various meetings, 10 Aug. 1904- 30 Apr. 1918 (NLI, UIL, minute book of the National Directory MS, 708).

<sup>80</sup> *Longford Leader*, 18 July 1925.

<sup>81</sup> *Westmeath Independent*, 16 Jan. 1926.

<sup>82</sup> National Executive resolutions 1926 (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy papers, P7b/61/26).

<sup>83</sup> *Westmeath Independent*, various issues Feb. to Mar. 1926.

active further north, although the Mullingar *cumann* did meet occasionally. In addition, the north Westmeath executive met soon after the party's annual convention in May. Addressing that meeting, Shaw told members that criticism of the government at the conference had been justified and that he hoped ministers would now take the need for greater economy in public spending more seriously.<sup>84</sup> It seems the Westmeath rank-and-file were more amenable to the need for retrenchment than were party activists in Longford.

In contrast to what was evident in Clare, Fianna Fáil branches were quick to spread throughout Longford/Westmeath during 1926. However, *Cumann na nGaedheal* remained well drilled in the constituency and it more than held its own in the summer of 1926. Nationally, as documented in chapter two, *Cumann na nGaedheal* did not make life easy for itself in this period as internal policy differences over tariffs became apparent, as did the sorry nature of the party's finances. Branches in Edgeworthstown and Clonguish remained very active as did Longford town and the *cumainn* covering Clonbroney (at times the parish had two branches with a separate one in the village of Ballinalee). These were the most consistent areas of *Cumann na nGaedheal* activism in Longford, with *cumainn* in other parishes going into hibernation for lengthy periods. Clonbroney *Cumann na nGaedheal* continued to call for a restoration of the old age pension while, unsurprisingly given its role in the revolutionary war, the branch also called for compensation to be paid to those who suffered ill health as a result of the War of Independence. It also criticised the amounts of money being paid by the Land Commission for ranches.<sup>85</sup> Various attempts to start *cumainn* in Ardagh and Moydow were unsuccessful though branches of the Farmers' Union and eventually Fianna Fáil took root there.<sup>86</sup> *Cumann na nGaedheal* was active in the neighbouring counties of Leitrim and Roscommon in 1926.<sup>87</sup> In May, a *Cumann na nGaedheal* meeting in Tulsk Co. Roscommon called on the Land Commission not to send any migrants as there was not enough land for them. Opposition to migrants in the receiving counties and elements within the party saw it as a means of protecting the status of the commercial farming class.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> *Irish Independent*, 18 May 1926.

<sup>85</sup> *Longford Leader*, 18 Dec. 1926.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 Sept., Oct. 1926.

<sup>87</sup> *Leitrim Observer*, 23 Jan., 15 May, 3 July, 7 Aug. 1926.

<sup>88</sup> Dooley, 'Land for the people', pp 140-1.

Fianna Fáil could devote its energy to organisation in 1926 without the worry of an impending general election and laid strong roots across the constituency. However, the Cumann na nGaedheal machine was as robust as it had ever been in Longford/Westmeath and again, the main threat facing it in the June 1927 election came from the sheer number of broadly pro-Treaty organisations in existence.

### **Mixed fortunes in two general elections**

De Valera addressed supporters gathered in the county Hall, Mullingar, on New Year's day 1927. There, the extra-parliamentary opposition leader outlined his party's programme while criticising aspects of government policy and the cost to the taxpayer of the Governor General, an election issue for Fianna Fáil.<sup>89</sup> However, most towns and villages across Longford/Westmeath now had working branches of Cumann na nGaedheal. Most of these branches were fully functioning. A routine meeting of the Tang branch took place in March. New members were enrolled and the *cumainn* affiliation fees were forwarded to headquarters.<sup>90</sup> The other new party established in 1926 was the National League and it, like the Farmers' Union, found fertile territory to exploit in Westmeath. Branches of the National League began to appear sporadically, with a meeting in Kilbeggan being particularly well attended.<sup>91</sup> In Longford/Westmeath, the consequences of the failure of the party hierarchy to reach a broad agreement with parties to its right would be felt quite acutely. Sinn Féin had virtually collapsed in the constituency with the foundation of Fianna Fáil leaving this party with a monopoly on anti-Treaty support that Cumann na nGaedheal did not enjoy with regards to Treaty support.

In April, the Cumann na nGaedheal campaign stepped up a gear with meetings in Rochfortbridge and Milltownpass. In Milltownpass, the secretary of the north Westmeath district committee, Joseph McEvoy, reminded those in attendance that Cumann na nGaedheal had virtually no organisation in 1923 yet managed to return the strongest party to the Dáil. McEvoy said they now had strong branches across the constituency where important national and local matters could be discussed and this would prove telling in the election. It was revealed at the meeting that an organiser

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<sup>89</sup> *Westmeath Examiner*, 8 Jan. 1927.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 Mar. 1927.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 Mar. 1927.

would soon visit inactive parts of Westmeath.<sup>92</sup> Shaw addressed numerous meetings in the county and remained popular with Cumann na nGaedheal supporters in Westmeath. Various meetings in the less well organised north Westmeath heard calls for the establishment of new branches and lists of prospective members were drawn up.<sup>93</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal in south Westmeath remained well marshalled, matching Fianna Fáil activism in the spring of 1927. The Athlone *cumann* met regularly while the south Westmeath branches of Tubberclair, Mount Temple, Castledaly, Rosemount and Moate remained active.<sup>94</sup> An Athlone *cumann* meeting heard that party central funds were to be used for general organisation and that each constituency had to manage its own spending. As noted, this was a break with the procedure in 1923 (see chapters two and three)

The three district executives of Longford/ Westmeath continued to act more or less independently. Candidate selection was the one area where cooperation was necessary. The Longford/Westmeath selection convention took place on 1 May and was attended by 120 delegates from across the constituency.<sup>95</sup> Various speakers at the selection convention expressed strong opposition to the Farmers' Union which of course had recently spurned Cumann na nGaedheal's advances.<sup>96</sup> Attacks on the Farmers' Union were part and parcel of Cumann na nGaedheal's belief that only a non class based party, with the strength to represent and express the interests of the whole community, could govern in the Irish Free State.<sup>97</sup> To compare, the Fianna Fáil convention was attended by 118 delegates indicating that the main parties were quite evenly matched in the midland constituency.<sup>98</sup> There was resentment within Athlone Cumann na nGaedheal that the convention had not selected a standard bearer from that end of the constituency. Canon Crowe of the Athlone *cumann* complained that Athlone was an important branch representing 14,000 people and that 'their right to a representative in the Dáil had been ignored at the Longford-Westmeath convention'.<sup>99</sup> The Cumann na nGaedheal ticket did seem to lack balance with Shaw representing

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 23 Apr. 1927.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., various issues Apr. 1927.

<sup>94</sup> *Westmeath Independent*, 30 Apr. 1927.

<sup>95</sup> Based on the figures for Clare and other constituencies, this seems like the average attendance at Cumann na nGaedheal selection conventions. De Róiste noted that 104 delegates voted at the Cork city convention. De Róiste, diary entry, 1 May 1927 (CCCA, Liam de Róiste papers, U271/A/54), *Westmeath Examiner*, 7 May 1927.

<sup>96</sup> Meehan, *Cosgrave party*, p. 86.

<sup>97</sup> *Roscommon Herald*, 7 May 1927.

<sup>98</sup> *Westmeath Independent*, 30 Apr. 1927.

<sup>99</sup> *Irish Independent*, 6 May 1927.



Mullingar, M.J. Connolly Longford and P.J. McCrann (whom we met earlier) the grey area between south Longford and north Westmeath. Candidate selection was democratic within Cumann na nGaedheal with little role for the party hierarchy, as lamented by Kevin O'Higgins,<sup>100</sup> so the very public nature of disquiet in Athlone was somewhat unjustified. Athlone delegates could have gone to the convention better organised.<sup>101</sup> However, the failure to select a balanced party ticket betrays a lack of electoral strategy within the Longford/Westmeath organisation. McCrann was based in the same end of the constituency as Connolly and Shaw while a candidate in Athlone would be better placed to maximise the party vote in that important urban centre. The Cumann na nGaedheal organisation in other constituencies seem to have placed a much greater emphasis on electoral strategy, sometimes calling constituency meetings to discuss matters of approach.<sup>102</sup>

Surprisingly, the Cumann na nGaedheal election campaign was somewhat staid given the dense *cumainn* network developed in the constituency over the previous two years. In Longford, the organisation only became thoroughly active in election work after the selection convention, with after-Mass meetings taking place in Kiltashee, Clondra and Newtownforbes in early May.<sup>103</sup> The mood of what was an exciting election campaign nationwide was captured in Ballinalee on 22 May where three rival after-Mass meetings of Cumann na nGaedheal, Fianna Fáil and the Farmers' Union took place simultaneously. It was early summer, though the temperature was high in Ballinalee on that day for political reasons. De Valera came to Longford as he crisscrossed the nation on his party's first election campaign. Government leaders also toured the country with Kevin O'Higgins making an appearance in Longford on 23 May. One of the Cumann na nGaedheal candidates, M.J. Connolly, organised a platform for O'Higgins to speak from. From his podium at the top of Dublin Street, at the junction with Ballymahon Street and Main Street, O'Higgins addressed a large, though somewhat subdued gathering according to the *Roscommon Herald*.<sup>104</sup> O'Higgins was a popular choice of speaker and the frequency

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<sup>100</sup> O'Higgins wrote that the days of the Irish party imposing candidates on local supporters were over. Instead 'Candidates are selected by constituency conventions with a very theoretical veto in the Standing Committee of our Organisation'. Kevin O'Higgins to Frank MacDermott, 18 May 1927 (NAI, Frank MacDermott papers, 1065/1/1).

<sup>101</sup> *Westmeath Independent*, 7 May 1927.

<sup>102</sup> *Roscommon Herald*, 22, 29 Jan. 1927.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 May 1927.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 May 1927.

of his trips to other regions damaged the party in his own Dublin county constituency.<sup>105</sup> He addressed a similar rally in Athlone on 1 June.<sup>106</sup>

The results of the June 1927 election were as disappointing for Cumann na nGaedheal in Longford/Westmeath as they had been around the country. Fianna Fáil held the two seats that had been won by anti-Treaty Sinn Féin in 1923. In spite of having a better organisation than at the previous general election, the government party still only managed to win one seat in Longford/Westmeath.

*Figure 2. Vote obtained by successful Longford/Westmeath candidates June 1927.*<sup>107</sup>

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First preference vote</b>
P. W. Shaw	Cumann na nGaedheal	6, 094
Henry Broderick	Labour	4, 282
Hugh Garahan	Farmers' Party	2, 623
M. J. Kennedy	Fianna Fáil	2, 504
James Victory	Fianna Fáil	2, 557

As explained in chapter two, the organisation was given a swift opportunity for atonement as a snap election in September followed the assassination of Kevin O'Higgins. In Longford/Westmeath, Cumann na nGaedheal again selected three candidates to Fianna Fáil's four, with Owen Dolan replacing P.J. McCrann as the party's third standard bearer. The September election was more of a two-horse race as smaller parties simply did not have the resources to fight two general elections in such a short period of time. As such, the Cumann na nGaedheal party now had an opportunity to monopolise the broader pro-Treaty vote. Nine Longford branches sent delegates to the selection convention in Mullingar. As usual Edgeworthstown and Newtownforbes were represented, although Ardagh was also able to send a delegate showing that a branch had finally taken root there.<sup>108</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal's national campaign for the September election was more robust than in June with strong attacks on the opposition and more advertisements appearing in the national and local newspapers as part of the party's recruitment of the O'Kennedy-Brindley

<sup>105</sup>See Chapter Two. Kevin O'Higgins to Frank MacDermott, 17 June 1927 (NAI, Frank MacDermott papers, 1065/1/2).

<sup>106</sup>*Westmeath Independent*, 4 June 1927.

<sup>107</sup>Walker, *Parliamentary election results*, p. 122.

<sup>108</sup>*Longford Leader*, 3 Sept. 1927.

advertising agency. One such advert attacked 'empty formulas and emptier pledges',<sup>109</sup> while Cosgrave was much more prominent in Cumann na nGaedheal's literature than he had been in any previous election. Fianna Fáil too was susceptible to negative campaigning, with one of its adverts portraying Cumann na nGaedheal as a party of 'Freemasons and West Britons'.<sup>110</sup> Lemass had first propounded his 'Masonic Scare' in 1925. In reality, Republican dreams of a Masonic conspiracy in cabinet were as grounded in reality as the 1932 'Red Scare' directed at Fianna Fáil.<sup>111</sup>

Cumann na nGaedheal's campaign again relied on public meetings with prominent speakers. Cosgrave and McGilligan were due to address a meeting in the Market Square in Longford town but were replaced by Professor Michael Tierney when they could not fulfil the engagement.<sup>112</sup> Tierney was interrupted numerous times during his address but was able to complete the meeting successfully. Longford voters were asked to vote for 'honesty' and 'truth' while Frank McGuinness repeated the slogan on one of the party's more bellicose pamphlets by stating that Cumann na nGaedheal had taken the oath to save the country whereas Fianna Fáil had taken it to change the government. Longford Cumann na nGaedheal printed a leaflet, instructing supporters to vote '1 Connolly, 2 Dolan, 3 Shaw'.<sup>113</sup> Another handbill was printed showing voters 'The money Mr. De Valera cost Ireland'<sup>114</sup> as the party sought to counter Fianna Fáil attacks on the cost of the Governor General.<sup>115</sup> In Westmeath similar sentiments were aired at public meetings in this high stakes election. Addressing a Westmeath county executive meeting, Shaw acknowledged that the organising efforts for the previous election were still paying dividends in September.<sup>116</sup>

The results in September were much more encouraging for Cumann na nGaedheal. M.J. Connolly from Longford recorded a strong vote to join Shaw as a Cumann na nGaedheal T.D. for Longford/Westmeath. However, the seat had been gained from the Farmers' Party, a natural ally of the government. Fianna Fáil also increased its vote as it retained its two seats. Cumann na nGaedheal had shown

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> *Westmeath Independent*, 10 Sept. 1927.

<sup>111</sup> David Fitzpatrick, *The two Irelands, 1912-1939* (Oxford, 1998), p. 189.

<sup>112</sup> *Longford Leader*, 10 Sept. 1927.

<sup>113</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal leaflet, Sept. 1927 (LCA, Leavy papers, P4/41/2).

<sup>114</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal leaflet, Sept. 1927 (ibid., P4/42).

<sup>115</sup> *Nenagh Guardian*, 17 Mar. 1928.

<sup>116</sup> *Westmeath Examiner*, 3 Sept. 1927.

resilience nationwide, while the seat gain in Longford/Westmeath showed that it had made progress there. However, the party had simply held its own with Fianna Fáil and not as such made a significant breakthrough.

*Figure 3. First preference vote of successful Longford/Westmeath candidates September 1927.<sup>117</sup>*

Candidate	Party	First Preference Vote
P. W Shaw	Cumann na nGaedheal	6,814
M. J. Kennedy	Fianna Fáil	4, 244
M. J. Connolly	Cumann na nGaedheal	4, 044
Henry Broderick	Labour	4, 047
J. J. Killane	Fianna Fáil	3, 434

### Post-election blues

The two general elections of 1927 had drained the parties' of energy and funds. There was a definite cooling off in political activism after the September contest. Cumann na nGaedheal's organisation in county Longford remained quiet for some time after the election, while Fianna Fáil established some new branches in the autumn.<sup>118</sup> At a Cumann na nGaedheal meeting in Clonbroney in November, Deputy Connolly thanked the branch for their help during the election while Frank McGuinness pointed out that this was the first time the party had won a seat in county Longford.<sup>119</sup> The Ballinalee *cumann* held its AGM on 11 December. Father Markey, branch president, called on members to become regular readers of *The Freeman*, the Cumann na nGaedheal newspaper established in August. It was also decided at the meeting that the branch ought to become a 'medium of social entertainment for the district'<sup>120</sup> As if to underline the fact that branches needed to become active again, a notice subsequently appeared in the *Longford Leader* in December to the effect that the organiser Mr. Grant would soon visit all districts in Longford/Westmeath for the purpose of reorganising the branches.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary election results*, p. 129.

<sup>118</sup> *Longford Leader*, 12 Nov. 1927.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 Nov. 1927.

<sup>120</sup> *The Freeman*, 17 Dec. 1927.

<sup>121</sup> *Longford Leader*, 10 Dec. 1927.

As promised, Ardagh and Edgeworthstown *cumann* reorganised on 10 January while Colmcille had its AGM on 8 January.<sup>122</sup> On 12 January the Granard *cumann* commended Cumann na nGaedheal on winning its first seat in county Longford and warned that strong local organisation would have to be sustained if progress was to be maintained.<sup>123</sup> Grant told the same meeting that the overall position of the party's support structures in county Longford had improved over the previous twelve months. Members in Granard also requested that *The Freeman* be made available in the town each week, while the question of unemployment grants was also raised. North Longford remained a Cumann na nGaedheal stronghold. In south Longford activism levels lagged behind with branches there often disappearing between elections. Activism in Westmeath declined somewhat although a meeting took place in Mullingar on 28 March 1928. Shaw explained the new agricultural credit scheme to those in attendance and discussed the importance of creameries.<sup>124</sup>

Longford Cumann na nGaedheal was pleased to have its own T.D., Shaw always having been regarded as a Westmeath politician. Cumann na nGaedheal remained very active in Clonbroney in the spring of 1928, although their continued use of school premises for meetings was raised in the Dáil by Fianna Fáil T.D. James Killane. On three separate occasions, Killane raised the issue with the Minister for Education John Marcus O'Sullivan. In March the Fianna Fáil deputy alleged Cumann na nGaedheal use of the national schools at Breaghy and Ballinalee for meetings. Both Connolly and the minister somewhat unconvincingly asserted that the meetings were convened to discuss unemployment and that all political representatives were invited to attend.<sup>125</sup> In May and June a dance held at St. Bernard's school Clonbroney on 6 January also became the subject of controversy. Killane raised the question of the dance twice within the space of a week and on both occasions was assured by O'Sullivan that it had not been held under the auspices of any political party. Unsatisfied, Killane jibed the Minister asking by 'how much the proceeds of the dance were deficient in paying the expenses of the delegates to the Cumann na nGaedheal Convention?'<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 7 Jan. 1928.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 21 Jan. 1928.

<sup>124</sup> *Westmeath Examiner*, 31 Mar. 1928.

<sup>125</sup> Dáil Debates, vol. 22, col. 941, 8 Mar. 1928 (Killane, Connolly, O'Sullivan).

<sup>126</sup> Dáil Debates, vol. 24, col. 6, 6 June 1928 (Killane).

Fianna Fáil activists had the local elections of 1928 to prepare for, whereas, as usual, the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation stood aloof from the contest. Indeed, Cumann na nGaedheal speakers often sought to discredit Fianna Fáil by attacking it for trying to politicise local government. Speaking in Edgeworthstown, Connolly stated that political candidates on the council would neglect the business they were elected for, while in neighbouring Leitrim, deputy Patrick Reynolds asked voters to support candidates with ‘more laudable ambitions than turning the council into a voting machine for the Fianna Fáil organisation’.<sup>127</sup> Contradicting Reynolds’ rhetoric, the organisation in south Leitrim did ratify some candidates to contest the local elections. In Longford, with nothing to prepare for, Cumann na nGaedheal activism quietened down.

H. J. Walker, secretary of Athlone Cumann na nGaedheal, remained a prominent member of the party who played an important role in the life of the organisation in south Westmeath. In 1926, Walker represented the constituency on the National Executive alongside Frank McGuinness.<sup>128</sup> Walker, generally an Athlone delegate to the Cumann na nGaedheal annual convention, was in attendance for a reception held in the Gresham hotel for Cosgrave on his return from the United States in February 1928. Welcome addresses for Cosgrave from the south Westmeath executive and the Athlone *cumann* were read out at the function, probably on Walker’s initiative.<sup>129</sup> However, Westmeath Cumann na nGaedheal activism levels once again dropped below that expended in neighbouring counties such as Offaly and Roscommon. The Longford/Westmeath organiser attended a rare Moate branch meeting in May as Cumann na nGaedheal retreated back to its strongholds in Longford and Westmeath. Speaking in the Dáil on 7 March 1928, Shaw hinted at the reasons behind the lack of party activism in Westmeath. Rebutting claims made by Fianna Fáil’s Ruttledge, Shaw used his own county to prove political patronage was not the hallmark of Cumann na nGaedheal. According to Shaw, quite a lot of land had been divided in Westmeath, between 6,000 and 8,000 acres. Before the distribution of this land, there had been between thirty and forty Cumann na nGaedheal branches in the county. However, when members had not received favouritism, nearly all of these had died. Speaking of the decline in party organisation in Westmeath, Shaw was sure

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<sup>127</sup> *Longford Leader*, 2 June 1928.

<sup>128</sup> National Executive 1926, officers and members (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>129</sup> *Westmeath Independent*, 18 Feb. 1928.

that the ‘fair division of land, by the Land Commission is the cause of that. I only speak for the place I know about myself’.<sup>130</sup> Shaw had made a similar point in March 1927 at a time when *cumann* had in fact been active.<sup>131</sup> In March 1928 new Longford T.D. M.J. Connolly told Mulcahy that Fianna Fáil supporters had been appointed gangers by the Land Commission and that ‘no one known to be a C Na nG [sic] supporter was taken on’.<sup>132</sup>

Cumann na nGaedheal remained quiet in the constituency during 1929, especially when compared to Fianna Fáil and the activity levels of its own organisation in neighbouring constituencies. However, that a party organisation would become inactive between elections is scarcely surprising. Even Fianna Fáil’s organisation suffered between elections. Figures quoted in Brian Reynolds’s thesis indicate that Fianna Fáil’s membership declined from 1,307 in 1927 to 550 in 1930 before moving on an upward trajectory again to 759 in 1931.<sup>133</sup> Moreover, the Reynolds thesis shows that there were eight affiliated Fianna Fáil branches in Longford in 1930 and seven in 1931 while the county came under the heading ‘need for improvement’ at the *Ard Fheis* of 1928.<sup>134</sup> In 1929, Longford’s Seán MacEoin romped to victory as the Cumann na nGaedheal candidate in the Leitrim/Sligo by election. However, the ‘Blacksmith of Ballinalee’ addressed a meeting of the Athlone *cumann* in September indicating that MacEoin saw that his political career would eventually take him back to his home constituency. MacEoin’s involvement could only strengthen the party organisation given the immense personal value he placed on organisation and the popular reputation he built up as a hero of the revolutionary period.

### **President Cosgrave tours the midlands**

In the autumn of 1929 Cosgrave embarked on what appears to have been a leader’s tour of sorts. In September, Cumann na nGaedheal’s leader had appeared in Tullamore County Offaly, where he was given a good reception, and it seems that he

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<sup>130</sup> Dáil Debates, vol 22, col. 888, 7 Mar. 1928 (Shaw).

<sup>131</sup> Dooley, *Land for the people*, p. 210.

<sup>132</sup> Note of talk with Mr. Connolly T.D., Longford, 2 Mar. 1928 (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy papers, P7b/69/50).

<sup>133</sup> Brian A. Reynolds, ‘The formation and development of Fianna Fáil, 1926-1932’ (Ph.D dissertation, TCD, March 1976) appendix vi.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, appendix vii.

now realised the need to spend more time on the ground, meeting the people, than he had before. Cosgrave's visits to Longford town in October, and to Athlone in November, gave the party organisation in each county something to prepare for. Cosgrave's meeting in Longford, his first visit to the county, was keenly advertised in the *Longford Leader* where it was made known the President would hear deputations from locals on matters requiring his attention. A platform was erected outside the courthouse on Main Street. On the approach to Longford town, a banner at St. Mel's Cathedral greeted Cosgrave with a hearty 'Céad míle Fáilte', while various streamers through the town simply read 'Welcome to Longford'.<sup>135</sup> Cosgrave was joined in Longford by the constituency's two sitting Cumann na nGaedheal T.D.s, by MacEoin and minister Hogan. Hogan strongly condemned Fianna Fáil's economic policies, particularly with regard to protectionism, a debate that captured the political differences between the two big parties at the time. Cosgrave's address focussed on the changes in world politics since the end of the Great War. Cosgrave stated that industry and offices now made a great nation, not armaments and battleships. Making reference to his government's orthodox financial policies, Cosgrave admitted that attempts to eliminate waste and cut costs were unpopular but, he argued, such policies were necessary. After Cosgrave heard deputations from locals, the well attended meeting was brought to a close.

Cosgrave was pencilled in to speak in Athlone on 17 November and in October the local Cumann na nGaedheal organisation began preparing for the visit. As in Longford, branches of Cumann na nGaedheal, and other organisations, were given the opportunity to make representations to Cosgrave.<sup>136</sup> Advertisements appeared in the local press three weeks before the visit with a list of fifteen deputations Cosgrave would hear.<sup>137</sup> Although the meeting was held on a cold day, there was a large turnout. Welcome addresses from the local Cumann na nGaedheal branch and the Urban council were read before Cosgrave rose to speak. Here, Cosgrave's speech dealt with numerous issues including land division and the country's financial position. Interestingly, Cosgrave also expressed the importance of bringing the Fianna Fáil opposition into the Dáil chamber. Such meetings between elections challenge the perception of a Treatyite élite ensconced in government buildings with

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<sup>135</sup> *Longford Leader*, 19 Oct. 1929.

<sup>136</sup> *Westmeath Independent*, 12 Oct. 1929.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 Nov. 1929.



little care for the concerns of ordinary voters. The Cumann na nGaedheal organisation had successfully arranged meetings in the three midland towns of Tullamore, Longford and Athlone in late 1929. What is most striking about the meetings however, is the lack of cooperation between Longford and Westmeath. Again, it seems that Cumann na nGaedheal did not act as a constituency organisation there, but rather organised through the three district committees.

### **The Longford/Westmeath by-election**

During 1930 and 1931 the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation across Longford/Westmeath remained rather quiet - the visits of Cosgrave had done little to stir greater activism among members. Athlone Cumann na nGaedheal held its AGM on 14 January 1930 amid a very quiet time for all the political parties,<sup>138</sup> though the Fianna Fáil *cumann* in Ballinamuck county Longford was a rare exception this rule.<sup>139</sup> However, the various party machines were given an opportunity to limber up following the death of Longford Fianna Fáil T.D. James Killane in April. The ensuing by-election made Longford/Westmeath the centre of national attention. On 10 May activity was reported in Colmcille, Ballymahon, Granard and Lanesboro and rumours that party bosses were secretly taking soundings from activists about candidate selection and strategy.<sup>140</sup> Fianna Fáil was first in the race on the weekend of 10 May as borne out by the *Longford Leader* headline 'Fianna Fáil start the ball rolling'.<sup>141</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal was also active and had in mind as its candidate Dr. Vincent Delany. Various names were linked with the Cumann na nGaedheal nomination, but Delany was the clear front-runner with the *Longford Leader* speculating the others would step aside in favour of a man who was 'extremely popular with all classes, irrespective of politics or creed'.<sup>142</sup> Delany seemed to embody Cumann na nGaedheal nationalism and was a prominent figure in Longford through his presidency of the county's nursing association and Longford town's Rugby and boxing clubs.

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<sup>138</sup> *Westmeath Independent*, various issues Jan. to Apr. 1930. The Athlone AGM took place on 14 January.

<sup>139</sup> *Longford Leader*, various issues Jan. to Apr. 1930.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 May 1930.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 May 1930.

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

The Cumann na nGaedheal selection convention was a lively affair chaired by Séamus Dolan and attended by John Marcus O’Sullivan and Liam Burke. Almost all parishes and towns across each county were represented. Westmeath delegates proposed Captain Malone for the vacancy. Malone withdrew his nomination, an act with which Dolan and most delegates agreed. Dolan supported Malone’s withdrawal, stating that the vacancy was a Longford one and so the Cumann na nGaedheal candidate should hail from that part of the constituency. MacEoin told the convention that the eyes of the world were on the constituency and urged Westmeath party activists to support the Longford candidate during the campaign.<sup>143</sup>

Various high profile speakers campaigned in the constituency, with Richard Mulcahy addressing a Cumann na nGaedheal meeting in Moate on 18 May. Seán MacEoin, involved in the candidate’s campaign team,<sup>144</sup> addressed a meeting in Ballymahon on the same day.<sup>145</sup> Blythe, Collins-O’Driscoll, Hogan, Milroy and Tierney also travelled to the constituency as Cumann na nGaedheal looked to gain some Dáil breathing space by gaining the Fianna Fáil seat.<sup>146</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal made a determined effort to win the seat and even allowed deputies who wanted to campaign in Longford/Westmeath miss Dáil business.<sup>147</sup> Delany also had the support of the Farmers’ Union, and Lord Longford,<sup>148</sup> as the ideological battle lines of the following general election were drawn as the world absorbed the shock of the Wall Street crash. The secretary of the Longford Famers’ Union, M.J. Lyons, told a meeting of farmers that Fianna Fáil policies would devastate agriculture. Lyons also appeared on Cumann na nGaedheal platforms during the campaign. MacEoin echoed the call made at the Farmers’ Party meeting, by asking voters not to endorse Fianna Fáil’s policies.<sup>149</sup>

On balance, Cumann na nGaedheal’s chances of taking the Fianna Fáil seat were slim. It was clear from *The Star* that the party was not confident of a gain. *The Star’s* columns stated the odds were stacked against Cumann na nGaedheal and that

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<sup>143</sup> *Longford Leader*, 24 May 1930. .

<sup>144</sup> Notice of appointment of sub-agent [May 1930] (UCDA, Sean MacEoin papers P176/845).

<sup>145</sup> *Westmeath Independent*, 24 May 1930.

<sup>146</sup> *Anglo-Celt*, 24 May 1930.

<sup>147</sup> Parliamentary Party, minutes of meeting, 22 May 1930 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/3).

<sup>148</sup> *Irish Independent*, 27 May 1930.

<sup>149</sup> *Longford Leader*, various issues May, June 1930.

the seat could only be won if ‘sufficient energy is put into the struggle’.<sup>150</sup> Supporters could not be faulted for lack of effort, the machine was active throughout the campaign. The selection convention had been representative of each corner of the constituency and the campaign in the localities was lively. Heckling of speakers remained a feature of the campaign while the party’s meetings in general trumpeted the government’s record and questioned the promises that Fianna Fáil had made.<sup>151</sup> While the by-election was a three cornered contest, Labour delegates met in Athlone to select Michael Duffy as its candidate, in reality, it was a fight between the two big parties. In the end, Fianna Fáil retained the seat, although the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation had held its own during the campaign. *The Star* was satisfied with the performance of the party machine and that no ground had been lost in Longford/Westmeath since the previous general election.<sup>152</sup> Both the main parties increased their vote but the overall position in the constituency remained as it had been at the previous general election with the two big parties on two seats apiece. It was the first time Fianna Fáil had outpolled Cumann na nGaedheal in a by-election.<sup>153</sup>

Grass-roots activism was maintained in 1931 with meetings taking place in various locations in Longford/Westmeath. Organising efforts for the by-election served to oil the machine in advance of the general election. Efforts to reorganise in all constituencies were discussed by the parliamentary party. Liam Burke asked that deputies cooperate with party workers in building up the machine.<sup>154</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal in neighbouring Roscommon was very strong in this period, with thirty two branches represented at that county’s executive meeting on 25 January 1931.<sup>155</sup> In Longford/Westmeath, Cumann na nGaedheal held public meetings in Moate in May and in Drumraney in August. In this period, the party pretty much had a quasi monopoly on the constituency’s pro-Treaty vote as the Farmers’ Union had disintegrated to quite an extent following the September 1927 election. Moreover, its alliance with Cumann na nGaedheal in the by-election probably identified it as the party of farming interests. The Labour party continued to build its constituency

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<sup>150</sup> *The Star*, 17 May 1930.

<sup>151</sup> *Westmeath Independent*, 7 June 1930.

<sup>152</sup> *The Star*, 21 June 1930.

<sup>153</sup> Meehan, *Cosgrave party*, p. 165.

<sup>154</sup> Parliamentary Party, minutes of meeting, 17 July 1930 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/3).

<sup>155</sup> *Westmeath Independent*, 31 Jan. 1931.

organisation under the direction of a reorganising committee,<sup>156</sup> forming new branches in late 1930 and having regular meetings in 1931. By then, buoyed by its by-election victory, Fianna Fáil was the most active organisation in the build up to the 1932 election.

In 1932 Clonbroney remained a Cumann na nGaedheal stronghold in county Longford with regular branch meetings while other centres had quietened somewhat. Cumann na nGaedheal's selection convention took place in the county hall in Mullingar on 17 January, a full eleven days after Fianna Fáil had selected its candidates- a statement of intent by the opposition party. The mood of the Cumann na nGaedheal convention was upbeat. Seán MacEoin, as had been widely anticipated, came back to his 'own people' in Longford to 'carry your banner and defend your interests'.<sup>157</sup> Connolly told the convention that the Cumann na nGaedheal government had succeeded in its task of bringing together various strands of Irish nationalism while the chairman of the convention J.J. Byrne T.D. commented on the strong financial position of the state compared with other European nations, a catch cry heard at party meetings throughout the country in 1932.<sup>158</sup>

Branches such as those in Mullinaghta and Ballymahon became active again after lengthy periods of idleness. Election meetings were widespread, showing that the party's organisation network in the constituency remained strong beneath the surface. Even if invisible for lengthy periods, it was there when called upon. Having MacEoin as a candidate boosted the party's campaign as his daring exploits during the revolutionary war became the theme at numerous election rallies in county Longford.<sup>159</sup> Election meetings were arranged as before and party supporters in north Westmeath interested in loaning their cars to the organisation were asked to forward their names to the director of transport at the party's election rooms Earl Street Mullingar.<sup>160</sup> MacEoin's desk diary reveals something of the gruelling task faced by candidates electioneering in a geographically large constituency such as Longford/Westmeath. Much ground had to be covered, first in calling on the rank-and-file membership to ask for their support at the Cumann na nGaedheal selection

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<sup>156</sup> Niamh Puirseil, *The Irish Labour party, 1922-73* (Dublin, 2007), pp 30-3.

<sup>157</sup> *Longford Leader*, 23 Jan. 1932.

<sup>158</sup> *Westmeath Examiner*, 23 Jan. 1932.

<sup>159</sup> *Longford Leader*, 30 Jan. 1932.

<sup>160</sup> *Westmeath Examiner*, 6 Feb. 1932.

convention,<sup>161</sup> and secondly in addressing election rallies in both counties once confirmed as a candidate for the party.<sup>162</sup> MacEoin's diary also shows that the party's schedule of election meetings in the constituency was arranged centrally by a committee and in consultation with the other Cumann na nGaedheal candidates. Before the convention, MacEoin met with Shaw and Connolly to arrange election meetings while a further schedule was worked on by a Cumann na nGaedheal committee on 20 January.<sup>163</sup>

Economic policy was a major issue in this election with Cumann na nGaedheal articulating the need for cooperation with England as against the more radical protectionist policies advocated by Fianna Fáil. Voters in Mullingar experienced the government argument first hand as Minister for Industry and Commerce Patrick McGilligan addressed a meeting in support of the government's candidates on 11 February.<sup>164</sup> Economics were not the only divisive issue of this election as both Cumann na nGaedheal and Fianna Fáil were guilty of raking over old Civil War wounds during the campaign. Meetings of both parties could be marked by the rehashing of the debates of the 1922 general election.<sup>165</sup> As before, the parties made an effort to organise meetings that would clash with fairs or markets. MacEoin addressed meetings of the Longford fair on 1 February<sup>166</sup> and at Lanesboro on 12 February.<sup>167</sup>

As the table below shows, the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation in Longford/Westmeath again held its own in an election campaign, but the government it supported nevertheless lost power. Fianna Fáil gained a seat, taking its total in Longford/Westmeath to three. Cumann na nGaedheal retained its two seats with MacEoin replacing Connolly in the Dáil. In MacEoin, the constituency organisation gained a politician of national stature who would play a leading role in the party for the following three decades.

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<sup>161</sup> MacEoin diary entries, 7, 14 Jan. 1932 (UCDA, Seán MacEoin papers, P151/1949).

<sup>162</sup> MacEoin diary entries, Jan., Feb. 1932 (ibid.).

<sup>163</sup> MacEoin diary entry, 20 Jan. 1932 (ibid.).

<sup>164</sup> *Westmeath Examiner*, 13 Feb. 1932.

<sup>165</sup> *Longford Leader*, 13 Feb. 1932.

<sup>166</sup> MacEoin diary entry, 1 Feb. 1932 (UCDA, Seán MacEoin papers, P151/1949).

<sup>167</sup> MacEoin diary entry, 12 Feb. 1932 (ibid.).

*Figure 4. First Preference Vote obtained by successful candidates in Longford/Westmeath in 1932.*<sup>168</sup>

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Preference Vote</b>
James Geoghegan	Fianna Fáil	7,202
M. J. Kennedy	Fianna Fáil	6,484
Gen. Seán Mac Eoin	Cumann na nGaedheal	6, 249
P. W Shaw	Cumann na nGaedheal	6, 128
Francis Gormley	Fianna Fáil	3, 796

### **Party of power to party of protest**

The loss of power initially hurt the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation. Treatyites watched as de Valera set about changing the state they had spent a decade building up. Speaking in Trim Co. Meath in September, Cosgrave, now leader of the opposition, expressed his disappointment that under Fianna Fáil, the army had not been allowed to honour its founder, Michael Collins as had been the case under Cumann na nGaedheal.<sup>169</sup> While Treatyites were riled at the failure of de Valera to honour their icons, it was opposition to the government's economic policies that provided the impetus for Treatyite political mobilisation after 1932. In Trim, Cosgrave was escorted to the podium by 150 Army Comrades members as a varied opposition to Fianna Fáil was emerging. A Blueshirt meeting took place in Mullingar in early September 1932 while the new Farmers' and Ratepayers' League's 'spontaneous growth' in the county was the source of editorial comment in October.<sup>170</sup> Having been a party of government and responsibility for ten years, it was scarcely surprising that disgruntled Treatyites and farmers would channel their radicalism and frustration into the new organisations rather than Cumann na nGaedheal. However, Cumann na nGaedheal in Longford/Westmeath did continue to function in 1932 with the Longford county executive meeting in May on the eve of the party's annual convention in the Gresham hotel. Westmeath was also represented at the party conference, though as usual, the impetus came from the southern part of

<sup>168</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary election results*, p. 136.

<sup>169</sup> *Longford Leader*, 10 Sept. 1932.

<sup>170</sup> *Westmeath Examiner*, 10 Sept., 15 Oct. 1932.

the county.<sup>171</sup> The south Westmeath executive proposed a vote of sympathy to the late William Redmond's family for the 'services which he and his family rendered throughout many years to the cause of Ireland'.<sup>172</sup>

Scarcely having had time to regroup since defeat at the polls in 1932, over one hundred delegates descended on Mullingar for the Cumann na nGaedheal selection convention in January 1933 as de Valera's snap election caught them by surprise.<sup>173</sup> Reports of the convention suggest delegates were resolute and firm in their belief that Cumann na nGaedheal would return to power after the election. Shaw defiantly referred to the leader of the opposition as 'President Cosgrave', being confident that his party leader would once again assume that title once all seats were filled after the election.<sup>174</sup> On balance, Cumann na nGaedheal fought a more positive campaign in 1933 than it had at the previous election,<sup>175</sup> and Cosgrave's national record was lauded in party adverts in newspapers across the country as Treatyites tried to counter Fianna Fáil's clever use of the green card. This was part of Cumann na nGaedheal's attempt to 'reconnect with its nationalist background'.<sup>176</sup>

Nationally, Cumann na nGaedheal fielded fewer candidates than in any previous election in order to avoid splitting the broader pro-Treaty vote.<sup>177</sup> Its selection of just two candidates in Longford/Westmeath was indicative of its more defensive posture going into the 1933 election. Cumann na nGaedheal in Longford/Westmeath cooperated with the Farmers' and Ratepayers' League, now the party organisation of the newly established National Centre Party, by selecting two candidates so as not to 'interfere unduly' with farming interests. As we have seen, in both Clare and Longford Westmeath, there had been incidents of cooperation between Cumann na nGaedheal and the old Farmers' Union in previous elections. However, the Economic War embarked on by the new Fianna Fáil government helped to draw Cumann na nGaedheal even closer to the party representing farming interests and quite possibly made fusion of the two inevitable. The Farmers' and Ratepayers' League were strong in both counties its ticket boasted a candidate from Longford and Westmeath.

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<sup>171</sup> *Irish Independent*, 18 May 1932.

<sup>172</sup> *United Irishman*, 21 May 1932.

<sup>173</sup> *Longford Leader*, 14 Jan. 1933.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> Meehan, *Cosgrave party*, p. 193.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

A boisterous campaign by Cumann na nGaedheal locally brought Cosgrave to Longford on 17 January for an election rally. Republican interrupters cried ‘Up de Valera’ during Cosgrave’s address. However, Cosgrave, long renowned for his ability to deliver a sharp rejoinder, calmly retorted that the ‘issue is up Ireland and not up de Valera or anybody else’.<sup>178</sup> In 1933 Cumann na nGaedheal also made use of a ‘talking film’ of Cosgrave which was brought to various constituencies by cinema vans.<sup>179</sup> On the same day that Cosgrave spoke in Longford, a fair in Athlone was interrupted when the ‘Cumann na nGaedheal talkie film van passed through the crowd and was received with some cheers and some derisive cries’.<sup>180</sup> Clearly those attending the Athlone fair were determined to recreate in full the conditions of a boisterous election meeting when greeted by the ‘talkie film’. However, in spite of Cosgrave’s best efforts, and partly through opposition fracture, Cumann na nGaedheal lost a seat in Longford/Westmeath. As in Clare, radical change would follow in the party’s constituency apparatus.

*Figure 5. First preference Vote Obtained by successful candidates in Longford/Westmeath in 1933.*<sup>181</sup>

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Preference Vote</b>
M. J. Kennedy	Fianna Fáil	7,784
Gen. Seán Mac Eoin	Cumann na nGaedheal	6,171
James Victory	Fianna Fáil	5,935
Charles Fagan	National Centre Party	5,729
James Geoghegan	Fianna Fáil	4,649

In April 1933, with their political party licking its wounds following another electoral defeat, Treatyites began organising in Longford/Westmeath with renewed zeal as part of Richard Mulcahy’s reorganising efforts. A county convention of Cumann na nGaedheal was organised in Longford in early April in advance of the party’s annual conference. At this meeting, in a break with previous practice, it was decided to form three separate executives for county Longford, seemingly in an attempt to execute a successful local election campaign. Previously the constituency had been divided in three with executives for Longford, south Westmeath and north

<sup>178</sup> *Longford Leader*, 21 Jan. 1933.

<sup>179</sup> Meehan, *Cosgrave party*, p. 119.

<sup>180</sup> *Irish Independent*, 18 Jan. 1933.

<sup>181</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary election results*, p. 141.



Westmeath. Fianna Fáil, on the other hand, had always had north and south Longford district executives. The proposed north Longford executive would be centred on Ballinalee; the one for mid Longford would be based around Longford town; and Ballymahon would be the focus of the new south Longford district.<sup>182</sup> A new branch of Cumann na nGaedheal was established in Arva in north county Longford, while existing *cumann* such as Newtownforbes and Edgeworthstown became much more active over the summer months as organisational renewal became key. Meanwhile, steps were taken locally to act on the national executive's decision to contest the local elections of 1933. The constituency was well represented at the 1933 annual convention showing that the party's core strength remained solid.<sup>183</sup>

While there had been an ACA presence in Westmeath since 1932, Longford had no branch until one was formed in Edgeworthstown in May 1933.<sup>184</sup> Though MacEoin stressed at its inaugural meeting that the new organisation was apolitical, it quickly became ever more politicised during the summer months. The Farmers' and Ratepayers' League was active too, holding numerous meetings to discuss the Economic War. James Dillon and Frank MacDermot addressed a reported 3,000 disgruntled farmers in Mullingar at the end of August.<sup>185</sup> Merger with Cumann na nGaedheal was openly discussed during the meeting. Fusion was also discussed at the Longford executive of the Farmers' and Ratepayers' League with near unanimous support expressed for a merger with Cumann na nGaedheal as the Economic War drove the Centre Party ever closer to Cosgrave. However, the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation across the two counties was also making its opposition to the Economic War known at this time. Longford/Westmeath joined forces with its colleagues in Carlow and Mayo in calling on the Fianna Fáil government to discontinue collecting the Land Annuities for the duration of the Economic War.<sup>186</sup> There was a marked increase in Cumann na nGaedheal activism in county Longford from the spring of 1933 until the foundation of Fine Gael in early September, while the impetus for the new party in Westmeath came almost exclusively from the Centre Party although there remained pockets of Cumann na nGaedheal organisation in the county.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> *Longford Leader*, 8 Apr. 1933.

<sup>183</sup> *Irish Independent*, 3 May 1933.

<sup>184</sup> *Longford Leader*, 3 June 1933.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 Sept. 1933.

<sup>186</sup> National Executive, resolution number two, 30 Mar. 1933 (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy papers, P7b/90/44).

<sup>187</sup> *Longford Leader*, various issues Aug., Sept. 1933.

The foundation of Fine Gael gave Treatyites a new stridency and sense of purpose across the whole constituency. For the remainder of 1933, Fine Gael activism levels far outpaced that of Fianna Fáil, and the organisation was even given its own section in the *Longford Leader*. Immediately upon the party's establishment, branches of the United Ireland Party began to appear in every corner of the constituency. It was quick to appear in old Cumann na nGaedheal strongholds in Longford such as Ballinalee and Edgeworthstown, and more than likely such branches of Fine Gael were in reality old Cumann na nGaedheal units revitalised with the addition of the farmers' organisation. The same was true in Westmeath where branches of United Ireland began to appear immediately upon the merger. However, it must be noted that in county Longford Treatyite reorganisation predated the foundation of Fine Gael. However the same could not be said of Westmeath where by 1933 much of the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation had lapsed after the party lost power, its support in the county had always been weakened by the potential strength of effective farmers' mobilisation. There had been some Cumann na nGaedheal activism in Westmeath during 1932,<sup>188</sup> though by 1933 most Treatyite activism in the county was channelled through the ACA.<sup>189</sup> In Westmeath, Blueshirtism proved radical with widespread tree felling and telephone wire cuttings. Numerous files in the Department of Justice papers bear testimony to the scale of outrages in the county during 1933 and 1934. Moreover, Blueshirt meetings and dances often provoked a violent reaction from the movement's opponents.<sup>190</sup>

Following the merger, numerous Farmers' and Ratepayers' League branches in Westmeath decided to continue on as branches of Fine Gael.<sup>191</sup> Representatives of Cumann na nGaedheal, the Blueshirts and the Centre Party gathered in Mullingar to form a branch of the United Ireland Party. The group decided to elect a committee of twelve. Six officers would be selected from the Farmers' and Ratepayer's League, four from Cumann na nGaedheal and two from the National Guard.<sup>192</sup> In Westmeath's second largest town, the former party of government had found itself in a subordinate position within the new opposition party. By October, the new party was sufficiently

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<sup>188</sup> *United Irishman*, 25 June 1932.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 Dec. 1932.

<sup>190</sup> Attack on UIP dance, Moate Co. Westmeath, May 1934 (NAI, Department of Justice papers, Jus 8/178).

<sup>191</sup> *Westmeath Examiner*, 23 Sept. 1933.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 Sept. 1933.

organised for O'Duffy to address 1,000 supporters in Mullingar, while Fine Gael platforms and branches became swelled with Blueshirted members.<sup>193</sup> The new party, created from elements that had long shared a common political outlook seemed set to become the most colourful and most vibrant organisation in Longford/Westmeath.

Cumann na nGaedheal had a presence in the constituency of Longford/Westmeath from its foundation right up until its dissolution in 1933. Longford was energetically organised in the aftermath of the 1923 election, while Westmeath had to wait until 1925 before it received similar attention, when the party at national level attempted to iron out organisational problems that had existed in a number of constituencies. The party was at its best organised in the constituency between 1925 and 1927 when its presence across county Westmeath was most notable. In September 1927 the organisation delivered two Cumann na nGaedheal seats for the first time, a feat that especially pleased the organisation in county Longford. Rather than form a constituency committee, the organisation in Longford/Westmeath instead formed three district executives: county Longford, north Westmeath and south Westmeath. Given the large geographical area it covered, this approach probably served the organisation well. These executives formed the focal point for the branches under their watch and could also co-ordinate their efforts. Almost all villages, towns and parishes in the constituency had *cumainn* established but many of these disappeared between elections. Nevertheless, there were a quite a number of consistent strongholds such as Ballinalee, Longford town, Edgeworthstown, Moate and Athlone where activism was solid throughout the period. From 1925 onwards the dangling of patronage as an inducement to join became less evident as the party instead seemed to focus on attracting members who would support government policy. In 1929 President Cosgrave visited the constituency twice, with no elections imminent. These visits brought people into contact with the head of government while the leader displayed more of a 'hands on' approach to his political machinery. Even as it lost power to a resurgent Fianna Fáil in 1932, Cumann na nGaedheal held onto the seat it had gained in the election of September 1927 showing that it had built up a strong support base in Longford/Westmeath. However, managing to stand still in the face of the Fianna Fáil onslaught of 1932 was not enough to keep Cosgrave and his party in power.

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<sup>193</sup> *Westmeath Independent*, 21 Oct. 1933.



## Cumann na nGaedheal in Dublin North

The third constituency in our study of the Cumann na nGaedheal grass-root organisation, Dublin North, contrasts quite sharply with the two constituencies looked at in chapters three and four. Located in the country's capital, close to parliament buildings on Kildare street and containing party headquarters on Parnell Square, this constituency had an in-built organisational advantage over more rural and peripheral areas such as Clare and Longford/Westmeath.

Throughout the period, Dublin North proved fertile ground for Cumann na nGaedheal. It was formed in 1923 through a merger of the old Mid Dublin and Dublin North West parliamentary constituencies. In June 1922 these constituencies were overwhelmingly pro-Treaty. In June 1922, Mid Dublin returned two independents, a Treatyite Sinn Féiner and an anti-Treatyite Sinn Féiner to the Dáil. Meanwhile Dublin North West elected four Treatyite Dáil deputies in 1922. There had been no anti-Treaty candidate in that constituency.<sup>1</sup> As such, Cumann na nGaedheal inherited a strong base in the Dublin North constituency

Dublin North was one of the few constituencies to organise Cumann na nGaedheal branches in the immediate aftermath of the preliminary conference of 7 December 1922. As noted in preceding chapters, organisational work until the formal launch of the party in April 1923 was of a relatively quiet nature. Dublin North on the other hand was energetically organised from early January 1923 with the Treatyite General Election Committee noting the formation of a *cumann* in Fairview at its meeting of 5 January.<sup>2</sup> At a further meeting of the same committee on 26 January, Treatyite organiser *par excellence* R.J. Purcell was appointed to organise Dublin. Purcell first became involved with the

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<sup>1</sup> Brian M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1918-92* (Dublin, 1992), p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> General and Election Committee, minutes of meeting, 5 Jan. 1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

Treatyites in 1922 on Michael Collins's recommendation to the Treaty election committees and brought to the Cumann na nGaedheal party his experience of political organisation over many years in Britain. Within days of Purcell's appointment, branches of Cumann na nGaedheal had been formed in east Clontarf, Drumcondra and the Mountjoy Ward.<sup>3</sup> However, after finding only eight to ten willing workers in East Clontarf, the provisional Standing Committee decided that those prospective members could link up with the branch which had been established in Fairview in early January. A *cumann* was started in Glasnevin by 8 February while efforts to establish the party machine in Arran's Quay were also underway at that time.<sup>4</sup> Purcell was pro-active in establishing branches, attending their meetings and making sure the new *cumainn* were speedily affiliated with headquarters. He also kept the provisional Standing Committee well briefed on the progress he was making in Dublin, reporting on the regularity of meetings, and on any increase in membership within the new branches. Cumann na nGaedheal made a promising start in Dublin North with regular meetings and *cumainn* established in most wards.

By 16 March, with the official launch of Cumann na nGaedheal still over a month away, Purcell was able to report that a branch had been established in every part of the constituency except the Rotunda ward.<sup>5</sup> Whether his work in Dublin was done, or as was perhaps more likely, his talents were needed elsewhere, Purcell was sent to Kilkenny and J.J. Egan became the new organiser for Dublin North.

Early in its life the North Dublin Cumann na nGaedheal organisation was well organised, active and outspoken in shaping the party that was developing out of the pro-Treaty wing of revolutionary Sinn Féin. A constituency committee was formed in April, well in advance of such developments in either Clare or Longford/Westmeath, and the *cumainn* themselves proved keen to make their voices heard within the organisation. Glasnevin *cumann* had a constitutional amendment defeated at the Cumann na nGaedheal Mansion House launch,<sup>6</sup> while the constituency committee and numerous branches forcefully expressed their views about such matters as the local elections and the prevalence of Gaelic features within the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation. By the end of June, Clontarf had its own branch with Seán McGarry chairing a *cumann* meeting there on 29 June. In revolutionary Sinn Féin days, there were two branches in Clontarf with

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<sup>3</sup> Provisional national executive, minutes of meeting, 2 Feb. 1923 (ibid.).

<sup>4</sup> Provisional national executive, minutes of meeting, 8 Feb. 1923 (ibid.).

<sup>5</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal, [provisional standing committee?], minutes of meeting, 16 Mar. 1923 (ibid.).

<sup>6</sup> Report of Cumann na nGaedheal convention, the Mansion House, 27 Apr. 1923 (ibid.).

McGarry chairing the west Clontarf club.<sup>7</sup> Mulcahy addressed the meeting first in Irish and then in English. He asked those present to use the organisation to ‘build up solid, lasting, public opinion’.<sup>8</sup> Seán Milroy went on to laud Clontarf’s national associations, which he claimed stretched back to the battle of 1014, and he expressed hope it would long be associated with General Mulcahy. Following the meeting, steps were taken to extend the organisation in the district. In June the constituency once again lost an organiser with J.J. Egan moving to Cavan.<sup>9</sup> Might it be that the organisation in Dublin North at this time was robust enough to do without the services of an organiser? It seems that Dublin North was sacrificed whenever an organiser was needed elsewhere because the party recognised its early organisational vitality.

The Dublin North constituency committee often acted on its own initiative and was never reliant upon the services of a paid organiser in the party’s formative days. On its suggestion, a public meeting for the two city constituencies was organised for 12 August, while it arranged a selection convention in a more efficient manner than the evidence has suggested was the case in either Clare or Longford/Westmeath. The branches busily sought a role in selecting the party’s candidates, and in the week before the 1 August selection convention, numerous local meetings were held across north Dublin. For internal organisation matters, north city branches often used the party’s headquarters which was of course located within the constituency. At one such meeting of the Glasnevin *cumann* on 23 July, Michael Staines, previously a pro-Treaty T.D. for Dublin North West told members that he would not stand as a candidate in Dublin North.<sup>10</sup> Members attending this meeting also thanked a resident of Botanic road for taking wounded national army soldiers on trips to the countryside.<sup>11</sup> Mr Breen, newly appointed Dublin city organiser, attended a meeting at headquarters on 24 July and seemed confident that each part of the constituency would be represented at the upcoming selection convention. Meanwhile McGarry informed the constituency committee that he was willing to stand as a candidate. Dublin North *cumann* would play a prominent role during the election. The party’s campaign in the capital began on 12 August with a public meeting addressed by all *Cumann na nGaedheal* candidates from across the three Dublin constituencies. The rally had been suggested by

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<sup>7</sup> List of Sinn Féin personnel, undated (NAI, Sinn Féin and *Cumann na Poblachta* papers, 1094/13/3).

<sup>8</sup> *United Irishman*, 30 June 1923.

<sup>9</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 22 June 1923 (UCDA, *Cumann na nGaedheal* party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>10</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 23 July 1923.

<sup>11</sup> *Irish Independent*, 25 July 1923.

the Dublin North constituency committee though it is likely that such a rally would have been arranged in any case.<sup>12</sup> Addressing the 5,000 strong meeting, Irish-American leader Judge Cohalan endorsed the Cumann na nGaedheal candidates for Dublin.

The constituency committee took a lead role in directing the election campaign across Dublin North. It met at party headquarters in mid August to plan numerous election meetings. Meetings were subsequently arranged to take place on the Finglas road and on Manor Street.<sup>13</sup> During the campaign, Cumann na nGaedheal public meetings took place across the various north city wards. Suitable locations with good acoustics were sought out by members before these rallies were organised. As was the case in the more rural constituencies, Cumann na nGaedheal in Dublin North used these meetings to convey the government's policy directly to the electors. Coverage of these Dublin North gatherings was less extensive than was the case in more rural constituencies. As noted in previous chapters, and by American political scientist Warner Moss, local newspapers in this period were gossipy by nature and the sheer attention to detail of reporters significantly widened a politician's audience.<sup>14</sup> However, in Dublin North, there was no constituency-wide local newspaper leaving the coverage of meetings in the hands of the national papers or the daily *Dublin Evening Mail*. As such, the coverage of election meetings in the city tended to be of a thinner consistency than that found in the rural press. Still, the parish pump could be as much of a factor in the political life of an urban constituency as anywhere else. On the eve of the general election, a committee of Glasnevin residents lobbied all the political parties to reopen the Finglas road post office. Following the election, Cumann na nGaedheal T.D. Seán McGarry introduced a delegation of local residents from Glasnevin to the Postmaster General J.J. Walsh. Walsh informed the group that he had decided to reopen the post office.<sup>15</sup> A Cumann na nGaedheal minister had capitulated to a local pressure group.

As can be gleaned from the table below, Cumann na nGaedheal's first electoral outing in Dublin North was a success. The party won four of the constituency's eight seats. Moreover, Alfred Byrne was a strong supporter of the Treaty as was the Businessman's party showing that sentiment in Dublin North remained strongly pro-Free State. Séamus Hughes, soon to be Cumann na nGaedheal's general secretary, obtained a somewhat

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<sup>12</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 13 July 1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books P39/min/1).

<sup>13</sup> *Irish Times*, 16 Aug. 1923.

<sup>14</sup> Warner Moss, *Political parties in the Irish Free State* (New York, 1933), p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 25 Aug., 5 Sept. 1923.



disappointing 365 votes as the party's fifth candidate. Treatyites had been well drilled in north Dublin, and the organisation of the so called 'Cumann Party' was praised in the *Times* of London. Treaty supporters in the capital had voted solidly for the Cumann na nGaedheal party ticket according to *The Times* which also praised the manner in which Republican voters had been marshalled in the city.<sup>16</sup> Dublin North, and indeed Dublin County and Dublin South would remain Cumann na nGaedheal strongholds throughout the party's life.

*Figure 1: Vote obtained by successful Dublin North candidates 1923.*<sup>17</sup>

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Preference Vote.</b>
Gen. Richard James Mulcahy	Cumann na nGaedheal	22,205
Alfred Byrne	Independent	10,518
Ernest O'Malley	Anti-Treaty SF	4,602
Seán T. O'Kelly	Anti-Treaty SF	4,233
William Hewat	Businessman's Party	2,594
Seán McGarry	Cumann na nGaedheal	1,397
Margaret Collins-O'Driscoll	Cumann na nGaedheal	1,247
Francis Cahill	Cumann na nGaedheal	790

Unlike the two previous constituencies which have been scrutinised, the work of Cumann na nGaedheal organisation in Dublin North did not abate with the passing of the general election. Rather, the party organisation in the constituency remained active and took a leading role in trying to shape the new party. Following the general election, two themes emerge which were to remain a cornerstone of the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation in Dublin North: its preoccupation with developing as a centre of entertainment for members and its clear interest in the pursuit of a policy of Gaelicisation in the newly independent state.

<sup>16</sup> *The Times*, 29 Aug. 1923.

<sup>17</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland*, p. 110.

## Politics as a pastime?

Dublin North Cumann na nGaedheal continued a longstanding nationalist tradition of combining leisure and politics.<sup>18</sup> It was from the seed of a Dublin North constituency committee meeting in September that the first Cumann na nGaedheal central branch or *ard-chumann* grew. Discussing the question of organising entertainment during the winter season, the constituency decided to bring the Dublin County and Dublin South constituency organisations together to arrange such a forum for members in the capital.<sup>19</sup> Members of the Standing Committee were invited to a meeting with the three Dublin constituency committees on 24 September. The meeting was called to arrange the establishment of a central branch.<sup>20</sup> Speaking at the launch of the *Ard-chumann*, Mulcahy said he hoped that it would become a centre of ‘progressive ideas’ and ‘Gaelicisation’. The central branch committee was made up of delegates representing each of the constituency committees in Dublin with Seán O’Kelly, Councillor Paddy McIntyre and Séamus Hughes representing Dublin North. Members of the central branch had to be members of a local *cumann* and its existence seems to have resided outside the remit of the Cumann na nGaedheal constitution. Subscriptions for central branch membership were set at 5 s. The central branch aimed to provide a forum for lectures,<sup>21</sup> educate party members politically and organise social functions. It hoped to host and organise lectures in the same atmosphere as ‘the old Celtic Literary Club’.<sup>22</sup> On 21 November 1923 John Marcus O’Sullivan lectured members of the central branch on the phases of revolution. The lecture was subsequently published.<sup>23</sup>

Reflecting a general Dublin North concern with Irish nationality, the central branch developed an Irish language committee. There is an inescapable sense that in this period, Dublin city, or more especially north city, Cumann na nGaedheal, was determined to shape

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<sup>18</sup> R.V., Comerford, ‘Patriotism as pastime: the appeal of Fenianism in the mid 1860s’ in *IHS*, xxii (March 1981), pp 239-50.

<sup>19</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 22 Sept. 1923.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 Sept. 1923; Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 21 Sept. 1923 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books P39/min/1).

<sup>21</sup> Lectures were seen as a key social function. George Lyons gave a lecture to the Dun Laoghaire branch in June 1923. He was later a candidate for Dublin South in August 1923. Seán Healey, branch secretary to George A. Lyons, 27 June 1923 (NLI, George A. Lyons papers, MS 33, 675/A/1/35).

<sup>22</sup> It is likely many Cumann na nGaedheal members in urban centres had backgrounds in the literary revival. De Róiste was a member of the Celtic Literary Society in Cork in 1902. De Róiste diary entry, 14 Feb. 1902 (CCCA, Liam de Róiste papers, U271/A/1); *Dublin Evening Mail*, 2 Oct. 1923.

<sup>23</sup> J.M. O’Sullivan, *Phases of revolution: lecture delivered before the ard-chumann of Cumann na nGaedheal on 21<sup>st</sup> November, 1923* (Dublin, [1924?]).

the new organisation which it saw as crucial in inculcating a sense of Irish nationality and political education among members and the wider population. As noted by Fearghall McGarry, a gaelicising zeal was also evident in the early years of the Garda Síochána. As Commissioner, Eoin O'Duffy saw the GAA as a potential force for healing the Civil War divide and Irish cultural pursuits more generally as a means of countering moral and physical degeneration.<sup>24</sup> Deep within Irish nationalism was a cultural chauvinism which sometimes displayed a sinister streak. In 1927, Irish-Irelanders in Tipperary called on Cumann na nGaedheal and Fianna Fáil to promote gaelic culture and to stamp out 'degrading' jazz and other foreign forms of entertainment.<sup>25</sup>

Professor William Magennis welcomed members to the first Cumann na nGaedheal central branch meeting of winter 1924. Magennis, reviewing the work of the club in the previous year, said its programme 'included lectures and social meetings, and at the latter nothing but Irish was spoken'.<sup>26</sup> Magennis then introduced the season's first speaker, President Cosgrave. In his usual modest way, Cosgrave said he hoped members would hear subsequent lectures of a more important and far reaching nature than that he would deliver that night. His lecture involved taking stock of the country's position, an exposition on the 'duties and responsibilities of Irish citizenship, and what were the political obligations of the moment'. Cosgrave advised supporters to buy Irish goods, and not to ignore the duties of citizenship.<sup>27</sup>

Dublin North branches proposed a number of resolutions for discussion at the January 1924 Cumann na nGaedheal annual convention. The resolutions submitted for debate represent the same general theme as those proposed by rural branches of the party. For instance, the land claims of War of Independence and Civil War veterans were pressed in a Glasnevin resolution that called for a portion of untenanted land to be set aside for old IRA and ex-National Army men.<sup>28</sup> Changes to the way branches were represented at the party convention were also proposed by Glasnevin while the Inns Quay *cumann* suggested that government produce a book annually 'giving particulars as to salaries in the Civil Service'.<sup>29</sup> The constituency committee itself submitted a motion for debate by the party conference. It called for Irish dances and music to comprise at least 50% of the programme

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<sup>24</sup> Fearghal McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy: a self-made hero* (Oxford, 2005), pp 150-62.

<sup>25</sup> *Nenagh Guardian*, 3 Dec. 1927.

<sup>26</sup> *Southern Star*, 18 Oct. 1924.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Amendments to the constitution, 1924 annual convention (UCDA, Hugh Kennedy papers, P4/1380/8).

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

at all Cumann na nGaedheal social functions. Again, cultural and national considerations were at the forefront of the constituency's thinking. Dublin North Cumann na nGaedheal seems to have been driven by a clear awareness of the possibilities before the country now that it had obtained its independence. Revolutionary rhetoric had spilled over into the north city Cumann na nGaedheal organisation and for it, the national revolution was a process which would continue to evolve under the Free State. Dublin North T.D. Richard Mulcahy was elected one of the Cumann na nGaedheal vice presidents, alongside Jenny Wyse Power, by delegates to the annual convention.

The Dublin North constituency AGM took place on 26 February 1924. Councillor McIntyre was elected to the chair with Mr. O'Driscoll, husband of the constituency's female T.D, elected constituency secretary. Those present were asked to ensure that the voting lists were accurate and advised that it was the duty of each conscientious citizen to ensure that 'no bogus voters' remained on the list.<sup>30</sup> In addition, members were provided with a breakdown of the number of electors in each of the ten wards in the constituency.<sup>31</sup> Reflecting the levels of cooperation that existed between the Dublin constituencies, north city branches were encouraged to help the South Dublin by-election effort by visiting the constituency organisation's election rooms on College Street. Councillor McIntyre was also chosen as the constituency's representative on the National Executive, and from there he was chosen as a member of the Standing Committee where he would play a leading role in the party organisation nationally.

McIntyre was a member of the Standing Committee during the tumultuous days of the Army Mutiny. On the party's governing committee, McIntyre proved proficient in pressing the interests of the Dublin North constituency committee. The constituency committee met on 27 March, between Standing Committee meetings on 25 and 28 of the month. McIntyre advised the Standing Committee that his constituency was generally supportive of its line on the mutiny. The 'Army Crisis' was a particularly sensitive issue in Dublin North given that Mulcahy was Minister for Defence. McIntyre further pushed an issue which Dublin North independent T.D. Alfie Byrne had raised in the Dáil, that of an order placed with a company in Leeds for suits for demobilised Free State soldiers. McIntyre pointed out that a number of clothing factories in the capital had recently closed

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<sup>30</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 27 Feb., *Irish Independent*, 28 Feb. 1924.

<sup>31</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 28 Feb. 1924.

down and that such orders should be placed locally. The Standing Committee agreed to refer the matter to the Minister for Defence.<sup>32</sup>

A Dublin North constituency resolution on 17 April 1924, during the party's crisis, sought to clarify the relationship that existed between the government, the party in the Dáil and the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation.<sup>33</sup> MacNeill's efforts of the previous November had clearly been in vain. Dublin North wanted the Standing Committee to summon a national convention of party members to discuss and to define the relationships between organisation, Dáil party and government and to clarify the aims and policy of Cumann na nGaedheal. This proposal was unrealistic given that the annual convention had just taken place in January. The resolution was referred to the national executive which was summoned specially to a meeting on 13 May. Showing that the Dublin North constituency was independent, even of its (national) poll-topping T.D., Mulcahy wrote to Hughes to 'protest most emphatically'<sup>34</sup> against the decision to convene a special meeting of the National Executive. McIntyre, in proposing the constituency's amended motion to the tempestuous 13 May meeting, called for greater consultation between the government and the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation prior to the introduction of unpopular legislation, that in future all the party's deputies be paid up members of *cumainn*, and that the deputies maintain closer contact with their constituency organisation. Deputies ought to maintain contact with 'the people who have elected them', according to the Dublin North constituency chair. McIntyre also argued from the rank-and-file member's perspective that unpopular measures could plunge Cumann na nGaedheal into a general election where it would be expected to secure the re-election of an unpopular government.<sup>35</sup> National Executive members from various constituencies concurred with McIntyre's analysis, and a discussion of the negative effect of government policies ensued. Kevin O'Higgins told the meeting that McIntyre was doing the organisation a service by putting down his motion and urged that ministers be given greater opportunities to speak at grass-root meetings. The Standing Committee subsequently met a deputation from the Dáil party to arrange the means of more regular communication between the organisation and government.

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<sup>32</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 28 Mar. 1924 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>33</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 17 Apr. 1924 (ibid.); John M. Regan, *The Irish counter revolution, 1921-1936: Treatyite politics and settlement in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), p. 202.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Mulcahy to Séamus Hughes, 25 Apr. 1924 (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy papers, P7b/55/91).

<sup>35</sup> National Executive, minutes of meeting, 13 May 1924 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

In June the fallout from the secession of the National Group affected Dublin North. Two of the constituency's Cumann na nGaedheal deputies, Cahill and McGarry, had already left the party with the other secessionists. As John Regan has pointed out, the National Group deputies elicited little support in the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation, even in their own constituencies.<sup>36</sup> In Dublin North, given that two of its deputies had left the party, there was a strong desire to reach some sort of compromise with the National Group. As such on 6 June, speaking at a Standing Committee meeting, McIntyre urged reunion with the McGrathites. As other historians have documented, the Standing Committee and organisation generally sought to maintain the unity of the party. Cosgrave too, as seen in previous chapters, appears to have adopted a more conciliatory line than some of his ministerial colleagues. The position of the Dublin North constituency was not out of line with the general feeling at many levels within Cumann na nGaedheal. Incidentally, correspondence from the Drumcondra *cumann* asking what action had been taken to act on decisions taken at the annual convention was also discussed at this meeting of the Standing Committee.<sup>37</sup> However, by 17 June, Drumcondra and the Mountjoy ward branches told a constituency committee meeting of their intention to withdraw from Cumann na nGaedheal.<sup>38</sup> The Standing Committee decided that four of its members, O'Connor, McCullough, Doyle and Tierney, should meet the Dublin North *cumann* to steady the ship in the city. The Dublin North organisation emerged intact, although undoubtedly it had been shaken by the secession of two deputies. By March 1925, a new branch had been established in Drumcondra.<sup>39</sup>

Meetings of the Dublin North constituency committee continued to take place regularly. These enabled constituency officers to oversee the *cumann*, which in turn could use that forum to raise issues deemed important by branch members. The constituency committee met at party headquarters in September, October, November and December 1924 showing that party structures remained effective in Dublin North. Branches were also active in the autumn and winter of 1924. Margaret Collins-O'Driscoll attended a meeting of the Glasnevin *cumann*, of which she was a member, in late September. There

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<sup>36</sup> Regan, *Counter revolution*, p. 200.

<sup>37</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 6 June 1924 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>38</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 20 June 1924 (ibid.).

<sup>39</sup> Invitation to Mulcahy to attend the inaugural meeting of the new Drumcondra *cumann*, Mar. 1925 (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy papers, P7b/90/130).

she revealed that many of her party colleagues in the Dáil were opposed to the concept of paying dole money to the unemployed. The deputy, however, believed the dole was necessary until public work schemes could be found to replace it. The Glasnevin branch found the idea of paying money to the unemployed objectionable and agreed on a resolution to that effect. The branch meeting also referred to the work of the constituency committee of April and May in trying to work out the relations that should exist between the government, party and organisation. The branch decided to request that the constituency advise the Standing Committee of the desirability of summoning a special convention of the organisation to review its work and its relationship with the government and parliamentary party.<sup>40</sup> This issue, originally raised by the constituency committee, rumbled on in the north city *cumainn*. The meeting also discussed the possible formation of a national boy-scout movement, a question that interested some of the members present. Glasnevin branch's resolution objecting to the dole was debated by members attending the October constituency meeting. Glasnevin branch succeeded in having the constituency committee adopt its motion calling for the abolition of the dole which was 'undermining the character, and ruining the moral of the people'.<sup>41</sup> However, it should also be pointed out that the meeting also passed resolutions calling on the government to repeal or amend the Act reducing the Old Age Pension and to alert the Dublin Union Commissioners of the need to provide a coal supply for the city's destitute in winter. At this time Paddy McIntyre was sent to North Mayo by the Standing Committee to help organise it for the November 1924 by-election.<sup>42</sup> His value as an organiser was obviously appreciated by the Standing Committee. However, with two vacancies to be filled in Dublin North as a result of the resignation of Cahill and McGarry, McIntyre's talents would soon be needed in his own constituency.

### **March 1925 by-election**

Chairing a Dublin North constituency meeting in November, McIntyre noted that the constituency had provided volunteers for by-elections in South Dublin and that his own Arran Quay *cumann* had authorised him to say such cooperation would again be forthcoming. Delegates from the Rotunda, Inns Quay, Clontarf east, north Dock and north

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<sup>40</sup> *Irish Independent*, 29 Sept. 1924.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 Oct. 1924.

<sup>42</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 10 Oct. 1924 (UCDA, *Cumann na nGaedheal* party minute books, P39/min/1).

City branches promised to do likewise.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps they were hoping for the favour to be reciprocated at the forthcoming March 1925 by-election in Dublin North? J.J. Walsh's new Organising Committee, discussed in chapter two, came into being as a consequence of the party's poor showing in the five November by-elections. It was charged with ensuring the March by-elections bore more fruitful results. The new committee paid close attention to candidate selection, and organisation, in Dublin North. A selection convention was held in headquarters on 28 December with Batt O'Connor presiding. This convention selected Donal J. O'Connor and a P.J. Lawrence as candidates. O'Connor was described as an old Sinn Féiner and Gaelic League activist who lectured in accountancy in UCD. Lawrence, a prominent businessman, was selected to broaden the party's traditional Sinn Féin base as it attempted the gargantuan task of winning two seats in a constituency by-election. Interestingly, Séamus Hughes and McIntyre were proposed as candidates but both declined to let their names go before the convention.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps the pair knew that the new party committee had a definite candidate strategy designed to attract middle-class and business support in the city. The Standing Committee ratified O'Connor as a candidate on 9 January but not Lawrence.<sup>45</sup> Another convention was arranged for 16 January to select the candidate for the second Dublin North vacancy. P.J. Leonard, also a prominent businessman was selected,<sup>46</sup> with the Standing Committee, still reserving the right of candidate ratification over Walsh's committee, providing formal sanction on the 23 January.<sup>47</sup> Dublin North was thrust once again into election mode.

Cumann na nGaedheal headquarters became a bee-hive of election activity as the nine by-elections assumed the status of a mini general election. The party's campaign in Dublin was scheduled to begin on 1 February with a large meeting on College Green to be addressed by Cosgrave, Mulcahy and the two candidates. The two candidates for Dublin North held a meeting with party members on 28 January at headquarters. Leonard claimed that Cumann na nGaedheal had approached him to stand as a candidate because of the need to have strong business representatives in the Dáil, while O'Connor said it was important

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<sup>43</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 3 Nov. 1924.

<sup>44</sup> *Irish Independent*, 29 Dec. 1924.

<sup>45</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 9 Jan. 1925 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute books, P39/min/1).

<sup>46</sup> Organising Committee, minutes of meeting, 20 Jan. 1925 (ibid.).

<sup>47</sup> Standing Committee, minutes of meeting, 23 Jan. 1925 (ibid.).



that voters shake off their apathy.<sup>48</sup> The *Dublin Evening Mail* commented that Cumann na nGaedheal was in the field earlier than usual for this by-election contest and that if it performed poorly ‘the fault can hardly be traced to [a] lack of organisation’.<sup>49</sup>

Cumann na nGaedheal’s campaign opening was well attended and passed off with only minor interruptions. Characteristically, Cosgrave answered the interrupters with a sharp retort that questioned where the unruly section of his audience had been when they were needed during the War of Independence. Cosgrave paid a generous tribute to Mulcahy, who remained exiled on the Cumann na nGaedheal backbenches following the Army Mutiny, stating that the country’s nationality was ‘safe in General Mulcahy’s keeping’.<sup>50</sup> Cosgrave also made reference to the Dublin city North and South secessionists during his speech. He described Cahill, McGarry and Dublin South’s McCarthy as old friends who had made a political mistake by resigning their seats. By 1927, it seems that at least some of the fall-out from the secessionists in Dublin North had been resolved. During the September 1927 election campaign, Francis Cahill, presided at a Cumann na nGaedheal meeting.<sup>51</sup> Another meeting of North Dublin party members was held on 4 February. J.J. Walsh, as head of the new Organising Committee, chaired the meeting. A house-to-house collection in North Dublin was organised to secure funds for the campaign while a committee to secure finance from the ‘more wealthy people’ was established under the chairmanship of M.J. Moran.<sup>52</sup> In what seems to have been part of the overall strategy of attracting the support of business people, the report of the meeting noted that a large number of businessmen attended.

Sinn Féin tried to portray Cumann na nGaedheal as a pro-British party during the March by-elections. One effective poster depicted a skeleton waving a Union flag from a cupboard marked ‘Cumann na nGaedheal’.<sup>53</sup> The anti-Treaty party also capitalised on Cumann na nGaedheal’s internal difficulties by portraying it as a government at war with itself. Other posters were more provocative, such as that portraying Ireland as a woman, tied to a stake, with both Cosgrave and Craig holding a knife to her neck. Other posters

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<sup>48</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 28 Jan. 1925.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 Jan. 1925.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 Feb. 1925.

<sup>51</sup> *Irish Independent*, 12 Sept. 1927.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 Feb. 1925.

<sup>53</sup> Mar. 1925 by-election material (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/20).

alleged that the Dublin constituencies where Cumann na nGaedheal support was strong benefited from patronage.

As in any other constituency, numerous Cumann na nGaedheal public meetings were organised as part of the campaign. In addition, a large placard supporting the North Dublin candidates adorned party headquarters. According to the placard, the two candidates stood for peace and stability while this slogan was flanked by quotes from both Griffith and Collins.<sup>54</sup> Another meeting of election workers was held on 9 February. This meeting was addressed by Mulcahy, Batt O'Connor and the two candidates. When asked for their thoughts on progress, workers said there was more interest in the party than before and that they believed the two seats in Dublin North could be won.<sup>55</sup> Meetings with the candidates took place at various centres in the constituency, such as Spensor Dock and Amiens Street. Walsh's committee was happy with the performance of the party machine in Dublin North, describing it as 'practically perfect'. However, the committee faced up to the reality and acknowledged that unless 60,000 votes were secured there was little chance of the party winning both seats on offer.<sup>56</sup> On the day of the election itself, Cumann na nGaedheal paraded a donkey through the streets of north Dublin which bore the slogan 'Everybody but me is voting for Leonard and O'Connor'. Confident it would win in Dublin North, the party arranged a victory demonstration on College Green with Cosgrave and O'Higgins as the main speakers. Cumann na nGaedheal secured seven of the nine vacancies, with Dublin North's two seats being shared between Leonard and anti-Treaty Sinn Féin's Oscar Traynor. Seán Milroy, representing the National Group, finished bottom of the poll.<sup>57</sup> Given that the party had done well nationally, and that the strength of the original Treaty party had not been weakened by the secessionists, the *Dublin Evening Mail* reported that the spirits of government supporters attending the College Green demonstration were high.<sup>58</sup>

By the summer of 1925, it would appear that some of the Dublin North branches had failed, or were slow, to affiliate. Again, we are hampered by the absence of party membership records from the period but we can say that in June there seems to have been

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<sup>54</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 9 Feb. 1925.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 Feb. 1925.

<sup>56</sup> Organising Committee, minutes of meeting, 13 Feb. 1925 (UCDA, Cumann na nGaedheal party minute book, P39/min/1).

<sup>57</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary election results*, p. 116.

<sup>58</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 14 Mar. 1925.

no affiliated branch in Clontarf, while the Rotunda ward was now incorporated in the Inns Quay branch. The north city, Arran Quay, Glasnevin and Drumcondra *cumainn* completed a list of five constituency branches which existed in June 1925.<sup>59</sup> However, the constituency committee continued to play an active role in the life of the organisation nationally. It submitted a resolution to the 1925 annual convention which called for the enactment of legislation to enable the seats of deputies who failed to take their seats in the Dáil to be given to the candidate with the next highest number of votes.<sup>60</sup>

Two of the constituency's T.D.s continued to show strong interest in the organisation and the minutes of the 1925 annual convention show that both Mulcahy and Collins-O'Driscoll were elected to the National Executive with the strong support of delegates. Mulcahy later used his strong support within the *Cumann na nGaedheal* grass-roots to manoeuvre his way back into the Executive Council. Mulcahy topped the poll in elections to the National Executive at consecutive annual conferences and pointed this out to his colleagues in 1926. Having been under the impression he was not wanted in cabinet, Mulcahy said:

In March 1924 a political accident occurred which has prevented me since that time having any hand or say in the administrative work of the government or in the Counsels of the Executive. In withdrawing from the Executive Council at the time I considered that I served best the interests of the country and of the Organisation...from many individual members in many parts of the country I have over and over again received every mark of confidence. The fact that each Ard Fheis held since that time placed me at the head of the members elected on the Ard Comhairle has been to me, at any rate, a mark of sustained confidence.<sup>61</sup>

Given that the constituency lay so close to the seat of power, it was reasonably easy for deputies to maintain regular contact with the organisation through their attendance at *cumainn* meetings. The constituency organisation itself was a broad church, even with the secession of the National Group element. In September, the constituency committee passed a resolution more in keeping with de Valera's Fianna Fáil party of the 1930s. The resolution proposed the rolling out of a new tillage scheme in Irish agriculture. Hugh Conway argued that such a plan would provide employment in the countryside and stop the trickle of men from Kildare and Meath coming into Dublin seeking work. As noted

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<sup>59</sup> List of Dublin North *cumainn*, 22 June 1925 (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy Papers, P7b/60/38).

<sup>60</sup> Resolutions for debate, 1925 annual convention (ibid., P7b/60/109).

<sup>61</sup> Mulcahy's speech to the National Executive, undated [June 1926?] (ibid., P7b/61/60).

elsewhere, there was a sense that Dubliners resented the migration of the rural poor to the capital.<sup>62</sup> Conway also said he was surprised that narrow self-interest was blinding the opponents of tillage, even if he admitted he understood such opposition given that grazing yielded many farmers big profits. The constituency's newly elected T.D. P.J. Leonard interjected that while he could see the merits in the proposal, he could not agree to compulsory tillage, given that some soils were simply unsuited to the practice.<sup>63</sup> It is likely that few of those who attended the meeting were involved in farming and as such the discussion was probably of a less partial nature than that likely to have taken place in more rural settings. However, those who spoke displayed a keen knowledge of agricultural policy, a willingness to speak out against the prevailing orthodoxy in their own party and most interestingly, a concern with a higher national ideal than the 'narrow self interest' denounced by Hugh Conway. Creating employment and making better use of the country's land appear to be the main motivations behind the debate.

As noted in chapter two, in December 1925 the Boundary Agreement, also known as the London Agreement, occupied the agenda of many *cumann* meetings as the party tried to avoid the ruptures which characterised the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. A private meeting of representatives of Cumann na nGaedheal in the three Dublin constituencies was held in 5 Parnell Square on 13 December. Though the meeting was held behind closed doors, a report of the proceedings was issued to the press. It is unlikely any opposition to the Agreement expressed by members would have evaded publication. O'Higgins took the lead in explaining the circumstances leading to the Agreement while two Ulstermen in attendance, a Mr. Chromie and H.M Murphy, expressed support for the accord. It is possible that the two Ulstermen were strategically chosen for the official report of the meeting. Both men were active in the organisation but their support of the Boundary Agreement must have carried heavier weight than that of members from outside the northern province.<sup>64</sup>

The newly established National League was busily organised branches in North Dublin, with some success, in the autumn and winter of 1926. However, Cumann na

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<sup>62</sup> Terence Dooley, *The land for the people: the land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), pp135-6; Mary E. Daly, 'Social structure of the Dublin working class, 1871-1911' in *IHS*, xxiii, no. 90 (November 1982), pp 128-30.

<sup>63</sup> *Irish Independent*, 2 Sept.1925.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 Dec. 1925.

nGaedheal was still active, even if it lacked the dynamism of previous years. The Glasnevin *cumann* brought a resolution to the 1926 annual convention suggesting the raising of the rate of interest on deposits in the GPO to 4% on the grounds that it would offer a safe investment for the thrifty members of society, make cheap money available to people for development schemes, and that it would give people an interest in electing stable government.<sup>65</sup> With no election imminent, the North Dublin machine was less visible than it had been at any time since the party's foundation. Meetings at this time were of a routine nature. The aforementioned Ulsterman H.M. Murphy presided at the AGM of the Glasnevin branch in December. Collins-O'Driscoll, as branch secretary (it seems deputies could be *cumann* officers), read a report of its activities over the course of the previous year. Members were told that the future of the country would depend on their work on behalf of Cumann na nGaedheal before the next general election. Citing the remarkably low electoral turnout in the constituency at both the previous general election and the by-election of the previous year, many members expressed support for the introduction of a compulsory voting Bill.<sup>66</sup> This had been discussed at the May annual convention on the proposition of the Dundalk branch. Whether influenced by their colleagues in Dundalk or not, the issue was now taken up by the Glasnevin *cumann*.

There was a noticeable sense of purpose about the efforts of the Dublin North constituency organisation from January 1927. This was a general election year and the political machine of the government was warming up for the contest. The *Dublin Evening Mail* remarked in early January on the electoral preparations then taking place at Cumann na nGaedheal headquarters. It was clear that the organisation was limbering up for a general election campaign. Glasnevin Cumann na nGaedheal met again in early January. A discussion of the role of the National Army ensued at the meeting. One branch member was keen to see the army utilised as a means of inculcating a sense of national pride and dispelling a 'pessimism and cynicism which is so prevalent in some quarters'.<sup>67</sup> Showing something of the cultural division between the capital and the countryside, the member proposing the new role for the army suggested that it should be engaged occasionally in colourful marches and parades in rural areas. Clearly to this Dublin member at least, it was rural areas where enhanced nationality and citizenship needed to be fostered. Being

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<sup>65</sup> *Irish Times*, 10 May 1926.

<sup>66</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 6 Dec. 1926.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 Jan. 1927.

supportive of the Free State, perhaps the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation was determined to show that the new state was in fact coterminous with national identity. By marching the army through the countryside, and thereby showcasing an important manifestation of Irish independence, the Free State and its government could be more readily reconciled with the nationalist aspirations of the population at large. However, save for the annual commemoration of Collins and Griffith and the St. Patrick's day parade, the government had little time (or resources) for pageantry and since the Civil War had shown a clear determination to be calm militarism within the regime by showing that power lay within the cabinet and ultimately with the civilian ministers. The idea remained just that, an idea.<sup>68</sup>

Cumann na nGaedheal's reorganising efforts in Dublin north continued in spring 1927 with a meeting of the Wood Quay branch in early February and the formation of a new *cumann* in Clontarf in March. The former Clontarf east and west branches had lapsed and the new *cumann* was designed to cover both wards. Liam Burke, alongside deputies Leonard and Collins-O'Driscoll, attended the meeting to establish the new Clontarf branch on 1 March.<sup>69</sup> A new committee was formed and the meeting concluded after discussing how to thoroughly organise the party in both wards. The important work of organising for the general election was also discussed at the meeting while the two deputies explained government policy to those present.<sup>70</sup>

Cumann na nGaedheal's campaign in Dublin North began on 19 May with the party's five candidates addressing a large meeting in the Rotunda concert hall. Mulcahy told the meeting that no country had a higher status in the Commonwealth than Ireland and that the government was prepared to cooperate and have friendly relations with Britain and other nations. Collins-O'Driscoll told the meeting that the Republicans were trying to fool the unemployed and the destitute by blaming the government for their woes.<sup>71</sup> Meetings were organised in much the same way as they had been for the previous general election.

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<sup>68</sup> Perhaps the idea should not be dismissed as a one off. Mulcahy's biographer claims that he saw the army as an 'agent for fostering national ideals'. Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, *Portrait of a revolutionary: General Richard Mulcahy and the founding of the Irish Free State* (Dublin, 1992), p. 238.

<sup>69</sup> *Irish Times*, 4 Mar. 1927.

<sup>70</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 5 Mar. 1927.

<sup>71</sup> *Irish Independent*, 20 May 1927.

*Figure 2: Vote obtained by successful Dublin North candidates June 1927.<sup>72</sup>*

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Preference Vote.</b>
Alfred Byrne	Independent	17,780
Gen. Richard James Mulcahy	Cumann na nGaedheal	11,726
Seán Thomas O’Kelly	Fianna Fáil	6,040
Oscar Traynor	Sinn Féin	4,351
Kathleen Clarke	Fianna Fáil	3,818
John Joseph Byrne	Cumann na nGaedheal	2,267
Margaret Collins-O’Driscoll	Cumann na nGaedheal	2,267
Dennis Cullen	Labour	1,692

Cumann na nGaedheal’s June 1927 election result in Dublin North was as disappointing as it had been anywhere else. P.J. Leonard lost his seat as the party returned just three members from Dublin North to the Dáil. Moreover, the party’s overall vote was down in the constituency and its representation in Dublin North was now on a par with the combined seat total of the anti-Treatyites of Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin. There had been considerable slippage in the Cumann na nGaedheal vote in its urban stronghold. As noted previously, the election left Cosgrave with just a precarious hold on power and the decision of Fianna Fáil to take the Oath further tightened the Dáil arithmetic. Cosgrave’s administration, having survived a confidence motion on the casting vote of the Ceann Conhairle, the Dublin North constituency committee met in early August to pass a resolution commending the parliamentary party for their continued support of the government in the Dáil.<sup>73</sup> The loss of a seat in Dublin North rankled and the organisation stepped up its activism in response.

Cumann na nGaedheal’s campaign in Dublin North for the September 1927 election was marked by a greater intensity, and more closely resembled the activism evident in the 1923 contest. Constituency public meetings were covered more extensively by the press than in June and parades and bands arranged to coincide with campaigning added a splash of colour to the party’s efforts to regain its lost seat.<sup>74</sup> In contrast to the two rural

<sup>72</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary election results*, p. 119.

<sup>73</sup> *Irish Independent*, 6 Aug. 1927.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 Sept. 1927.

constituencies looked at in this study, Dublin North's geographical size allowed for a lot of ground to be covered in one day of electioneering. As such, meetings in different parts of Dublin North could be scheduled in one evening with the same speakers. On 6 September meetings were held in Hardwicke Place and Doyle's Corner. These reflected a palpable frustration in Treatyite circles with the inconclusive verdict of the people in June. Margaret Collins-O'Driscoll, as she did numerous times during the campaign, asked voters to give a decisive verdict in favour of the government. She also criticised de Valera's visit to the United States during the War of Independence while her 'poor brother [Collins] could not get a bed to lie on in Dublin'.<sup>75</sup> The tone of many Dublin North meetings was negative with candidates expressing their opposition to all the other parties, rather than focussing on the positive reasons why people should support Cumann na nGaedheal. On the following evening meetings on Fairview Avenue and Church Road heard a somewhat more positive message emanating from the Cumann na nGaedheal candidates. Cumann na nGaedheal was the party of 'peace and stability' while Collins-O'Driscoll said the people did not want another quarrel with England, implying this would be the result if the reins of government changed hands.<sup>76</sup> The Church Road meeting also heard that Cumann na nGaedheal's platform was broad enough to hold all the people of the Free State. In its own eyes at least, Cumann na nGaedheal was still the National Party it set its stall out as in 1922/23. Cumann na nGaedheal's grass-root support in the north city was in high spirits concluding the Church Road meeting with three cheers for President Cosgrave.

Margaret Collins-O'Driscoll's re-election efforts were noticed by the *Irish Independent*, which described her as a tireless worker who had on numerous occasions addressed two to three meetings in the constituency each night.<sup>77</sup> The well respected vice-chair of the party organisation, was at the forefront of the Cumann na nGaedheal campaign in her constituency. Again she implored her constituents to leave no doubt as to their preferred choice of government on this occasion when addressing a meeting in Glasnevin on 9 September. Invoking the faith Arthur Griffith had placed in the intelligence of the Irish electorate Collins-O'Driscoll asked voters to support Cumann na nGaedheal. Promised peace the dangers of a de Valera government and the memory of the dead Treatyite leaders were all utilised in Dublin North in an effort to gain support. Liam

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 7 Sept. 1927.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 8 Sept. 1927.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 12 Sept. 1927.



Burke, noted the enthusiasm of Dublin North members and the fact that it had secured more vehicles than any other party to help transport voters to the polling stations.<sup>78</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal's election strategy and organisational efforts worked. Patrick Leonard regained his seat as Fianna Fáil failed to capitalise on the withdrawal of Sinn Féin from the contest. The pro-Treaty vote had rallied to the government. In Cumann na nGaedheal's old stronghold, the forward march of de Valera had been halted.

*Figure 3: Vote obtained by successful Dublin North candidates September 1927.*<sup>79</sup>

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Preference Vote.</b>
Gen. Richard James Mulcahy	Cumann na nGaedheal	14,597
Alfred Byrne	Independent	11,864
James Larkin (Sen.)	Independent Labour	7,490
Seán Thomas O'Kelly	Fianna Fáil	6,958
Eamon Cooney	Fianna Fáil	3,477
John Joseph Byrne	Cumann na nGaedheal	2,935
Margaret Collins-O'Driscoll	Cumann na nGaedheal	2,274
Patrick Leonard	Cumann na nGaedheal	2,068

### **Dublin North Social Club**

Having successfully completed its electoral task, the Dublin North constituency organisation turned once again to the question of providing social entertainment for its members. By November 1927, Cumann na nGaedheal had formed a constituency social club in Dublin North which operated from party headquarters. The club, which was pioneering in its own right, organised a wide variety of activities for members. These ranged from billiard and snooker nights, Irish dancing classes and card games. Dance classes for children took place on Saturday afternoons, Monday evening was bridge night with whist drives taking place on Thursday's at 8pm. There was something for everyone, and in keeping with the constituency organisation's concern with nationality, Irish events held a prominent place in the club's programme. An advert for the social club placed in the

<sup>78</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 15 Sept. 1927.

<sup>79</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary election results*, p. 127.

*Freeman* assured Cumann na nGaedheal members: ‘[It is] a Ceád Mile Fáilte they’ll give you down at No.5’.<sup>80</sup>

In terms of providing a social outlet for members, Dublin North was something of a trend-setter within Cumann na nGaedheal. As noted above, the impetus for the original central branch came from the constituency committee’s concern with providing a social outlet for members. *The Freeman* was keen to impress upon its readers the merits in the organisation becoming a facilitator of the social entertainment of party supporters. For example, on Christmas Eve 1927, *cumann* were urged not to neglect the social side of political organisation over the course of the new year. Members were warned that sometimes the best workers were lost to the party because they had to look outside Cumann na nGaedheal when seeking a social life.<sup>81</sup> Of course, we must bear in mind that it was much easier for the city-based organisation to arrange an attractive array of social events given that it could use party headquarters for a small fee and members did not have to travel great distances. Even though we saw Fr. Markey in Ballinalee inform his branch that it ought to become a medium of social entertainment for the district, we must recognise that it would be extremely difficult for rural branches such as Ballinalee in Longford or Lahinch in Clare to maintain anything like the more regular schedule of events on offer in Dublin North. Such was the in-built advantage of organisation in the country’s capital.

Fianna Fáil at this time was also engaged in similar cultural activities. In fact some of Fianna Fáil’s pronouncements mirrored those of Dublin North Cumann na nGaedheal. Fianna Fáil urged members to join Irish language classes, to take lectures in Irish history and to ensure social events were comprised at least partially of Irish dancing. In addition, the party pledged to support that year’s Tailteann games.<sup>82</sup> In 1924, anti-Treatyites had boycotted the games. In January 1929, a Fianna Fáil central branch was established. Named, *Craobh na Féinne*, like its Cumann na nGaedheal counterpart, it operated outside the party’s official structures. Membership was by invitation or by election of a local Fianna Fáil *cumann*.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *The Freeman*, 19 Nov. 1927.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 Dec. 1927.

<sup>82</sup> Report of Special Committee on Irish-Ireland activities of the organisation, 20 Dec. 1928 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/351/53).

<sup>83</sup> *Craobh na Féinne*, Jan. 1929 (*ibid.*, P176/351/59).

Jim Larkin's disqualification as a T.D. caused an April 1928 by-election in Dublin North. As such, the Cumann na nGaedheal constituency committee and social club were both busy organising in January and February. Batt O'Connor delivered a lecture on the lives of Griffith and Collins to the Dublin North organisation in early January, while the constituency committee itself passed a resolution in early February congratulating Cosgrave on the success of his recent visit to the United States.<sup>84</sup> The constituency social club marked Cosgrave's return by hosting a smoking concert at party headquarters. These smoking concerts were a favourite of the club, and talented musicians were generally invited to perform.<sup>85</sup> Social events may have helped to maintain the cohesion of the organisation which was called into action in March for the aforementioned by-election. Cumann na nGaedheal selected Vincent Rice, formerly of the National League, as its candidate. In a three way contest Rice saw off the challenge of Kathleen Clarke and James Larkin.<sup>86</sup> Following the by-election the organisation remained active, with occasional *cumainn* meetings during the summer. Not to be outdone by the *cumainn*, the constituency social club organised some summer activities in the process maintaining its good reputation within the wider national organisation. Ms. M. Coleman was secretary of the club in August 1928. Membership was set at 10s annually and the club was open to 'all citizens who support Cumann na nGaedheal'.<sup>87</sup> This suggests that one did not necessarily have to be a card carrying branch member to avail of the club's offerings. The party newspaper was very supportive of the club's activities and by September social clubs began to appear in other parts of the country. The positive coverage of the Dublin North social club seems to have sparked interest in other centres showing that the constituency had led the way within the Treatyite organisation.

Political considerations dominated the early months of 1929 as the Dublin North constituency faced yet another by-election test. This by-election was caused by the election of independent deputy Alfie Byrne, as a Cumann na nGaedheal nominee,<sup>88</sup> to the Free State Senate. T.F. O'Higgins, brother of the late Vice-President, was chosen as the party's candidate for the Dublin North by-election by a selection convention that took place in the Rotunda. O'Higgins was educated at Clongowes Wood and U.C.D where he studied

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<sup>84</sup> *Irish Independent*, 9 Jan., 4 Feb. 1928.

<sup>85</sup> *The Freeman*, 14 Jan. 1928.

<sup>86</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary election results*, p.131.

<sup>87</sup> *The Freeman*, 28 July, 18 Aug. 1928.

<sup>88</sup> *Irish Independent*, 1 Nov. 1928.

medicine before practicing as a doctor. Cumann na nGaedheal began its campaign for the 14 March by-election in February. Fianna Fáil selected Oscar Traynor, a late convert from the rump left behind in Sinn Féin, as its candidate, and both parties were actively campaigning by late February.<sup>89</sup> The indefatigable R.J. Purcell was drafted in to help organise the constituency for the by-election campaign. On 28 February, he presided at a large meeting on Seville Place in support of O’Higgins. The meeting was also addressed by Liam Burke, transatlantic flight hero Colonel Fitzmaurice and the candidate himself.<sup>90</sup> Fitzmaurice helped garner support for Cumann na nGaedheal’s candidate by dropping handbills in support of O’Higgins, from his plane, onto the streets of north Dublin. It was the first time an aeroplane was used in an Irish election campaign.<sup>91</sup> Like his late brother O’Higgins proved an able public speaker with a keen grasp of both local and national issues. He told the Seville Place meeting that £6m had been spent on trying to alleviate unemployment and that there were a higher percentage of people out of work in Belfast than there was in Dublin. On 10 March Cosgrave addressed an election meeting on middle Abbey Street. The new Cumann na nGaedheal newspaper, *The Star*, clearly believed the result of the by-election was a forgone conclusion. The party had a candidate who was a ‘Nationalist to the core’ and the contest would be easily won with ‘energetic campaigning’ in a constituency described as intelligent and nationally minded.<sup>92</sup> *The Star*’s optimism was justified given that the constituency was consistently a party stronghold. However, the seat was won only by a narrow majority with O’Higgins finishing just 151 votes ahead of Oscar Traynor.<sup>93</sup> In the international press, O’Higgins’s victory in Dublin North was portrayed as having saved the Cosgrave government.<sup>94</sup> Little cheer was evident in the Cumann na nGaedheal paper. *The Star* lamented the ingratitude of the electorate. According to its columns, ‘millions’ benefited from economy in spending but there were no electoral rewards for those who implemented it; meanwhile the handful of those negatively affected generated a ‘frenzy’ of outrage.<sup>95</sup> However, the Dublin North organisation was quite satisfied with the result and modestly passed a motion congratulating the government on its

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 25 Feb. 1929.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 1 Mar. 1929.

<sup>91</sup> Meehan, *Cosgrave party*, pp 161-2.

<sup>92</sup> *The Star*, 2 Mar. 1929.

<sup>93</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary election results*, p. 131.

<sup>94</sup> *New York Times*, 16 Mar. 1929.

<sup>95</sup> *The Star*, 23 Mar. 1929.

victory in the by-election.<sup>96</sup> The National Executive was equally impressed that the seat was won. O'Higgins had overcome a powerful alliance of anti-Treatyites and the 'Larkin element' to secure victory according to the minutes of its end of year meeting.<sup>97</sup>

In 1930, Cumann na nGaedheal in Dublin continued to cooperate with business interests. With municipal elections due, it was widely held that Cumann na nGaedheal would not challenge the business vote but rather would support their candidates.<sup>98</sup> In October, the Dublin North constituency executive met. John Homan presided. It is worth noting that Francis Cahill attended this meeting though its main business reveals the close ties between Cumann na nGaedheal and Alfred Byrne at this time. At the meeting, T.F. O'Higgins announced that Cumann na nGaedheal would endorse Byrne as Lord Mayor of Dublin.<sup>99</sup> Alfred Byrne of course had given up his seat in the Dáil to become a Senator but would return to the Dáil after the 1932 election. The report of the meeting also reveals that Collins-O'Driscoll continued her long crusade on behalf of the unemployed. In her remarks, the T.D. urged the government to launch a national development scheme to alleviate unemployment. The social functions of the organisation in Dublin North continued to cover a wide spectrum. For example, in September 1931 Mrs. Mulcahy presented medals to the champions of various tennis competitions organised by it during the year. The club organised a dance after the presentations and Liam Burke attended alongside Cumann na nGaedheal deputies for Dublin North.<sup>100</sup>

### **The 1932 election in Dublin North**

Dublin North was one of the last constituencies to select its Cumann na nGaedheal candidates for the 1932 election. As before, the Cumann na nGaedheal campaign comprised public meetings in various parts of the constituency combined with major demonstrations taking place in the city centre for the candidates from both the capital's constituencies. Cumann na nGaedheal's Dublin North agent for the candidates was once again P.F. O'Reilly. As part of its election campaign, a pamphlet providing biographical

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<sup>96</sup> *Irish Times*, 3 May 1929.

<sup>97</sup> National Executive, minutes of meeting, Dec. 1929 (UCDA, Seán MacEoin Papers, P151/844).

<sup>98</sup> *Irish Independent*, 4 Sept. 1930.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 Oct. 1930.

<sup>100</sup> *Sunday Independent*, 13 Sept. 1931.

details of the party's six candidates was published. In addition to providing those details, *The North Dublin Election News* also offered stern anti-Fianna Fáil propaganda.<sup>101</sup> From 6 February, both major parties were in full campaign mode in the constituency with numerous meetings taking place while Cosgrave was scheduled to address a major Dublin city rally on 14 February.<sup>102</sup> The rally was well attended with amplifiers carrying President Cosgrave's address to all those present. However, as the table below shows, the Cumann na nGaedheal vote in Dublin North did not hold up. Despite possessing a strong organisation in the north city, the party's campaign betrayed an element of complacency and lack of dynamism. Fianna Fáil gained two seats in the former Cumann na nGaedheal stronghold.

*Figure 4: Vote obtained by successful Dublin North candidates in 1932.*<sup>103</sup>

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Preference Vote.</b>
Alfred Byrne	Independent	18,170
Gen. Richard James Mulcahy	Cumann na nGaedheal	9,477
Seán Thomas O'Kelly	Fianna Fáil	9,176
Oscar Traynor	Fianna Fáil	7,850
Cormac Breathnach	Fianna Fáil	3,491
Eamon Cooney	Fianna Fáil	3,060
Margaret Collins-O'Driscoll	Cumann na nGaedheal	2,715
John Joseph Byrne	Cumann na nGaedheal	2,113

The Dublin North organisation proposed a motion to the 1932 annual convention which dealt with the disturbances that had taken place at Cumann na nGaedheal election meetings across the country. The motion urged that 'it behoves Cumann na nGaedheal to organise in every parish in the Saorstát a body of men pledged to stand shoulder to shoulder in the putting down of organised rowdyism [sic] and disorder at public meetings'.<sup>104</sup> This suggests that the eventual synthesis of the Army Comrades Association into an organisation of stewards for Treatyite political meetings had roots deep in the

<sup>101</sup> *The North Dublin Election News*, 10 Feb. 1932. (UCDA, Fine Gael general election records, P39/GE/1).

<sup>102</sup> *Evening Mail*, 6, 13 Feb. 1932.

<sup>103</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary election results*, p. 133.

<sup>104</sup> *United Irishman*, 21 May 1932.

Cumann na nGaedheal organisation too. We have seen that Cumann na nGaedheal meetings in Dublin were subject to frequent interruption, albeit of a less severe nature than that witnessed in Clare or Longford/Westmeath. Disruption of political meetings was a national issue, which affected Treatyites in particular, and Dublin North's motion can be interpreted as a response to the disturbances. Again, the constituency can be seen as something of a microcosm of the mutterings heard within broader Treatyite circles in 1932. Addressing Dublin North Cumann na nGaedheal in 1933, Mulcahy claimed that the ACA had checked a movement of great violence during the recent elections. He asked for the same spirit that had resisted laws against 'the wearing of the green' to again show itself and questioned what national purpose was served in making laws against the 'wearing of the blue'.<sup>105</sup> Such rhetoric was unlikely to resonate outside the Cumann na nGaedheal fold.

There was no wholesale reorganisation of the party in Dublin North, of the type of scale witnessed in Clare or Dublin North, after the 1932 election. It seems that what branch structure was already in place was deemed sufficient, and instead, organising efforts were directed towards weak constituencies such as Clare. The snap election of January 1933 provided the party organisation with what would prove to be its last electoral challenge. With headquarters now located on Merrion Square in Dublin South, the hustle and bustle of the opposition party's campaign emanated from there rather than 5 Parnell Square and its environs. Cosgrave's national tour has been discussed in previous chapters so it is sufficient to state here that a major campaign effort was also planned in the supposedly 'safe' Cumann na nGaedheal heartland of Dublin City.<sup>106</sup> An *Evening Mail* reporter described, in some detail, the scene in Merrion Square in the early stages of the 1933 campaign. Ex ministers were constantly 'in and out' of party headquarters, over 100 people were busily engaged in various duties on the ground floor while paid Cumann na nGaedheal staff were quietly working upstairs.<sup>107</sup> The seemingly supportive reporter went further: 'Cumann na nGaedheal is one of the best organised political machines in any country. The fact that there are only three weeks to the election will make little difference to its prospects'.

Cumann na nGaedheal's Dublin North selection convention took place on 4 January. As witnessed elsewhere, a more nationalistic tone was struck at the convention, with

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<sup>105</sup> *Irish Independent*, 18 July 1933.

<sup>106</sup> *Evening Mail*, 4 Jan. 1933.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

Mulcahy calling for the immediate union of Ireland and laying the blame for partition firmly on England's shoulders.<sup>108</sup> Now that it was an opposition party Cumann na nGaedheal could not help but have recourse to the type of nationalistic rhetoric it had long denounced its opponents for engaging in. The Cumann na nGaedheal campaign in Dublin North opened on 8 January with a meeting of its candidates on Findlater's corner O'Connell street. This meeting was a stormy affair which witnessed fierce disruption. It seems that the lorry used as a platform was set upon by interrupters as Mulcahy faced 'the angry element with an extraordinarily calm demeanour' while the 'lorry on which he stood rocked like a boat on a rough sea'.<sup>109</sup> The meeting had been rushed by Republicans who succeeded in collapsing the platform.<sup>110</sup> This violent meeting made the international press. The *Manchester Guardian* reported that wild scenes had marked the meeting and that groups of interrupters had chanted slogans and sang songs as speakers tried to address voters.<sup>111</sup> Only those near the platform could hear the speeches and a determined effort to rush the platform was made while Collins-O'Driscoll spoke. Windows were smashed at 5 Parnell square and a reported 700 Blueshirt stewards were present at the Cumann na nGaedheal meeting. Later Cumann na nGaedheal charged that the meeting had been inadequately policed although Mulcahy's courage in the face of the attempt to wreck the meeting was widely lauded in the press. Cumann na nGaedheal enlisted the support of the Blueshirts for its final rally in Dublin. This meeting was addressed by Cosgrave under a banner which read 'Cosgrave for Ireland, Ireland for Cosgrave'. That there was a crowd of 30,000 in College Green is attested to by surviving film footage of the meeting on the British pathe website.<sup>112</sup> Large numbers of Blueshirts were deployed through the crowd and the meeting passed without major incident with just two cases arising out of disturbances at the meeting being brought before Dublin District court.<sup>113</sup> *United Irishman* was most pleased with the success of the College Green demonstration.<sup>114</sup> In the final days of the campaign the Cumann na nGaedheal apparatus rolled into Marina, Cabra,

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 5 Jan. 1933.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 9 Jan. 1933.

<sup>110</sup> Risteárd Mulcahy vividly recalls this meeting. He attended this meeting as an eleven year old and described it as a 'grim and worrying time' in Ireland. (Conversation with Risteárd Mulcahy, UCD, 26 Nov. 2009).

<sup>111</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 9 Jan. 1933.

<sup>112</sup> "'Election-Itis" At fever heat in Ireland' (AKA, Election it is) Mr. W.T. Cosgrave addresses monster meeting in College Green', available at : <http://www.britishpathe.com/record.php?id=3398> , [accessed 17 December 2009].

<sup>113</sup> *Evening Mail*, 14 Jan. 1933.

<sup>114</sup> *United Irishman*, 21 Jan. 1933.



Phibsboro' and Aughrim street.<sup>115</sup> In Fairview, the gardaí took extensive precaution to ensure the Cumann na nGaedheal speakers received a fair hearing.<sup>116</sup> The constituency closed its campaign with a rally in 1 and 2 North Earl Street where last minute advice was dispatched to voters. A musical programme brought the final rally, and the opposition party's general election campaign, to a close.<sup>117</sup>

**Figure 5: Vote obtained by successful Dublin North candidates in 1933.**<sup>118</sup>

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>First Preference Vote.</b>
Seán Thomas O'Kelly	Fianna Fáil	17,053
Alfred Byrne	Independent	14,472
Gen. Richard James Mulcahy	Cumann na nGaedheal	8,864
Cormac Breathnach	Fianna Fáil	5,923
Oscar Traynor	Fianna Fáil	5,143
Vincent Rice	Cumann na nGaedheal	5,045
Eamon Cooney	Fianna Fáil	4,685
Patrick Belton	Cumann na nGaedheal	2,989

As can be gauged from the table above, Cumann na nGaedheal's strength in the constituency remained as it had been in 1932. Patrick Belton, formerly of Fianna Fáil, and active farming representative,<sup>119</sup> replaced Collins-O'Driscoll as a Cumann na nGaedheal T.D. for Dublin North. Commenting on the election, the *New York Times* described the loss of Collins-O'Driscoll as an 'outstanding defeat' for Cumann na nGaedheal on a day when it had lost votes to the Centre Party and Fianna Fáil.<sup>120</sup> Belton was a sinister figure who began as an advocate of Griffithite protectionism in Fianna Fáil before leaving to join Cumann na nGaedheal. He would later become a dabbler in the politics of the far right as a leading Blueshirt and Irish Christian Front activist.<sup>121</sup> Belton was later expelled from Fine

<sup>115</sup> *Evening Mail*, 19, 21 Jan. 1933.

<sup>116</sup> *Irish Independent*, 13 Jan. 1933.

<sup>117</sup> *Evening Mail*, 25 Jan. 1933.

<sup>118</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary election results*, p. 136.

<sup>119</sup> De-rating and how to do it, Mar. 1930 (UCDA, Michael Tierney papers, LA/30/347/1).

<sup>120</sup> *New York Times*, 27 Jan. 1933.

<sup>121</sup> Fearghal McGarry, *Irish politics and the Spanish Civil War* (Dublin, 1999), pp 22-3.

Gael in 1934 in the wake of O'Duffy's rancorous departure as the movement's president.<sup>122</sup>

In January 1933 the electorate had, by a decisive and unambiguous margin, placed Cumann na nGaedheal in opposition. For the organisation in Dublin North, life continued largely as before. Whereas the party apparatus received considerable attention in the spring of 1933 under the direction of Mulcahy and his reorganising efforts, in Dublin North, the structures remained as they had been while the *cumann* themselves got on with the mundane work of organising meetings and social functions. On 7 March the North Dock Michael Collins *cumann* elected a new committee at its AGM in the former party headquarters of 5 Parnell Square, which was still used by the north city organisation. Possibly exaggerating for propaganda purposes, the latest party newspaper *United Irishman* reported that the meeting had attracted an unusually large attendance.<sup>123</sup> The branch elected a separate committee to oversee the preparation of social functions. In this period, branch meetings were sometimes held in the homes of grass-root members. For instance, in June the Drumcondra *cumann* AGM took place at the home of Mark Wilson of 81 lower Dorset Street. Again *United Irishman* reported that a large number of people attended and that 'new blood' had enrolled during the meeting.<sup>124</sup>

Once again, social functions became the mainstay of Cumann na nGaedheal life in Dublin North. Whether it functioned as a society or was just a label given to party supporters who liked the sport, a Dublin North Michael Collins boxing club existed in the spring of 1933. Boxing was a feature of the Blueshirt movement's sporting features showing considerable overlap between the various Treatyite organisations in 1933. The Arthur Griffith *cumann*, which enrolled twenty eight new members according to *United Irishman*, ended its AGM with musical entertainment at 5 Parnell Square. A constituency social club meeting on 29 March was attended by 120 members showing that the machine remained strong in the constituency. Mulcahy and John A. Costello addressed the meeting. Each *cumann* was asked to select two delegates to represent them on the social club

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<sup>122</sup> McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy*, pp 272-3.

<sup>123</sup> *United Irishman*, 18 Mar. 1933.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 June 1933.

committee.<sup>125</sup> The powers behind the social club were quite clearly trying to tie the rest of the constituency organisation into its endeavours to provide social entertainment.

Ladies' branches of Cumann na nGaedheal, pioneered by female party supporters in Cork, spread to Dublin in March 1933. Liam Burke attended a meeting at party headquarters on 27 March where it was decided to extend the initiative to the Dublin city constituencies. Mrs. Cosgrave was also in attendance as Burke said the new body could induce 'larger numbers of women and young girls to take an active part in the work of the organisation'.<sup>126</sup> It was intended that women's branches of Cumann na nGaedheal would spread across the city, north and south. Cumann na nGaedheal's ladies' branches coincided with the growth of the Blue blouses in perhaps more rural constituencies. Women were attracted into O'Duffy's uniformed movement for the same reasons as men with cultural and sporting activities providing social interaction.<sup>127</sup> On Fine Gael's foundation, a party handbook, similar to those issued by Cumann na nGaedheal in previous years, advocated the 'organisation of women either in separate or in mixed branches as local circumstances may determine'. In a reference to the Blue blouses and Cumann na nGaedheal's ladies' branches the handbook said existing women's organisation had shown its worth. Women were often more important and 'effective in Organisation than the man'.<sup>128</sup>

However, segregation of the sexes was not a feature of Cumann na nGaedheal generally and some women were involved in the regular branches. One such woman was a Mrs. F. Ceannt newly elected to the chair of the Rotunda branch. She led a committee that was dominated by male officers.<sup>129</sup> Following the lead of other Dublin North branches who had recently honoured Collins and Griffith in their names, the Rotunda branch decided that in future it would be known as the Tom Keogh *cumann*. The Dublin North branches themselves were very active at this time, particularly the Mountjoy ward, and the Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith *cumainn*. Membership of the Michael Collins *cumann* had doubled according to the *United Irishman*. As alluded to, the constituency structure in Dublin North remained as it had been. Whereas in the large rural constituencies, district committees had always marked Cumann na nGaedheal organisation, these never made an

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 15 Apr. 1933.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 1 Apr. 1933.

<sup>127</sup> Mike Cronin, *The Blueshirts and Irish politics* (Dublin, 1997), pp 36-7.

<sup>128</sup> United Ireland organisation election handbook, undated [1934?] (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/634).

<sup>129</sup> *United Irishman*, 8 Apr. 1933.

appearance in Dublin North. Even with Cumann na nGaedheal preparing to contest local elections for the first time, there was no attempt to sub-divide the constituency into new local divisions as there was in the spring and summer of 1933 in Clare and Longford/Westmeath. Instead the constituency committee continued as the sole overseeing unit, with Mulcahy addressing a meeting of it in July.<sup>130</sup>

As the evidence in the preceding paragraphs suggest, as in the constituencies of Clare and Longford/Westmeath, the Cumann na nGaedheal organisation in Dublin North was in good shape before the foundation of Fine Gael in September 1933. The only difference there being that the activism of Cumann na nGaedheal in the city seems to have been organic and not extracted through any pressure piled from above on the local organisation. The new Fine Gael organisation inherited from Cumann na nGaedheal in Dublin North an enthusiastic and active branch structure. The experience of the John Devoy Cumann na nGaedheal branch is typical of the plight of the party's local units in the capital after the merger. Meeting on 5 October, members of the branch were introduced to the new party's scheme of organisation by an organiser. After listening to the organiser's presentation, branch member P.J. Murray proposed a resolution that 'this branch adopt the principles and policy of Fine Gael and that the branch be known as the John Devoy *Cumann Fine Gael*'.<sup>131</sup> Without the presence of the Farmers' and Ratepayers' League organisation, Dublin North Fine Gael simply took on much the appearance of a renamed Cumann na nGaedheal.

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<sup>130</sup> *Irish Independent*, 17 July 1933.

<sup>131</sup> *United Irishman*, 14 Oct. 1933.

## Part II

## **Cumann na nGaedheal: Isolated instance or part of a European phenomenon?**

In the preceding chapters Cumann na nGaedheal's organisational strength was examined. Numerous works have linked the party's electoral demise with a perceived paucity of living, pro-Treaty constituency structures in the 1920s and early 1930s. Party leaders were said to have displayed a 'positive contempt' for the whole business of grass-root mobilisation in contrast to the organisational flair that characterised their opponents in Fianna Fáil. Part I of this thesis has shed new light on Cumann na nGaedheal's constituency activism while demonstrating that organisational problems were even prevalent in the legendary Fianna Fáil political machine.<sup>1</sup> As such, it is no longer enough to attribute Cosgrave's descent in 1932/33 to inferior political machinery. Instead we must factor in the policy choices made by the Cumann na nGaedheal government and these must be examined against the backdrop of wider, international events. That Cumann na nGaedheal's demise in 1933 coincided with the onset of the Great Depression and far reaching political upheaval in Britain, Spain, Germany, Japan and the United States cannot be overlooked.

In this second part of the thesis it is hoped to ascertain to what extent the Free State's political realignment of 1932/1933 was the product of wider political and economic trends. Cumann na nGaedheal's initial years in government were marked by the stabilisation of international relations and European politics. Moderate conservatives dominated the politics of Britain, France and the United States for much of the 1920s as the pre-war liberal economic order was resurrected.<sup>2</sup> However, by the beginning of the 1930s everything had altered as a tense era characterised by the absence of international

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<sup>1</sup> National Executive, minutes of meeting, 18 Mar. 1927 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/351/6).

<sup>2</sup> David Stevenson, *1914-1918: the history of the First World War* (London, 2004), p. 554.

cooperation and the collapse of free trade beckoned. Given that Cumann na nGaedheal held power in the period of economic liberalism's renewal, and lost it at a time when economic chaos caused political convulsions across the globe, the chapters that follow argue that international factors cannot be overlooked in accounting for the party's demise. Before analysing the Free State government's domestic policies, it is necessary to provide a broad outline of the wider, international backdrop against which they are set. Drawing primarily on secondary sources, this chapter aims to provide such an overview of the international trend in politics and economics from the end of the Great War until the political convulsions of the early 1930s.

### **Europe, before and during the Great War**

The decades immediately preceding the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 saw Europe reach the zenith of its power. The so called '*Belle Époque*', which many Europeans hankered after in the Inter-war period, would be remembered fondly, especially by the middle classes, as a time of peace and prosperity when the onward progress of European culture and civilisation seemed inevitable. This happy era was made possible by the scientific and technological advances of the so called 'Second Industrial revolution' of the late nineteenth century. In turn, industrial development created a new and expanding urban working class in the major cities, a class which clamoured increasingly for greater political participation and social change. The position of the old élites was further threatened by the expansion of the middle classes in this period through such forces as the 'managerial revolution' and the growth of bureaucracies, both public and private, and that of the professions. Of course, the nineteenth century had largely consolidated the values of the Enlightenment and the French revolution, especially after 1848, and absolutist forms of government by and large had given way as political liberties in general were extended. With their deep attachment to liberal values, active political participation and their clear rejection of more aristocratic or absolutist forms of government, the middle class became an increasingly dominant political player. The monarchies which dominated Europe ceded political rights to ensure the more active consent from those they governed while the French, of course, had embarked on the Republican route once more in 1871 after defeat in the Franco-Prussian war. A further consequence of that war was the creation of the

Prussian-dominated German empire, which had become a major industrial powerhouse by the turn of the twentieth century. For the increasingly influential middle classes of Europe, diets were improving as were overall hygiene and living standards. Prices continued to rise while bourgeois ‘faith in progress’ went hand in hand with the apparent modernising forces of the age.<sup>3</sup> Writing in 1929 in his famous *The revolt of the masses*, the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset referred to the pre-war period outlined above as one of plenitude, a time when humanity felt it had achieved a long sought after state of living, that the pinnacle of the civilising journey had been reached. Gasset also pointed out that this was an epoch that labelled itself ‘Modern’, indicating that sense of being a definitive or final ‘height of time’ or end of history.<sup>4</sup> The society of the late nineteenth century had come to view itself as the culmination of the history of progress that had come before it. It was this self perception of the period as a time of unprecedented prosperity and European dominance that would shape the policies of politicians and economists charged with the reconstruction of the continent after 1918.<sup>5</sup>

The pre-1914 era was also one of globalisation and levels of economic interdependence between countries not seen again until after the Second World War.<sup>6</sup> Europe was the centre of the world economy, London its financial capital and sterling its dominant currency. Between 1871-1900 most of the world’s leading powers joined the gold standard. This was a fixed exchange mechanism which meant currencies could be converted to gold at a fixed rate. As such, the trade of goods between countries was facilitated by the system.<sup>7</sup> The successful operation of the gold standard demanded a degree of cooperation and that those countries played by the rules, that is adhered to orthodox economic and financial policies that balanced national budgets and maintained a positive balance of payments. In essence gold standard orthodoxy entailed pursuing deflationary policies.<sup>8</sup> Adherence to the rules of gold standard orthodoxy served as a ‘good housekeeping seal of approval’,<sup>9</sup> signalling a country’s fiscal and monetary prudence.

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<sup>3</sup> Frank Tipton and Robert Aldrich, *An economic and social history of Europe, 1890-1939* (Baltimore, 1989), p.9.

<sup>4</sup> José Ortega y Gasset, *The revolt of the masses* (London, 1932).

<sup>5</sup> Patricia Clavin, *The Great Depression in Europe, 1929-1939* (London, 2000), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Stevenson, *First World War*, pp 5-7.

<sup>7</sup> Clavin, *Great Depression*, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>9</sup> Michael D. Bordo and Hugh Rockoff, ‘The Gold Standard as a “good housekeeping seal of approval”’ in *The Journal of Economic History*, 56, no. 2 (June 1996), pp 389-428.



The portion of the earth under European control expanded in the decades before 1900 as parts of Asia, and much of Africa, were carved up and conquered by the ‘New Imperialism’ of the continent’s major powers. Much of Europe itself was under the control of the multi-national empires of Imperial Russia, the Ottoman Turks and Austria-Hungary, while Italian and German unification had been effectively completed by 1870 and 1871 respectively. In an age of *laissez-faire* economics and free trade it seemed correct, from an economic and political viewpoint, that the continent be divided into these great, political blocks. Large political blocks provided a substantial market for the produce of agriculture and industry.<sup>10</sup> Single currencies covered large areas and the vast empires amounted to bigger markets. Elsewhere in Europe, France was still a major power and actively sought colonies in Africa in the process of recovering from her defeat in the Franco-Prussian war. Spain and Portugal, formerly great powers, were in decline and Ireland remained an integral part of the United Kingdom, a political entity described by Niall Ferguson as itself, ‘to all intents and purposes an English empire’.<sup>11</sup>

Already, before 1900, Friedrich Nietzsche and other philosophers stood out from the prevailing optimistic view of the age of liberalism,<sup>12</sup> and articulated a much more pessimistic vision. ‘God was dead’ as a result of scientific discovery and increased secularisation giving modernism its first critics who questioned the direction this ‘progress’ was taking Europe. As political power gradually became more readily contested, socialists, nationalists and conservatives espoused views which ran against the seemingly inexorable triumph of bourgeois liberalism. The German Social Democrat party had become the largest party in the Reichstag by 1912, while many rural German conservatives came to reject modernising forces such as industrialisation, urbanisation and increased political liberties encroaching on their position. A more autocratic and anti-modern form of government was desired by Germany’s rural conservatives. Nationalism itself was evolving. Having been an ideology which had created German and Italian nation states in the nineteenth century, on the eve of the First World War, nationalism took a discernable chauvinistic turn as political debate moved from the rational to the irrational ground. Alan Kramer argues that in the final years of the *Belle Époque* many of the ideas of a militant, sometimes racist nationalism ‘were not only developed in theory but tried out in

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<sup>10</sup> Mark Mazower, *Dark continent: Europe’s twentieth century* (Bath, 1998), p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> Niall Ferguson, *The war of the world: history’s age of hatred* (London, 2006), p. Lxiii.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Kitchen, *Europe between the wars* (London, 2006), p. 1.

practice'.<sup>13</sup> European colonial wars, and in particular that of Italy in Libya, and atrocities on all sides during the Balkan wars, showed the uglier side of an ideology which had its roots in the linguistic and cultural ties that it argued bound people together. Of course, at both the micro and macro level, it was nationalism that caused the outbreak of the Great War. Serb nationalists provided the spark which needed only the fuel provided by the territorial ambitions of Europe's great powers to engulf the whole continent in its flame. The same industrial revolution which had transformed the continent economically and socially, now provided the means for war on a scale never seen before.

Without delving into the complex reasons for the outbreak of war in 1914, it suffices to mention here the extent to which the war challenged the pre-dominant liberal assumptions of politics, economics and society. The Great War unleashed forces that manifested themselves in the 1920s and 1930s as direct challenges to the ascent of parliamentary democracy and economic liberalism. Anticipated as a war of movement, the Great War quickly became a war of attrition in the absence of a swift victory as all sides became bogged down in the static warfare of the trenches. Belligerents had to mobilise all their human and material resources for the war effort, making the 'home front' more important than ever. The language of nationalism was used to overcome domestic class and political divisions and in most cases, such conflict was subordinated to the war effort as the mainstream left made its peace with those in office.<sup>14</sup> War, in some ways, offered the European powers a distraction from their domestic political problems. In pre-war Britain, the Irish question dominated the agenda at Westminster. In 1912-1914, a civil war seemed likely in Ireland over the granting of Home Rule as loyalists and nationalists armed in opposition to each other and in defence of their interests, while the Conservative party in collusion with Irish Unionists stoked mutinous and anti-democratic sentiment in the British army. On the outbreak of war, the majority of the Ulster and Irish Volunteers and their political leaders rallied to the British war effort and Westminster shelved dealing with the crisis until the war in Europe had ended. The majority of the Irish Volunteers who supported Redmond's call to fight in support of Britain became known as the National Volunteers. We have already dealt in previous chapters with the separate trajectory on which Ireland developed thereafter largely on the initiative of the IRB influenced Irish

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<sup>13</sup> Alan Kramer, *Dynamics of destruction: culture and mass killing in the First World War* (New York, 2007), p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Philip Morgan, 'The First World War and the challenge to democracy in Europe' in Menno Spiering and Michael Wintle, *Ideas of Europe since 1914: the legacy of the First World War* (New York, 2002), p. 73.

Volunteers who responded negatively to John Redmond's call to fight in return for Irish Home Rule. Subsequently, constitutional nationalism was superseded by the revolutionary tradition which allied itself with the reconstituted Sinn Féin party in 1917. During the subsequent revolutionary period, the Irish Labour party rallied to the nationalist cause in much the same way as their counterparts in various European had joined in the war effort.

### **Consequences of the war**

European governments at war increasingly found themselves abandoning the liberal 'rules of the game' by which they had organised their economies. War, especially on this scale was costly, especially when prices doubled,<sup>15</sup> and countries could not finance the effort by remaining wedded to the policies that would give them the 'seal of approval'. Instead of pursuing their orthodox policies and allowing the invisible hand of supply and demand set the economic parameters, they found themselves forced to ration food, fix prices and intervening in their economies in ways that had not been countenanced before. War was largely financed through inflation rather than tax increases and all belligerents abandoned the gold standard. In Britain Treasury control was abandoned as it waived its right to vet army and navy purchases.<sup>16</sup> By borrowing, governments ensured future generations would be made to share the cost of a victory they would benefit from but accumulated enormous debts. Capacity to repay these was questionable.

Domestic economies were reorganised to mobilise vast resources in isolation from the world economy giving governments a more interventionist role in the economy.<sup>17</sup> Free trade and other pillars of the pre-war international economic order were seriously undermined by the phenomenal success of the war economies as countries looked within their own borders rather than to international trade to gather the necessary resources to wage war on a scale unprecedented.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, both Keynes and Salazar took as their model in developing their economic theories, the organisation of the war economies. As a lecturer at Coimbra, the future leader of Portugal used each country's war economy 'as a source of examples for his Political Economy class'.<sup>19</sup> Also using the war economies as an example,

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<sup>15</sup> Stevenson, *First World War*, p. 219.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 220.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, pp 232-235.

<sup>18</sup> Tipton and Aldrich, *Economic and social history*, pp 154-6.

<sup>19</sup> Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses, *Salazar: a political biography* (New York, 2009), p. 22.

Keynes developed his unorthodox views on counter-cyclical economic planning that came into more general acceptance after the Second World War.

In Britain, the war seriously damaged the Liberal party. War did not sit easily on the shoulders of the Liberals and the Conservatives would have been the natural party of government in wartime. Traditionally, the Liberal party fought the Tories by ‘denouncing their jingoism rather than outbidding their militarism’.<sup>20</sup> In fact, during the course of the war, under Liberal-led governments, various tenets of the Liberals were abandoned as in turn the parliament’s term was extended, the party entered coalition government with its traditional Conservative enemy and in December 1916 the party split over the introduction of conscription. The effects of the First World War were lasting for the British Liberal party as it remained divided in the long term and relinquished its dominance of the party system. Post-war British politics would be dominated by the Conservatives and Labour.

Politically, the war unleashed a new wave of national feeling across much of the continent and was greeted with particular enthusiasm in central Europe. In Germany it was seen as an opportunity to end British and French domination of Western culture, enabling that of Germany to replace it.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, it was far from inevitable that the war would usher in a new era of democratisation. It must be remembered that Wilson did not even consider the British or French governments as wholly representative of their peoples. Towards the end of the war, in Germany, a new and short-lived nationalist Fatherland Party emerged in the hope of providing a national front ‘uniting all classes behind a militarist and imperialist’ programme under ‘strong leadership, while carefully avoiding any alteration of domestic social relations’.<sup>22</sup> Germany’s defeat in 1918 helped collapse the initiative. In Russia, the most absolutist regime in Europe was replaced first by the provisional government in February and then in October 1917 by the Bolsheviks. The spectre of Bolshevik Russia now acted as a further source of destabilisation in the Europe to emerge after the war and the country now posed as a serious economic alternative to capitalism. The world as it had existed in 1914 was becoming an ever more distant reality, faced as it was by working alternatives. In 1917, the Entente powers had made the war an ideological conflict- between the democracies of America, Britain and France (the latter two still in their evolution) and the apparently absolutist regimes of the central powers.

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Bentley, *The Liberal mind, 1914-1929* (London, 1977), p.20.

<sup>21</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *A history of Fascism, 1914-45* (London, 1995), pp 71-4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.74.

President Wilson's 'Fourteen Points' essentially laid the basis of a new, democratic post-war order of nation states that would follow an allied victory. Wilson described the German campaign as a war against mankind and all nations. He also talked of the conflict as a war for free peoples and called for partnership between democratic nations.<sup>23</sup> Not just democracy, but the idea of national self-determination was to emerge ascendant on the victory of the allies in 1918. However, the triumph for national self-determination did not usher in the era of democracy, partnership or peace Wilson had hoped for.

The First World War destroyed the relative peace that had marked Europe since Napoleon, and destabilised the predominant Liberal cultural, economic and political ethos. War destroyed central pillars on which the world economy had been based. Governments had been compelled to intervene in their national economies, gold was abandoned, inflationary policies had been pursued and states had borrowed extensively to fund the war effort. Governments had temporarily abandoned gold and financial orthodoxy to meet the unusual spending of war on the assumption that taxes would be raised after the war to service the debts and restore credibility.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the war exacerbated the same militarism and national feeling that had helped cause the conflict in the first place. The immediate consequence of the war was the break-up of the multi-national empires of the defeated central powers while the Russian Revolution, and the harsh peace extracted by Germany at Brest-Litovsk, had put paid to that country's control of much of the eastern European territory previously governed by Imperial Russia. Europe emerged from the First World War with a host of new nation states having been created from the rubble of Austria-Hungary, the German Empire, Imperial Russia and the Ottoman Empire. Many of these new states lay precisely where German and Russian Imperial ambitions had resided, and few would prove ethnically homogenous given the diverse peoples that populated the remnants of the multi-ethnic empires. The war had cost Europe dearly with as many as 9,450,000 military deaths alone<sup>25</sup> and the wholesale destruction of towns, cities and prime agricultural land. Moreover, the economic balance had shifted considerably as Britain lost its place as a major creditor nation. Instead, both Britain and France emerged with large debts to America, which President Wilson would not repudiate, necessitating harsh economic terms being demanded of the vanquished powers, particularly Germany.

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<sup>23</sup> *The Times*, 4 Apr. 1917.

<sup>24</sup> Bordo and Rockoff, "Good housekeeping", pp 389-92.

<sup>25</sup> Stevenson, *First World War*, p. 544.

America emerged from the conflict in a strengthened position with New York replacing London as the world's financial capital and world banker.<sup>26</sup> Having seen the pre-war world with all its safe conventions turned upside down, many on the victorious side longed to recreate the Europe of the golden *Belle Époque*, even though the altered landscape left in the war's wake made such a task almost impossible.<sup>27</sup> The tension between those who wanted to turn the clock back to 1914, and those who wanted to apply whatever lessons they had taken from the experience of the war to the post 1918 world would frame the politics of Europe for the next two decades.

### **Post-War Europe and democratisation**

The victorious powers immediately set about restructuring Europe, and imposing a new order in their own image upon it. As promised, national self-determination was rigorously applied on the former territories of the fallen empires. Interestingly, the victors only applied this principle where it suited them. Determined to ensure German weakness, the Austrian rump that remained of the Habsburg empire was prohibited from uniting with Germany.<sup>28</sup> Both Germany and Austria desired union, the latter initially referred to itself as 'German Austria',<sup>29</sup> but that would have led to the encirclement of the new state of Czechoslovakia. Instead Germany lost something in the region of 10% of its continental population and 13% of its territory as German speakers of the Sudetenland (formerly part of Austria-Hungary) found themselves within the boundaries of the new Czechoslovakian state. In addition, the Polish corridor gave the new state of Poland a route to the sea which cut Germany from East Prussia to the chagrin of German nationalists. It was easier for the allies to attempt the recreation of the old order through the imposition of democracy in the defeated countries and new nation states than it was for either Germany and Austria who were forced to accept the realities of the new world order and look to the future. The defeated countries came to terms with the new realities while the victorious side looked back to the pre-1914 world of the *Belle Époque*.

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<sup>26</sup> Clavin, *Great Depression*, pp 18-20.

<sup>27</sup> Payne, *Fascism*, p. 79.

<sup>28</sup> Stevenson, *First World War*, pp 523-9.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Gerlich and David Campbell, 'Austria: from compromise to authoritarianism' in Dirk Berg-Schlosser and Jeremy Mitchell (eds), *Conditions of democracy in Europe, 1919-39: systematic case studies* (London, 2000), p. 44.

German governments before 1914 had been authoritarian in nature with the Reichstag having little power. In addition, the country lacked a strong liberal tradition. A new democratic settlement in Germany was not the result of slow evolution, but was hastily applied in the war's aftermath. Indeed, German generals staring military defeat in the face hurriedly initiated reforms in the autumn of 1918 that made Imperial Germany a constitutional monarchy. These reforms were undertaken to help stave off revolution from below and to place the burden of responsibility for Germany's defeat on the shoulders of democratic politicians rather than the German high command. In Britain, slow and steady liberal reform continued its long evolution in 1918 with December's election held on the widest franchise yet known. Under the Representation of the People Act of 1918, universal adult male suffrage and the vote for all women over thirty were introduced. In Britain and the United States the war was generally regarded as a victory for democracy. According to the *Times* 'In arms, this is the year of the victory of democracy, triumphant over the most arrogant autocracy that the world has ever seen'. However, there were warnings about complacency. The *Times* warned of the peril of class antagonism, complaining that workers sometimes did not see the connection between their work and the welfare of the country. Resolving and restraining class antagonisms was the next challenge for democracy as the clamour for more representative government increased.<sup>30</sup> In the United States, supporters of Irish self-determination often referred to the war for democracy in presenting their case,<sup>31</sup> as pro-British elements in America were predisposed to regard the 1916 Rising as a 'stab in the back'.<sup>32</sup>

Like their Czechoslovakian counterparts, Poland and the Baltic states lost no time in drawing up appropriately democratic constitutions.<sup>33</sup> The 9 November revolutionary proclamation of the Weimar Republic in Germany was copper-fastened by the election of a National Constituent Assembly on 19 January by universal adult suffrage. Under the Chancellorship of the Social Democratic leader Friedrich Ebert, a transitional liberal regime was followed by a government of a more avowedly social democratic ethos. Between the wars, social democracy evolved as a means of mediating relations between government and the workers and tended to prosper in countries that were late to

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<sup>30</sup> *The Times*, 6 Sept. 1919.

<sup>31</sup> *New York Times*, 5 Mar. 1919.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 June 1919.

<sup>33</sup> Mazower, *Dark continent*, p. 4.

democratise or lacked a liberal tradition.<sup>34</sup> In drafting Germany's new constitution, middle class lawyers looked to established liberal polities for inspiration. The end product differed from those of the nineteenth century in its extension of rights from political and civil liberties to the realm of social policy. As such, social policy goals with regard to health, welfare and land were set out clearly in constitutional provisions.<sup>35</sup> The constitutional footing given to these, entitling German citizens to avail of the services of the welfare state, represented a quantum leap for social policy. Until then Bolshevnik Russia had been the only country to make the provision of social needs a goal of the state. From the 1880s Britain and Germany had been moving from local to national provision of relief,<sup>36</sup> but not as a policy goal of the state. In the German case classic liberal values were mixed with popular social democratic demands which helped to win workers to the side of parliamentarianism as against that of revolution during the tumultuous days of 1918-1919. Despite this, Weimar Germany would be characterised by political division, a quest for popular legitimacy and economic, social and political instability. From the outset, the party system was seriously fragmented with the pro-democratic elements holding only a slim majority over the forces both of counter-revolution and those who supported Soviet-style soldiers' and workers' councils. To make matters worse, a split ran through most parties between centralists and federalists,<sup>37</sup> the latter being, for the moment, in the ascendancy. The road ahead was anything but smooth for Germany's new democracy as right wing nationalists regarded national solidarity as having been replaced by fractious party politics. Moreover, the 'stab in the back myth' also took hold. Weimar Germany struggled to assert its legitimacy and gain the widespread approval of Germans in a way that in some respects mirrored the experience in the Irish Free State under Cumann na nGaedheal.

The new Austrian state retrospectively referred to the events of 1918 as a 'national revolution', a term that would come to typify regime changes across Europe. Moreover, there was a strong desire in Austria to complete this process by uniting with Germany. There was an atmosphere of political cooperation and consensus at the drafting of the Austrian constitution in 1920 which was implemented on 1 October. However, this atmosphere was quickly replaced by a more divisive political tone when the Christian

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<sup>34</sup> Gregory M. Luebbert, 'Social foundations of political order in interwar Europe' in *World Politics*, 39, no. 4 (July 1987), pp 450-6.

<sup>35</sup> Mazower, *Dark continent*, pp 5-7.

<sup>36</sup> Mel Cousins, *European welfare states: comparative perspectives* (London, 2005), pp 79-81.

<sup>37</sup> Detlev J.K Peukert, *The Weimar Republic* (London, 1993), p. 37.



Socials preferred to share power with the Austrian right and to exclude the country's socialists.<sup>38</sup> Austrian politics assumed a confrontational image with deep polarisation between the left and right. The pluralism and tolerance of the old empire was lost as the new state of Austria was divided between cosmopolitan 'Red Vienna' and the rest of the country, which was predominantly rural and conservative.

Where does Ireland fit within this phase of post war democratisation? Home Rule for Ireland made it to the statute book only to be postponed in 1914 until the war in Europe had ended. Irish nationalist politics had been radicalised during the First World War and the 'Irish problem' was again centre stage by 1919. This time, Irish Home Rule was not a credible solution given nationalist Ireland's reaction to the execution of the rebel leaders, the conscription crisis and support for Sinn Féin at the ballot box. It would appear that the principle of national self-determination was not applied to the Irish case as it did not suit the Allies, who were content to let Britain deal with the Irish question as an internal and complex political problem for the United Kingdom. As such, the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 provided for the establishment of two Home Rule parliaments in Ireland, one in Belfast and one in Dublin. Ireland would remain a component of the United Kingdom, albeit a part with a limited form of self-government. Alvin Jackson argues that this act did represent the force of liberal opinion and the drive for self-determination and federalism evident after the war. Dismissing arguments for Irish exceptionalism, Jackson nevertheless points out that aspects of its twentieth-century history are distinctive.<sup>39</sup> Without desiring to repeat the arguments made in earlier chapters, the establishment of the Irish Free State in December 1922 shows that Ireland ran on a very different track to the other new states and democracies created in the aftermath of the First World War. They were created as part of a general assertion of the Liberal world view held by America, Britain and France on the post-war European order, and in particular on the former territories of the defeated central European empires. Ireland, in theory a victor in the war, was caught between the fact of its being a part of the territory of the victorious United Kingdom and the forces unleashed during the revolutionary period. In addition, the Free State differed from the other

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<sup>38</sup> Gerlich and Campbell, 'Austria: from compromise to authoritarianism', pp 46-8.

<sup>39</sup> Alvin Jackson, 'The two Irelands', in Robert Gerwarth (ed.), *Twisted paths: Europe, 1914-45* (New York, 2007), pp 62-7.

Dominions that would make up the British Commonwealth. Those former colonies had achieved their Dominion status through evolution, the Free State through revolution.<sup>40</sup>

Whereas the new states on the continent were forged from lands of the defeated powers, advanced Irish nationalism faced a triumphant Britain in laying claim to its right to self-determination. Compromise was inevitable as Irish nationalism went to the negotiating table to reconcile its aspirations with British imperialism (see chapter one). Partition had been mooted for some time, and was made a reality by the Government of Ireland Act 1920. The origins of the settlement with Sinn Féin can be traced to the King's speech on the opening of the Northern parliament on 7 June 1921. The new Ireland that emerged after the Great War contained, as in the patchwork of new states dotted across Europe, ethnic minorities either side of the border. There was a substantial nationalist minority in the Northern state which would remain part of the United Kingdom and a much smaller but still significant, ex-Unionist population in the southern state.<sup>41</sup> The Irish Free State, was not just a unique case in the history of the Dominions, but also presents a contrast with the new states created in post-war Europe. It was established through its own internal forces and not as part of the great wave of democratisation after 1918 (though there may have been a rather elastic argument for this had the Government of Ireland Act 1920 endured). As such, the Free State (with which we are concerned, given our focus on the Cumann na nGaedheal party) owed its existence to internal factors though, as we shall see, it would be heavily influenced by external events, especially given that it was created a couple of years after the new states of central and eastern Europe, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland etc. The Free State also differed from the new states on the continent in that it was a Dominion linked to Australia, Canada, South Africa and New Zealand through membership of the Commonwealth.

On examining the Irish state, we see that, while its origins lay within its own borders, it fits in with the theme being developed in this section. The Irish Free State conforms with the general re-assertion of Liberal political values that followed the First World War and the attempt to recreate the world of *laissez-faire* economics.<sup>42</sup> The Free State constitution,

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<sup>40</sup> D.W. Harkness, *The restless Dominion: the Irish Free State and the British Commonwealth of Nations, 1921-31* (London, 1969), p. 21.

<sup>41</sup> Allan Zink, 'Ireland: democratic stability without compromise' in Dirk Berg-Schlosser and Jeremy Mitchell, *Conditions of democracy in Europe, 1919-39: systematic case studies* (London, 2000), p. 280.

<sup>42</sup> Protectionist policies in Ireland took a blow in 1923 when the Fiscal Inquiry Commission, dominated by academics such as George O'Brien who were schooled in gold standard orthodoxy so dominant in the 1920s, actually favoured reduced protectionism.

even with the face-saving Imperial trappings insisted upon by the British, and so repugnant to the sentiments of many Irish nationalists on all sides,<sup>43</sup> has been praised by Dermot Keogh and others for its liberal tone. The constitution was based *de facto* on popular sovereignty,<sup>44</sup> although like Poland it differed from other new constitutions in its assertion that sovereignty emanated from the ‘nation’ rather than from the people.<sup>45</sup> As in Poland, the Irish constitution granted the vote to men and women aged twenty-one or over, a reform which went further than that embodied in Britain’s Representation of the People Act 1918. In line with the trend of the time, popular participation was emphasised largely through the referendum and initiative with the head of government destined for a role as cabinet chairman rather than master.<sup>46</sup> The drafters of Ireland’s new constitution in 1922 seem to have been motivated by a mixture of liberal and democratic political values and a commitment to developing a distinctive Irish polity, suited to the country and the ‘character’ of the people.<sup>47</sup> The Constitution Committee, picked by Collins and answerable to him as its chair, was furnished with constitutional examples from Europe and the Dominions. As such the constitutions of such countries as Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Poland, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa were distributed to members of the Committee. The Committee drafted three alternative constitutions, drafts A, B and C. The advocates of each draft wrote to Collins to plead their case. In their explanatory statements to Collins, the authors of each draft outlined the thinking behind the constitutional provisions they had chosen while criticising those adopted in the drafts submitted by other members of the committee.

Cumann na nGaedheal formed the first governments in the Free State at a time when Liberalism was reasserting itself in Europe after the convulsions of the First World War (and the revolution and civil strife in Ireland). As noted in chapter one, Tom Garvin labelled the pro-Treaty side ‘Nationalist pragmatist’, reflecting a political style marked perhaps by a cold commitment to democratic procedure, political rights and voter rule whereas the anti-Treatyites were ‘Republican moralist’ with a more radical political style displaying a culture of emotion, moralism and communalism in contrast to the legalism

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<sup>43</sup> Jackson, ‘The two Irelands’, p. 68.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Constitution of the Polish Republic, 17 Mar. 1921 (NAI, Constitution Committee papers, CC/N/1-2), Mazower, *Dark Continent*, p. 6

<sup>46</sup> Brian Farrell, *Chairman or chief?*, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> Darrell Figgis, James McNeill and John O’Byrne to Michael Collins, 13 Apr. 1922 (NAI, Constitution Committee papers, CC/E/1).

and conservative nature of the Free State side. In the economic sphere this dichotomy was continued. There is a case that the state's prosecution of the Civil War, particularly with regard to the executions and murky atrocities such as that carried out at Ballyseedy, damaged the government's democratic credentials. However, all things considered, that democracy emerged ascendant in Ireland with the defeat of the anti-Treatyites in 1923 cannot be disputed, with government depending on the support of a parliament elected by universal suffrage emerging on a firm basis by 1932. Pro-Treatyites and later Cumann na nGaedheal were marked by commercialism, free trade, financial orthodoxy and a recognition of the state's economic relationship with Britain and the Commonwealth whereas de Valera's Sinn Féin and later Fianna Fáil were characterised by self-sufficiency, protectionism, and an economic nationalism increasingly popular in Europe after 1929.<sup>48</sup> In short, the world view espoused by Cosgrave's party from 1922, even if it lacked the social democratic flavour of Weimar Germany, was in keeping with the general theme of the years 1918-1922, which is hardly surprising, given that the new state's proximity to Britain and membership of the Commonwealth. During the state's formative years, de Valera's party's world view was out of step with that trend although circumstances would change in its favour over the course of the decade. For the duration of this chapter it may be possible to move away from what Roy Foster has dubbed the 'cliché' of the Free State's rigorous conservatism under Cumann na nGaedheal and arrive at a more nuanced interpretation of the state in this period.<sup>49</sup>

### **Reaction against the new democratic order in Europe**

Having emerged a few years later than other new polities, the Irish Free State had some catching up to do. As such, by the time of its foundation, teething problems were already becoming apparent in the new liberal and democratic European order. Hungary experienced a brief period of Bolshevik rule as Béla Kun overthrew the Liberal Hungarian Republic only to see his anti-Liberal regime replaced by the restored Kingdom of Hungary. Hungary's political convulsions from Republic to Communist dictatorship to restored Monarchy reflect the aftershock of a war which had challenged the accepted political order of the continent. The traditionally Liberal state of Italy became the first Fascist country in

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<sup>48</sup> Tom Garvin, *1922: the birth of Irish democracy* (Dublin, 2005), p. 155.

<sup>49</sup> R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London, 1989), p. 516.

October 1922, just as the Irish Provisional Government was preparing the way for the formal establishment of the Free State. Benito Mussolini, originally a Socialist, was pushed to the nationalist right by his experience of the First World War. War had heightened the sense of Italian national identity, and Italian nationalists believed they had not been sufficiently rewarded for their victory in the war. Mussolini believed that Liberalism belonged to the pre-1914 world and in June 1920 when the seventy-eight year old Giovanni Giolitti again became prime minister, his appointment seemed to symbolise a political system which was in decline.<sup>50</sup> Addressing Fascists in Naples on 24 October 1922, Mussolini described his movement as the ‘most interesting, most original and most powerful phenomenon which has appeared in the world since the war’.<sup>51</sup> On 29 October 1922, after his Blackshirt ‘March on Rome’ Mussolini was invited by the King to lead a new coalition government. *The Times* correspondent in Rome met Mussolini on 30 October and in the ensuing interview captures perfectly Fascism’s lack of a coherent programme to underpin it. Mussolini described his ascent to power as a bloodless ‘Nationalist revolution’ and indicated that he would close down superfluous branches of the state, restore law-and-order and maintain friendly relations with countries possessing stores of raw materials.<sup>52</sup> By 1925, Fascism had consolidated its grip on power in Italy. In that country liberal democracy had appeared weak and divided in comparison to the strident forces of the left and right.<sup>53</sup>

While it opposed the subverting of the Italian nation by an internationalist left-wing ideology, Italian Fascism nevertheless envisaged a strong role for the state in the coordination of the economy. This was a clear break with the accepted wisdom of western European countries in this period. Originally differing only in degree from the prevailing *laissez-faire* view of the economy, Italian Fascism became ever more interventionist as the years wore on. As such, in Fascism we are dealing with a revolutionary doctrine, seeking not to restore an old reactionary, élite or *laissez-faire* system, but rather to govern by a new (continually evolving) attitude based simply on action and dynamism.<sup>54</sup> Events in Italy caused considerable alarm in Britain with Viscount Grey referring to the worrying precedent that saw the collapse of representative government in the face of a movement of

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<sup>50</sup> Payne, *Fascism*, p. 89.

<sup>51</sup> *The Times*, 25 Oct. 1922.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 Oct. 1922.

<sup>53</sup> Kramer, *Dynamics of destruction*, p. 284.

<sup>54</sup> Payne, *Fascism*, pp 102-3.

considerable organizational force.<sup>55</sup> Events in Italy were unpalatable for most Liberals, while the antics of the extreme left in British politics during the 1924 general election further upset Liberal sensibilities. Asquith claimed that free speech was under threat during the campaign having been subjected to cat calls and interruptions during a particularly tense election meeting. Asquith blamed the Socialist and Communist parties for ‘this interference with free speech’.<sup>56</sup> The election itself resulted in the first Labour party government. As in France, Britain’s 1924 experiment with left leaning government did not last,<sup>57</sup> and the government itself had proved ‘gaffe prone’.<sup>58</sup>

Little over two weeks after Cumann na nGaedheal had won its first general election in August 1923, thereby cementing the Free State’s constitutional position, democracy suffered a further blow on the continent as Miguel Primo de Rivera staged a military coup in Spain on 13 September 1923. Spain had been marked by uneven economic development with much modernisation and industrialisation taking place in the capitals of Catalonia and the Basque country which sought to restore their regional autonomy. In addition, Spain’s politics in the nineteenth century had been divisive with those of a liberal persuasion opposed by the defenders of Monarchy and Church domination.<sup>59</sup> Traditionally, in Spain, nationalism had been largely the domain of the regional separatists as Spanish national identity remained quite weakly developed in many parts of the country. However, military defeat to the United States in 1898 underlined the country’s decline as a power and the lack of a Spanish national consciousness was a cause of political discussion thereafter. The country was not yet a true democracy, being governed by an elitist liberalism common to the Iberian peninsula, and as a neutral in the war it was largely immune as democracy asserted itself in much of Europe after the First World War. The years 1918-21 were marked by rural and urban upheaval as landless peasants agitated for land distribution and workers clashed with employers in Barcelona. Political murder was rife and by 1923 it was clear that the existing political system could not survive.<sup>60</sup> Spain’s élite-led liberal order proved unable to adjust to the new era of mass politics and democracy.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *The Times*, 5 Feb. 1923.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 Oct. 1924.

<sup>57</sup> Stevenson, *First World War*, p.

<sup>58</sup> Harkness, *Restless Dominion*, p. 43.

<sup>59</sup> Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses, *Franco and the Spanish Civil War* (London, 2001), pp 1-5.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>61</sup> Payne, *Fascism*, p. 138.

Like Mussolini's Fascist takeover in Italy, de Rivera's military dictatorship went against the general trend of liberal democratisation that had followed the war and showed that Liberalism had not in fact won the post-war argument. Economic decline and hardship were clear indicators for many that the status quo was not delivering. In fact, as Patricia Clavin argues, more representative government actually changed expectations and altered the context of economic policy as governments had to look to more of their people for re-election.<sup>62</sup> For de Rivera, decadence and regional nationalism were leading to the disintegration of Spain. The country would have to be regenerated by a government which would promote *Spanish* nationalism, crush regional separatists and pursue as a policy goal of the state, the inculcating of a sense of Spanish identity in the population.<sup>63</sup> De Rivera's arguments were typical of democracy's opponents on the right of the political spectrum. Decadence and fractious party politics associated with the triumph of Liberal democracy proved the bane of those of the right across Europe who wished to experiment in new forms of government. Primo de Rivera's regime differed from Mussolini's fascist dictatorship in its reliance on old elites and its identification of Spanish national identity with Catholicism. First under military rule, and from 1925 under the Civil Directory, de Rivera's regime sought to suppress the separatist nationalism of the Basque country and Catalonia and to use the state apparatus to aggressively develop a sense of Spanish national identity. Censorship was extensive and civil liberties such as free speech were viewed by the dictator as decadent and superfluous rights as political debate in the country was reduced to the very minimum.<sup>64</sup> The Spanish state posed as the protector of the nation which was envisaged as a community of Spaniards and the Education system was identified as a key agent of promoting Castilian as the language and culture of Spain.

José Ortega y Gasset had clear views about how Fascist and authoritarian regimes came to power in Europe at this time. Nineteenth-century liberalism had failed to secure its perpetuation by creating a generation which failed to appreciate the principles upon which its organisation of state politics was based. Because it saw itself as a culmination of history's progression, the ascendant liberalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had taken the future for granted. The masses, the very people who benefitted most from this progression, did not understand its importance as a historical development and

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<sup>62</sup> Clavin, *Great Depression*, p. 8.

<sup>63</sup> Alejandro Quiroga, *Making Spaniards: Primo de Rivera and the nationalization of the masses, 1923-30* (Basingstoke, 2007), pp 6-8.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 34-5.

hence took it for granted.<sup>65</sup> In a scathing indictment of these masses, Gasset went on to suggest that mass politics threatened the advances of the Liberal order. For the Spanish philosopher, Fascism was a movement of the masses. As an anti-liberal movement it posited the recreation of the pre-liberal order which pre-dated the French Revolution. For Gasset, such ideologies of the masses, based on brute force rather than reasoned debate, would return Europe to a state of barbarism. Rather than using arguments to put forward a political programme, opinions were being forced on others by a violent creed which threatened to undo all the progress of the previous century. For Gasset, Bolshevism and Fascism were examples of retrogression.<sup>66</sup> Because it followed a period of plenitude, the post-war generation had been left directionless and insecure of its position in the world, hence the common assertion of Europe's decadence and decline by politicians, demagogues and philosophers such as Oswald Spengler. The war punctuated a period of plenitude from one of pessimism, instead of believing tomorrow would be better than today, the post-war generation believed tomorrow would be the same as today. Gasset believed, post-war Europe saw itself as amounting to more than the past but conceived of itself as a beginning of an uncertain new age rather than a culmination of history's progress. It was superior to previous epochs, yet inferior to what it ought to have been. The post-war generation saw itself as a disappointment in an age that was unsure of itself.<sup>67</sup> Parliamentary systems were increasingly seen as the cause of an apparent 'decay', disputed by Gasset in his writings, and opposition to parliamentary rule, and the compromises associated with it, would characterise Europe by the early 1930s.

It is clear that the experience of the Irish Free State under Cumann na nGaedheal in this period stands in stark contrast to events in countries such as Italy, Hungary and Spain. The Civil War could be regarded as an event which might have ushered in a more radical regime of the right or left but victory for the anti-Treatyites would most probably have resulted in a return of the British army than in a more exotic style of native Irish government. Moreover, the Irish Labour movement was moderate.<sup>68</sup> It was not revolutionary and remained on reasonably good terms with Cumann na nGaedheal, due to its support of the Treaty, and with Irish nationalism in general given their cooperation from the 1916 rising, through to the 1918 general election and subsequent War of Independence.

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<sup>65</sup> Ortega y Gasset, *Revolt of the masses*, p. 65.

<sup>66</sup> Quiroga, *Making Spaniards*, p. 101.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 32-40.

<sup>68</sup> Niamh Puirseil, *The Irish Labour party, 1922-73* (Dublin, 2007), p. 31.



Neither was there a significant right wing threat to the Irish experiment in democratic government during the 1920s. The splinter groups spawned by Cumann na nGaedheal, the National Group and Clann Éireann, generally framed their grievances in the language of a more populist brand of Irish nationalism that wanted free-trade to be replaced by Protectionism, and the personnel of the public service to reflect the views of the revolutionary generation. Ex Unionists were numerically too small to pose a serious threat to the constitution, if they had so desired, and generally accepted the new State. The Free State Senate ensured political representation for the ex Unionist community. The Farmers' Party, Labour, Cumann na nGaedheal and independent Unionists all accepted the Constitution and the anti-Treatyites in the guise of Fianna Fáil came to accept it by 1927. By August 1927, most anti-Treatyites were working within the constitution and the state almost had its first left-wing led government when a putative Labour party/National League coalition supported by Fianna Fáil was scuppered as Cosgrave survived a vote of confidence on the casting vote of the Ceann Comhairle.<sup>69</sup> In addition, the outcome of the army mutiny showed that the civilian government was secure enough in its position to be calm militarism within the administration and to face down any perceived threat to the authority of the government. Cumann na nGaedheal throughout its period in office was determined to bed down functioning democratic institutions. It developed the administrative machine of the state without any wholesale purges of former personnel of the *ancien regime* and the decision of Fianna Fáil to accept the legitimacy of those institutions of state in August 1927 has been described as W.T. Cosgrave's finest hour.

In 1923, Mussolini had admirers in Germany, and elements of his political style were copied in Spain. Hitler admired Mussolini's nationalism and saw him as the only leader in Europe who had crushed Marxism and purged his nation of its enemies.<sup>70</sup> However, Hitler's Beer Hall putsch of 9 November 1923 was easily defeated and the Nazis remained on the fringes of German politics until the end of the decade. In 1920s Ireland Cumann na nGaedheal continued to govern within the democratic constitution. During the Civil War, proposals did emanate from within the pro-Treaty organisation that an armed militia of Treaty supporters be formed to help defeat the anti-Treaty military effort. J.J. Walsh used the word *fascisti* in advocating the proposal. John Regan quotes O'Higgins as responding

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<sup>69</sup> The proposed cabinet was published in full by the *Irish Times*, 15 Aug. 1927

<sup>70</sup> Kramer, *Dynamics of destruction*, p. 318.

curtly 'No fascisti'.<sup>71</sup> Regan notes that during the Civil War, the government did not succumb to the temptation to merge the state's security apparatus with their party organisation and that the principle, first enunciated by Collins, of government rather than party control of the police was adhered to.

Political developments in Ireland during 1924 and 1925 have been described by numerous historians as critical in the evolution of Cumann na nGaedheal. It has become common to describe the army mutiny, the secession of the National Group, the acceptance by the government of the London Agreement and the further split with what became Clann Éireann as demonstrating the ascendancy within Cumann na nGaedheal of its 'consolidationist wing'.<sup>72</sup> But what were the alternatives? Cumann na nGaedheal, as seen in previous chapters did use the language of the nation and did eschew more popular policies because of the economic constraints it was working under. From its inception it talked of representing the whole of the nation as distinct from any social group and in that regard differed little from post-war continental governments keen to avoid class politics. We have also seen, in chapter two the language of nation being used by W.T. Cosgrave in his speeches to party conferences to justify and enunciate his government's policy. Different factions continued to exist within Cumann na nGaedheal throughout its existence though most large parties generally are made up of different strands. In fact, it could be argued that these more radical elements within Cumann na nGaedheal had greater scope for expression in 1933 after the moderate or 'consolidationist wing' led the party to a second electoral defeat in 1933. The 1920s were an inopportune time for Griffithite Protectionists to come to the fore, while John Regan has already discussed the attempt by Séamus Hughes to infuse the Cumann na nGaedheal party constitution with a distinctly Socially Democratic ethos in 1922.<sup>73</sup> Had Hughes succeeded in having his decidedly welfarist clauses on the health and education of Irish children included in the Cumann na nGaedheal constitution, and supposing the government acted on the constitution of its party apparatus, the Free State might now be regarded, like Weimar Germany, as one of the first examples of a working Social Democracy. Instead, radical impulses within the party remained in check as Cumann na nGaedheal stuck to a somewhat middle road

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<sup>71</sup> John M. Regan, *The Irish counter revolution, 1921-36: Treatyite politics and settlement in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), pp 122-5.

<sup>72</sup> Maryann Gialenella Valiulis, 'After the revolution: the formative years of Cumann na nGaedheal' in Audrey S. Eyler and Robert F. Garrett (eds), *The uses of the past: essays on Irish culture* (Wilmington, 1988), p. 142; Fearghall McGarry, *Irish politics and the Spanish Civil War* (Cork, 1999), p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> Regan, *Counter revolution*, p. 136.

between the radical forces of left and right then asserting themselves on the continent of Europe. Inside the Dáil, the party played the role of a centrist party between Labour on one side and the Farmers' party, independents and National League on the other.

Despite the seemingly successful attempt to recreate the pre-1914 world order, as is apparent in the writings of Ortega y Gasset, by the mid 1920s, the triumph of liberal democracy in Europe had become increasingly contested. Various political creeds espoused alternative ways of providing government in an age of industrialisation, social change, modernisation and economic difficulties. Over-reliance on heavy industry, the emergence of new non European powers the United States and Japan and the struggle of agriculture to adapt to the post-war economy were among the problems European politicians grappled with. Economic problems were compounded by low consumer confidence and the deflationary policies necessary for a return to the gold standard.<sup>74</sup> In addition, capitalist countries were more concerned with containing Communism than they were in challenging the emergence of the right-wing dictatorships. Democracy had few 'unambiguous' defenders in the 1920s,<sup>75</sup> while the success of Liberal reform in the previous century seemed to remove its *raison d'être* as a force for change. Indeed, some of its own successes such as increased suffrage threatened it as Socialists gained ground with the extension of the franchise and Nationalist and Conservative forces increased support as they came to be seen as a more effective counterweight to the rise of the Left.

Liberalism was seen as an ideology no longer suited to the problems of a modernizing world, while for others its insistence on pluralism and tolerance were failing the nation.<sup>76</sup> British liberals were split and in terminal decline (Blythe, as we noted in Chapter One, had used this as a model for Cumann na nGaedheal organisation in 1922). Weimar Germany was a Social Democracy rather than a Liberal Democracy and countries such as Italy, Spain and now Portugal in May 1926 chose an entirely different form of government. In the mid 1920s, Portugal could not be regarded as democratic as coup remained the most effective means of bringing about political change.<sup>77</sup> The country had been a functioning Republic since 1910 but for a year's interruption in 1917. It had a tradition of liberal constitutional government, but it was an élitist liberalism, much like that of Spain, which had not evolved into a stable and democratic parliamentary style

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<sup>74</sup> Clavin, *Great Depression*, pp 8-17.

<sup>75</sup> Mazower, *Dark continent*, p. 22.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 25-7.

<sup>77</sup> De Meneses, *Salazar*, p. 35.

government.<sup>78</sup> On 28 May 1926, General Gomes da Costa staged a coup against the ailing Portuguese Republic. Portugal was in the midst of a long standing fiscal crisis, while, as elsewhere, the pace of change in this traditionally Catholic country was too fast for some who had already witnessed the separation of Church and state. The Republic had antagonised Catholic sentiment while, as in Spain, a perceived lack of national sentiment, decadence and the need to reform and modernise Portugal motivated many of the instigators and in particular loomed large in the thinking of the country's future head of government, António de Oliveira Salazar.<sup>79</sup> As 'Financial dictator', Salazar, an ex seminarian, showed an interest in the neo thomist current then prevalent in Europe. As in Spain, the regime that would come to characterise Portugal from the late 1920s cannot be regarded as in the Fascist mould of Mussolini's Italy. Salazar, as an increasingly well regarded Minister for Finance from his appointment in April 1928, wanted to direct the economy towards production and the more efficient consumption of wealth. He wanted Portugal to produce a lot more and spend carefully.<sup>80</sup> Salazar's state would actively co-ordinate the economic sphere, although this was combined with a degree of orthodox financial policy as balanced budgets were quickly achieved. In this regard, the Finance Minister drew the plaudits.<sup>81</sup> Like so many others, Salazar believed that the political apparatus of the nineteenth century was unsuited to the demands of the new century. Excessive individualism and political liberties had weakened the state and the nation, both of which had to be protected from damaging international currents and internal decay. Class struggle too would be subordinated to national unity in the new, apparently corporatist constitution that Salazar would set about drawing up for Portugal and its New State.

In Spain and Portugal, Liberal democracy failed to assert itself in the post-war period and, instead, each country found itself going down an authoritarian path. The break with Liberalism, and Salazar's economic and financial prowess, enabled Portugal to pursue less orthodox spending policies- public works, education, infrastructure and communications- that would characterise the 1930s recovery elsewhere.<sup>82</sup> Portugal and Spain were followed by Poland, Greece and Lithuania, countries that experimented with

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<sup>78</sup> Payne, *Fascism*, p. 142.

<sup>79</sup> De Menezes, *Salazar*, pp 23-37.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, pp 42-3.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, p. 51.

<sup>82</sup> Clavin, *Great Depression*, p. 167.

authoritarian regimes between 1926 and 1928.<sup>83</sup> Greece returned to parliamentary rule after seven months but the force of nationalism held together the regimes of Poland and Lithuania. Pilsudski's Polish dictatorship was opposed by democrats, nationalists and Socialists.<sup>84</sup> The Irish Free State's democracy was coming of age at a time when much of Europe was turning its back on parliamentarianism and towards dictatorship or the party state. In 1927, the legitimacy of the Free State constitution was enhanced as Fianna Fáil took their seats in the Dáil. As Depression struck in the early 1930s, Ireland was an increasingly lonely outpost of parliamentary democracy marked by universal suffrage and keen electoral competition between the two main parties. However, combined with the country's commitment to democracy was an adherence on the part of Cumann na nGaedheal to an economic policy that began to unravel as the world economy collapsed. The Depression would prove the catalyst for far reaching political and economic changes.

The relative economic stability of the mid 1920s, with most governments adopting a policy of balanced budgets and deflation, made the growth of fascist, communist and authoritarian alternatives difficult, even if they were increasingly noisy in their political contributions. The potential for political instability remained given the radicalising impact of the Great War and the multiplicity of political creeds appealing to the various interest groups. Anti-liberal movements gained ground as the 1920s wore on and exploited a political vacuum once the Great Depression struck. This was a visual age where the collectivity became a more evident reality in a further threat to liberal individualism. It was a time of mass leisure, cinema and sporting events that were watched by tens of thousands of spectators huddled together as one. Social psychologists analysed the thinking and emotion of crowds with the Frenchman Gustave le Bon concluding that crowds were essentially irrational in behaviour, which led him to the theory that there was a need for strong leadership in society.<sup>85</sup> Flying in the face of liberal individualism was the front generation, particularly potent in Germany and Austria. They had been a collectivity, huddled together in the trenches during the war. It was also an age where various ideologies posed as offering an imagined but achievable utopia and escape from the problems associated with the status quo. For the believers in a better, radically different future, staid, unstable and fractious parliamentary democracy of course stood in the way.

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<sup>83</sup> Payne, *Fascism*, p. 139.

<sup>84</sup> *New York Times*, 12 Feb. 1928.

<sup>85</sup> Payne, *Fascism*, p. 27.

When a downturn came, as it did in the late 1920s, democracy in Europe would be shown to have been built on quite shaky foundations. The right believed socialism and class warfare were threats to the national community and in many instances sought to build an alternative that was, in the words of James Hogan, as ‘definite and fundamental as the theories of socialism’.<sup>86</sup>

Weimar Germany struggled to assert its authority throughout the 1920s. As in the Irish Free State, its legitimacy was questioned by a considerable segment of the electorate, this time the German nationalist right, and we have already mentioned the abortive Beer Hall Putsch of 1923. More extremist German nationalists still talked of an undefeated German army which had not been pushed back onto German soil during the First World War but had been betrayed by internal enemies; this became the ‘stab in the back’ myth.<sup>87</sup> When the republic’s first President Friedrich Ebert died in February 1925, a fatal blow was struck against the state. In the ensuing Presidential election, the right’s candidate, Field Marshall Paul von Hindenburg, a monarchist career officer, emerged as the winner with 48.3% of the vote. His victory marked a shift to the right and was a boon to the old élites who had been loyal to the monarchy.<sup>88</sup> Meanwhile the symbols of the new Republic remained contested. The government of Hans Luther fell over the question of allowing German embassies and consulates fly the old flag of the monarchy or the new flag of democracy and republicanism. Many rejected the new black, red and gold flag of the Republic preferring to fly the black, red and white flag of the former German Empire. The flag of the Republic was sometimes subject to vandalism and by 1927, on the annual celebration of Weimar, *The Times* of London noted that the number of Republican flags flying was largely the result of compulsion orders placed on municipalities which had hitherto boycotted the flag.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, the Chancellor in his closing remarks at the ceremony acknowledged that there remained considerable apathy among the German public for the Republic but optimistically stated appreciation for the new constitution was growing. However, political instability continued to be the hallmark of Weimar Germany with parties struggling to form stable governments and failing to reach compromises with each other. Weimar’s problems were exacerbated by the economic crash of 1929.

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<sup>86</sup> Mike Cronin, *The Blueshirts and Irish politics* (Dublin, 1997), p. 92.

<sup>87</sup> Kramer, *Dynamics of destruction*, p. 308.

<sup>88</sup> Kitchen, *Europe between the wars*, p. 264.

<sup>89</sup> *The Times*, 12 Aug. 1927.

## Europe in the maelstrom of Depression

After the Wall Street crash in October 1929, the position of democracy in Europe became even more fragile. Many economic historians argue that the depression in Europe pre-dated the Wall Street crash by two years. Creaks were evident as early 1927 though these were worsened by America's collapse in 1929 now that it had become the world banker. The economic and financial crisis left in its wake served to exacerbate disillusionment with liberal political institutions and *laissez-faire* economics at the outset of the 1930s. Trade was in retreat, unemployment rose and governments struggled to cope with the crisis facing capitalism.<sup>90</sup> Reluctant to abandon conventional economic theory at first, most countries sought to pursue the deflationary policies consistent with membership of the gold standard and cut spending which only deepened the hardship of ordinary people and served to worsen the problem. Gold standard orthodoxy was omnipresent in the 1920s. As Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Snowden was as committed to thrift and economic orthodoxy as any Conservative or Liberal minister while the Labour party he belonged to had come to accept capitalism and had abandoned much of its early Socialism. Economic collapse placed enormous pressure on the political institutions of most countries. In Britain, the Depression eventually divided the Labour party, with some of its members even serving in a national government with the Conservatives. This became in effect a Conservative government after the election of October 1931 as the Labour party was decimated and remained divided. The Conservatives supported Protectionist policies in 1931, hinting at an increased realisation across Europe that countries would have to 'go it alone' as the depression forced the adoption of a new economic nationalism. Communism and economic nationalism emerged as serious alternatives to a style of economic management which seemed doomed to failure.

The death knell of conventional economic policy was effectively tolled in September 1931 when Britain came off the gold standard, devalued and was now free to abandon the orthodox policies that were worsening the crisis. Cheap money would encourage demand and investment while balanced budgets and free trade were no longer the holy grail of British policy.<sup>91</sup> Still adhering to its traditional policy of retrenchment and only limited tariffs in 1932, Cumann na nGaedheal must have seemed out of step with the new

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<sup>90</sup>Mazower, *Dark continent*, pp 114-7.

<sup>91</sup>Clavin, *Great Depression*, pp133-5.

economic realities as de Valera's advocacy of economic nationalism and self-sufficiency was more in tune with the trend of the time. Free trade and other tenets of liberalism seemed outdated, as the world economy crumbled. Cumann na nGaedheal was slow to adapt and move away from its conventional policies and lost power in February 1932 just as new economic theories were making an impact on government policy in Europe.<sup>92</sup> With protectionist parties in government on each side of the Irish Sea from 1932, and in particular with a new Irish government that was determined to cut all imperial ties, trade war between Britain and Ireland was the almost inevitable outcome. However, relations between the two countries were further damaged by de Valera's reluctance to take advantage of Imperial preference, while nationalism generally was a force for tense relations in the 1930s.

In Germany, the Nazi party emerged as liberalism's most extreme opponent as it increased its support as the effects of the Depression were felt in Germany. Having emerged from the economic difficulties of the hyper-inflation, the Weimar Republic enjoyed some years of relative calm in the mid 1920s, during which time the extremes of right and left lost ground, until the economic collapse of 1929. Nevertheless, the Weimar Republic had always been dogged by political instability that saw governments struggle to maintain parliamentary majorities. Even during the years of relative stability, German governments were either in a minority and dependent for survival on the goodwill of an SPD which had become more dogmatically left-wing, or comprised uneasy coalitions of the left and right. None of the Republic's underlying political problems were addressed during the years 1924 to 1928 and they resurfaced once the country's economy nosedived.<sup>93</sup> There remained little emotional attachment to the Weimar Republic - even the German People's Party (DVP) of its star performer Gustav Stresemann were unenthusiastic supporters of the Republic, and right-wing nationalists associated it with surrender, compromise and national decay. After the Wall Street crash, Germany was unable to borrow from the United States and unemployment rose at an alarming rate.<sup>94</sup> From 29 March 1930, the German Chancellor Heinrich Brüning assumed the power to rule by decree and no longer depended on a parliamentary majority.<sup>95</sup> In his first address to the Reichstag, Brüning warned that this was the country's last experiment with parliamentary

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>93</sup> Kitchen, *Europe between the wars*, p. 262.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p. 267.

<sup>95</sup> Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, p. 5.



government and that he would rule by decree if necessary. Through a mixture of increased taxes, retrenchment and protective tariffs, Brüning sought to overcome the country's dire economic problems. When the Reichstag voted against his plan to cut the salaries of civil servants, Brüning turned to President Hindenburg, who passed the legislation through the agency of Article 48. The Reichstag was dissolved before it could veto the move, having previously resisted attempts to use the emergency constitutional provision.<sup>96</sup> The ensuing election returned an even more divided parliament with Hitler's Nazi party emerging as the second largest in parliament. German society and politics remained divided as parliamentary democracy's credibility was further eroded by continued instability and the use of article 48. The new Chancellor, von Papen, proposed to govern without the Reichstag and to suppress political organisations and parties. His cabinet disagreed as the Republic ran out of options. Believing the only alternative to forming a military dictatorship was to appoint Hitler as Chancellor, Hindenburg chose the latter option. On 30 January 1933 Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany. Before long the Weimar Republic was replaced by the totalitarian state of the Nazi party.

Like Germany, after some initial economic difficulties, particularly a period of hyperinflation caused by numerous factors, Austria had stabilised between 1923 and 1929. This period was marked by balanced budgets and a stable currency. Depression struck Austria in 1930 and the economic problems of the early 1930s helped to radicalise the country's politics. The country had many underlying problems. It had inherited an oversized bureaucracy from the remnants of the old Habsburg empire, the regional division of labour in the empire meant that the new state of Austria was oversized in some sectors and undersized in others. Moreover economic self-sufficiency became a goal of many of its neighbouring countries which damaged Austria's trade relationship with states which had formerly been part of its empire.<sup>97</sup> Eventually parliament was banned in Austria as the divisions between the extremes of left and right threatened to get out of hand and the country moved from parliamentarianism to authoritarianism.

In Spain, this time an anomaly in the history of inter-war Europe, the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera was brought to an end as the army which had originally brought him to power turned against the dictator in January 1930. Instead a new democratic order followed in Spain with the inauguration of the Republic. After some initial attempts at

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<sup>96</sup> Kitchen, *Europe between the wars*, pp 268-9.

<sup>97</sup> Gerlich and Campbell, 'Austria: from compromise to authoritarianism', p. 52.

preserving the monarchy and restoring the 1923 constitution failed, the left, pressing for a socialist and republican Spain, gained power. Dictatorship had crumbled in Spain at a time when it was democracy which was on the retreat in much of the continent. The new Spanish Republic was copper-fastened in the elections to a constituent assembly in June 1931 and the approval of a mildly socialistic constitution in December.<sup>98</sup> Church and state were separated and regional autonomy promised to the separatists as the new government took Spain in a new direction at a time of instability and economic chaos across Europe. Fearghal McGarry likens the transition of power in Spain at this time to that in the Irish Free State in February 1932.<sup>99</sup> The new Spanish government represented a marked shift to the left for that country and its policy, particularly with regard to regional autonomy, stood in contrast to the ‘national regeneration’ agenda of the military dictatorship. Radical change in this period was often met by right wing mobilisation. This is what happened in Spain resulting eventually in a Civil War between the Republicans and the right wing forces of Franco.

It was in this context of the collapse in world trade, economic depression and global political insecurity and instability that Cumann na nGaedheal faced the Irish people in February 1932. In 1932 Cumann na nGaedheal, for most of the 1920s the champion of ‘impeccable nineteenth century liberal economics’ in Ireland,<sup>100</sup> watched as its policy was discredited by the global economic slump. We have noted how economic nationalism was much in vogue with the onset of the Great Depression, not so much as an effective remedy to the crisis, but as a last resort as governments were left with little other option. James Meenan noted this in 1967. He said there had been a ‘world-wide revulsion from the old orthodoxies’ as international trade collapsed. Worldwide, the protectionist case had advanced slowly during the stable 1920s but accelerated with the onset of the Great Depression.<sup>101</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal, during its term of office, had introduced moderate tariffs, as a revenue raising device rather than a shift in economic thinking. The party had not gone far enough to satisfy protectionists within its own ranks or the nationalist electorate at large. In Ireland, the advocate of an alternative economic vision based on the new economic reality of the Depression seemed to be Fianna Fáil. In June 1932 as free

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<sup>98</sup> Kitchen, *Europe between the wars*, p. 339.

<sup>99</sup> McGarry, *Irish Politics*, p. 5.

<sup>100</sup> Andrew W. Orridge, ‘The Blueshirts and the “Economic War”’: a study of Ireland in the context of Dependency Theory’ in *Political Studies*, 31, (1983) p. 358.

<sup>101</sup> James Meenan, ‘From free-trade to self-sufficiency’ in Francis MacManus (ed.), *The years of the great test, 1926-39* (Cork, 1967) pp 73-8.

trade retreated across the world to be replaced by tariffs, the *New York Times* lamented what it referred to as the ‘bitter fruits of Nationalism’. The paper claimed trade and industry were stagnant as each country pursued material self-sufficiency.<sup>102</sup> For its part, the *Manchester Guardian* had had a premonition of what would engulf Europe in the early 1930s. Then, the newspaper had warned that Fianna Fáil’s nationalism was of the type that would ‘oppose irresistible world forces which are breaking down the barriers between nation and nation’.<sup>103</sup> The paper claimed Fianna Fáil was suspicious of Britain, looked inwards and opposed exports which generated wealth for the country. By 1932, this was the predominant theme in the continent’s politics as the ‘viability of the political and economic basis of post-war Europe was being brought increasingly into doubt’.<sup>104</sup>

As in other countries, under Cumann na nGaedheal part of the initial solution was retrenchment and cuts in public spending. On the eve of the election, Cumann na nGaedheal duly obliged with across-the-board cuts for public servants as they attempted to stick to the rigours of financial orthodoxy as they had done before the economic crisis set in. Cumann na nGaedheal went to the country with the sort of budgetary policy which may have been possible in Portugal in 1928,<sup>105</sup> or which had needed the flouting of democratic procedure to be implemented in Germany under Brüning but was almost unthinkable in a parliamentary democracy such as the Free State. Cumann na nGaedheal lost the 1932 general election bringing to an end ten years of relatively stable, single-party government. The Free State’s change of government also ended a decade of an ‘outward looking’ commercial policy based on pursuing the country’s comparative advantage in pastoral agriculture.<sup>106</sup> However, fears that the Free State was about to go the way of a Spain, an Italy or a Russia proved well wide of the mark as instead the peaceful transfer of power from Civil War victor to vanquished consolidated the Free State. In Cosgrave’s words, ‘the other fellows’ were given a chance to implement their policies within the framework of a working parliamentary democracy. It is against this backdrop that we now analyse Free State government policy 1923-33 in the following two chapters.

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<sup>102</sup> *New York Times*, 26 June 1932.

<sup>103</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 21 Sept. 1927.

<sup>104</sup> Kevin B. Nowlan, ‘President Cosgrave’s last administration’ in Francis MacManus (ed.), *The years of the great test, 1926-39* (Cork, 1967), p. 14.

<sup>105</sup> De Meneses, *Salazar*, p. 48.

<sup>106</sup> Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland: a new economic history, 1780-1939* (New York, 1994), p. 385.



## Cumann na nGaedheal policy in government, 1923-28

In chapter six something of the ‘temper’<sup>1</sup> of Europe between the two world wars was provided. In that chapter we learned that the Great War had something of a radicalising effect on the politics of Europe, unleashing new forces of both the left and right. Soviet Russia cast a shadow across the continent while Britain, Denmark and France flirted briefly with left-wing governments during 1924. Initially, an attempt was made to recreate the golden pre-war age of the *Belle Époque* as countries returned to the fixed exchange rate mechanism of the gold standard and the financial orthodoxy that went hand in hand with that. For much of the 1920s, moderate conservative governments generally tried to balance budgets and send out the signal that they were prudently managing the affairs of the state.

In this chapter, we build on the themes developed in chapter six by analysing Cumann na nGaedheal policy in the years of relative stability in Europe. The government’s decision-making process will be studied through an examination of primary and secondary sources, in the hope of understanding why and in what spirit certain decisions were made by this hard-pressed group of ministers. By examining Cumann na nGaedheal decision making in government, and by analysing the general thrust of the world economy, it will be possible to reach a more nuanced interpretation of the party’s demise in 1933.

Cumann na nGaedheal’s 1923 ‘address to the nation’, penned by Hugh Kennedy, set out the strategy of the first independent Irish government. In language reminiscent of the 1916 proclamation, the document asked the ‘Men and women of Ireland’<sup>2</sup> to secure the status of national security attained through the Anglo-Irish Treaty by supporting Cumann na nGaedheal’s programme in the election. The party’s appeal to voters set out the

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Kitchen, *Europe between the wars* (London, 2006), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Address to the Nation, Cumann na nGaedheal 1923 (UCDA, Ernest Blythe Papers, P24/614).

aspirations of a native Irish government facing enormous challenges. The task of state-building would prove difficult and would require discipline, resolve and sacrifice on the part of the Irish people. Partition was a reality and the Boundary Commission envisaged in article twelve of the Treaty would be dealt with during the lifetime of the government elected in August 1923. Secondly, the state would have to grapple with the problem of spiralling expenditure given the inheritance of a quite lavish system of public spending from the British administration in Ireland, the legacy of the progressive social policies of the last Liberal governments.<sup>3</sup> This was not to mention the costs (material, wages and pensions) incurred by the fledgling state during the Civil War. A native Irish government would have to fund itself and could not count on the ample resources of the British treasury as the Castle administration had done. Another rock on the road to recovery and consolidation was the bitter legacy of the Civil War which left the southern polity divided, with the defeated side refusing to recognise the legitimacy of the Free State and its government. As late as 1929, de Valera talked of the events of 1922 as a coup that had swept the true custodians of the Republic from power.<sup>4</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal claimed it wanted to move beyond the divisions engendered by the fratricidal conflict and aspired towards Irish unity in the long term and national solidarity in the south in the short term. Until greater progress had been made towards Irish unity, and the status of the Free State made secure, the party urged the people:

Now that you have under your control the shaping of the future destiny of the nation, it is manifestly your first interest to secure and to safeguard the status of national sovereignty [ ] which you have attained. This we ask you to do by supporting with your united strength the party whose programme stands for the realisation of the immense possibilities the ratification of the Treaty and of the Constitution open up for our country. Convinced of the necessity of national solidarity for years to come and until our people shall have made invulnerable from any attack, internal or external, the historic one-ness and territorial integrity of our ancient nation, and shall have brought about by common consent a re-united Ireland, at peace within her own borders and with all the world, we earnestly exhort you and your fellow countrymen everywhere to rally in active organisation in defence of the rights and liberties which now are yours to hold and develop.<sup>5</sup>

National solidarity was desirable in the short term as the government needed to work immediately towards the thorough transfer of power in Ireland from British to native government while a constructive programme would ‘evolve itself accordingly’ once the

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<sup>3</sup> Mel Cousins, *The birth of social welfare in Ireland, 1922-1952* (Dublin, 2003), p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Kevin B. Nowlan, ‘President Cosgrave’s last administration’ in Francis MacManus (ed.), *The years of the great test, 1926-39* (Cork, 1967), p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Address to the Nation, Cumann na nGaedheal 1923 (UCDA, Ernest Blythe Papers, P24/614).

Free State Constitution was secured from 'internal' and 'external' threats. Bedding down the new state and ensuring its security was the government's priority; everything else was secondary. Vaguely dealing with a policy programme that could be developed once the state had been secured, the document promised it would have a wide national aspect embracing the interests of all the people, 'no matter how powerful or influential' the various sectional interests may be. Showcasing its Irish-Ireland credentials, the party claimed to stand for the gradual 'gaelicising' of the country's life and promised to complete land distribution holding out the Land Act as proof of its credentials. In government, the party pledged to secure access for the people to 'legitimate and reasonable prosperity' and to support a 'greatly increased population' through the extension of intensive agricultural cultivation. Moreover, the document promised to develop the nation's industrial life so that 'towns will require constantly increasing supplies from the country[side], and so that the country[side] will require the increasing manufactured products of the towns'.

In the arena of social policy, local and national government would cooperate to secure a 'higher standard of living for the masses of the people'. Citizens would have 'direct association' with plans to solve problems such as unemployment and housing. Moreover, Cumann na nGaedheal's Ireland, as outlined in the manifesto, would be meritocratic, with state employment open to 'every Irish man or woman' best qualified for the job. Given the immediate challenges facing the Executive Council, it would be unreasonable, concluded the document, to expect the government to immediately turn its attention to fisheries, afforestation or industrialisation. These would be addressed with 'peace and ordered national life re-established'. Cumann na nGaedheal's appeal to the people ended by asking those who loved Ireland to band themselves together 'in order to bring to fruition speedily the hopes for the country we cherish'. In August 1923, a vote for Cumann na nGaedheal was a vote to continue self-government under the Treaty.

Unsurprisingly, the document told a more optimistic story than was the reality. The prospects facing the Free State government were bleak. To the outside world, the Free State seemed racked by political instability and it was clear that the new government would have to spend heavily on reconstruction following the destruction of railways, roads, bridges and buildings during the Civil War. In 1922, the state's revenue was collected by the British and there were encouraging signs in the healthy returns from income tax even

as Civil War raged across the country,<sup>6</sup> though these came with the proviso that there were as yet no indicators of the overall cost of the war. In August 1922 *The Economist* welcomed the Provisional Government's reduction of income tax from six to five shillings in the pound. For the magazine, this was a good indicator that frugal and orthodox financial and economic policies would be pursued in the new state.<sup>7</sup> As gleaned from the previous chapter, this was a period when a return to economic normalcy was desired; this normalcy implied a *laissez-faire*, free trade and balanced budget economy that had characterised the period before the Great War.<sup>8</sup> In 1922 and 1923, the fledgling government wanted to portray itself as conventional, prudent and self-supporting so as to earn the 'good housekeeping seal of approval'. However, the reality of governing an independent Ireland was far removed from the utopia envisaged during the years 1916-22. Whereas Britain had vast revenue with which to govern Ireland, the Free State was limited to tax raised within the twenty six counties. During its first term of office, Cumann na nGaedheal would play 'the role of a centre party' given that the farmers, business and unionist interests lay to its right and the Labour party to its left.<sup>9</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal seemed content with a moderate role, *The Freeman* boasted 'challenged from the right; challenged from the left; we will keep to the middle of the road'.<sup>10</sup>

### **Financing the Free State**

In April 1923, the Free State took over full fiscal responsibility from the British and collected taxation for the first time. Given both that a costly Civil War marked the birth of the state, and that the international climate favoured financial orthodoxy-balanced budgets, it was clear that any Irish government would be well advised to initially pursue a cautious policy lest they alienate potential investors or invite the wrath of either Irish or international financial experts. In this regard, the government's Land Act proved problematic with some investors believing it would swallow too much revenue. As Mary Daly has observed, any 'radical departure on tariffs would have upset the British, worried

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<sup>6</sup> *The Economist*, various issues throughout 1922.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 Aug. 1922.

<sup>8</sup> Patricia Clavin, *The Great Depression in Europe, 1929-1939* (London, 2000), p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> Brian A. Reynolds, 'The formation and development of Fianna Fáil, 1926-1932' (Ph.D dissertation, TCD, March 1976), p. 62.

<sup>10</sup> *The Freeman*, 11 Aug. 1927.



the Irish banks and alienated the large farmers and businessmen'.<sup>11</sup> Therefore the new government needed to reassure the latter classes that the state was stable, secure and worth investing in.

Achieving a balanced budget would prove problematic given the extent of services provided by the British in Ireland. The Free State would have to either fund these from much smaller revenue or reduce the amount spent on services. More pressing however, was the need to pay for the Civil War. The state would need to borrow, and given the difficulty of attracting investment from abroad, would eventually need to find the money at home. This would demonstrate the financial and economic independence of the state while tying its people to the principle of stable government. In like manner, the government was acutely aware of the need to demonstrate its financial prowess and established the Fiscal Inquiry Committee in July 1923. This committee met forty times and heard evidence from Irish industrialists. Jacobs opposed a tariff on flour milling while numerous free trade economists, such as George O'Brien, also gave evidence.<sup>12</sup> Long established industries offered the strongest opposition to tariffs with weaker ones favouring protection.<sup>13</sup> When it finished its work in September, the committee was lukewarm about Irish protectionism and further shaped the evolution of an orthodox Irish fiscal policy. Moreover, the department of Finance was ideologically *laissez-faire* while Girvin argues the nature of Irish society favoured caution over innovation. Ireland had always been suspicious of British welfare policies fearing they could bankrupt a Home Rule parliament. British society was dominated by the working classes, whereas in Ireland, the propertied class was strongest.<sup>14</sup>

Determined not to seek out financial assistance from Britain, the government turned to the Irish banks for a temporary loan in 1923 to tide them over until the August election. Irish banks kept the state afloat in its formative months. In June, *The Economist* outlined the challenges facing the Free State and the inherent risks in securing capital. Ireland's ability to borrow on favourable terms in the future would be secured if she could successfully float a national loan. Should the country become dependent on rival groups of investors in London or New York, it risked unseemly interference in her domestic politics by powerful lenders.<sup>15</sup> As such, a strong Cumann na nGaedheal performance in the

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<sup>11</sup> Mary E. Daly, *Social and economic history of Ireland since 1800* (Dublin, 1981), p. 139.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Brian Girvin, *Between two worlds: politics and economy in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 1989), pp 18-21.

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

<sup>15</sup> *The Economist*, 2 June 1923.

election was crucial, and the country's financial position helps explain the government's determination to portray the state's internal politics as settled and stable. *The Economist*, for its part, welcomed the 'heavy vote for the Constitution and stability' in the August election,<sup>16</sup> believing that Ireland's future economic well-being depended on the Treaty, Cumann na nGaedheal and on an end to damaging fratricidal conflict. The magazine generally painted a positive picture of the country and its government as they both tried to find their feet in the autumn and winter of 1923.

In the aftermath of the 1923 general election, New York investors were in communication with Blythe regarding the possibility of providing the Free State with a loan.<sup>17</sup> C.J. France, representing the Guarantee Trust, assessed the Free State's economic potential and reported back to the Trust on the political situation. France met with Cosgrave and department of Finance officials to discuss the immediate financial requirements of the new state. Dillon and Read, also of New York, indicated an interest in the Free State's credit. They had already lent to the Dutch and Brazilian governments and seemed keen to explore the possibilities offered by investment in the Free State. The Guarantee Trust was impressed with Blythe's plans to reduce spending and to balance the budget. Moreover, France was convinced of the economic and political soundness of the country. However, the government and state itself remained financially untested and while recommending 'without reservation Ireland as a country worthy of real financial support' it was apparent to him that 'a successful internal loan would do much to strengthen external credit'.<sup>18</sup> One problem facing the government was its lack of financial know-how, though there is evidence that attempts were made to recruit into the civil service people with such an expertise,<sup>19</sup> and the advice of economists such as George O'Brien was valued.

The Free State Constitution embodied adherence to the principle of Treasury control,<sup>20</sup> and many of the officials in the department of Finance were schooled in the

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<sup>16</sup> *The Economist*, 8 Sept. 1923.

<sup>17</sup> C.J. France to Ernest Blythe, 21 Sept. 1923; Sir James Dunn to Tim Healy 4 Oct. 1923 (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/359/2, P24/359/9).

<sup>18</sup> C.J. France to Ernest Blythe, 16 Nov. 1923 (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/359/13).

<sup>19</sup> Gordon Campbell to Professor J.G. Smith, Birmingham, 2 June 1925. Four letters in total were exchanged between the two with Campbell discussing the need to attract people with expertise to help evolve programmes of 'national economic development'. While admitting the meagre remuneration on offer in Ireland was a disincentive, Campbell cited the Shannon Scheme and the sugar beet factory as signs of progress. (UCDA, Patrick McGilligan papers, P35b/5).

<sup>20</sup> Ronan Fanning, *The Irish Department of Finance, 1922-58* (Dublin, 1978), p. 68.

orthodoxies of British financial practice.<sup>21</sup> The background of officials in the department was a cause of concern at times to Cumann na nGaedheal members and to the party's political opponents. Fears that the 'old gang' still had too much control were commonplace while the continuity with the personnel of the Castle administration fed into Republican propaganda which portrayed Cumann na nGaedheal as Imperialists and 'West Brits'. Still, it must be remembered that Joseph Brennan, secretary of the Department of Finance and formerly a member of the Castle administration, was recommended to Collins by McGilligan during the Treaty negotiations, and secretly helped the Irish delegates counter Britain's financial claims. Moreover, J.J. McElligot, assistant secretary and later Brennan's replacement, had been removed from the Castle administration on account of his involvement in the 1916 Rising. The expert financial journalism McElligot turned to after his expulsion caught the eye of both Collins and Blythe who were keen to bring talented people into the administrative machine of the fledgling state.<sup>22</sup> As Fanning points out, the department of Finance which emerged was something of a synthesis between the revolutionary Dáil department controlled by Collins and the precedent set by the British Treasury tradition. Collins had placed Finance at the centre of the Dáil government, a custom carried on under the Free State where the tenet of finance control was maintained. Claims that officials were working for the benefit of British interests were unfounded, given that much of the Catholic middle class recruited by the Castle in the decades before independence would, like the Free State ministers they served, have aspired to Irish self-government. Before 1922, the Irish administration was in contact with British reform era politics which embedded the notion of the neutral and impartial state.<sup>23</sup>

In January 1924, the government was made aware of a third prospective investor inspecting the financial prospects of the Free State. Again, the assessment was negative. Economist Raligh S. Rife outlined the reasons why investment would be impossible at that early stage of the new state's life. He feared that land purchase, as outlined in the Land Act of 1923, would place a considerable strain on the country's resources while warning that the government needed to demonstrate its financial and economic credentials. Credit, generally, was tight in the winter of 1923-24 and British bankers feared a period of

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<sup>21</sup> The Provisional Government inherited an administrative machine which had been 'thoroughly overhauled by some of the best brains in the British civil service' and more amicable relationships developed between officials and Irish ministers than would have been expected of their predecessors. *Ibid.*, pp 8-13.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 40-59.

<sup>23</sup> W.J. Lowe, 'Irish constabulary officers, 1837-1922: profile of a professional elite' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, 32 (2005), p. 20.

inflation should the government decide to establish its own currency. The hyperinflation in Weimar Germany during 1923 probably made investors everywhere feel somewhat uneasy about taking a risk in countries trying to find their feet. Indeed, two lessons (mistakenly) learned from the German crisis was that budget deficits led to both inflation and monetary chaos, and that inflation was to be avoided at all costs, since it would lead to economic problems later. From 1923, ‘hostility towards inflation became the *leitmotif* of economic policy across Europe’.<sup>24</sup> Before luring foreign investment, Blythe and his colleagues would have to show that ‘they comprehended the magnitude of their financial problem’,<sup>25</sup> that is, that they would conform to international financial practice. Rife praised the government’s decision to appoint a fiscal commission in the summer of 1923. He also warned of widespread fears that ‘if the Free State had ample funds today, expenditure might be made more freely and in the long run the State would assume too heavy a financial burden’. Ireland, new to statehood and recovering from Civil War presented too great a risk for potential investors and the country had yet to prove itself capable of taking tough economic medicine. As it began its journey into full statehood, the Free State would have to demonstrate its financial and economic independence by raising a national loan to meet its needs.

Before issuing the national loan, the government was determined to send out the right signals regarding their approach to fiscal policy and to create favourable conditions for a full subscription to the loan. Outlining the legislative programme of the new Free State government in the Dáil on 3 October 1923, Governor-General Tim Healey, in a widely reported speech, said that the nation’s resources had to be husbanded with the utmost care and that government and citizen alike needed to economise and play a part in repairing the financial ravages of recent years.<sup>26</sup> In advance of issuing the national loan, this was a speech designed to reassure the public and potential investors. A policy of retrenchment was embarked upon in the months that followed to impress upon the world the financial intentions of the government; to deal with the heavy public spending bill inherited from the British, and to make some inroads into the deficit caused by the Civil War. In creating a suitable climate for investment, reductions in expenditure on the army, salaries, pensions and dependants allowances were announced. In informing the Dáil of the

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<sup>24</sup> Clavin, *Great Depression*, pp 31-3.

<sup>25</sup> Raligh S. Rife to Ernest Blythe, undated [Jan. 1924?] (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/359/17).

<sup>26</sup> *The Times*, 4 Oct., *The Economist*, 6 Oct. 1923.

decision to reduce the old-age pension, Blythe was at pains to point out the heavy burden the government had inherited from the British. In 1920/21, the cost of the old age pension for the whole island had been £4,463,500 out of total revenue of £48,845,000. In 1923, the charge for old age pensions in the Free State stood at £3,277,000 out of revenue of £24,761,405. According to Blythe, the government was ‘paying three quarters of the all-Ireland pension charge of 1920/21 with only half the all-Ireland revenue of the same year’.<sup>27</sup> The government argued that it simply could not afford to maintain the old age pension at the rate paid by the British, though the reduction was connected to demonstrating a commitment to sound finance before the national loan was issued.<sup>28</sup>

As seen in other chapters, Cumann na nGaedheal members found defending such measures unedifying. In a letter to Blythe, the party’s general secretary outlined the organisation’s objection to the reduction. Rather than reducing the top figure by one shilling, members would have been satisfied with a ‘combing out’ of those on a pension who had private wealth at their disposal.<sup>29</sup> At a time when new members were being sought out, party people regarded the move as having harmed organisational efforts. However, the government had more pressing issues to deal with and succeeded in having the £10m National loan oversubscribed by £200,000. Discontent with the policy of retrenchment rumbled on in the *cumann* but ministers would not backtrack. A draft letter Kevin O’Higgins proposed to send to the discontented Fr. Malachy Brennan in Roscommon reveals their attitude. According to O’Higgins’ letter, the government would have had to borrow to meet the cost of maintaining the old age pension at pre-independence levels and this would have a consequent impact on the country’s credit. Alternatively, taxes could be raised to meet the cost of the pension but this would exacerbate the country’s woes by placing an unfair burden on taxpayers. Furthermore, maintaining the pension would reduce funds for relief and economic development. O’Higgins asked that supporters trust the government in its endeavour to ‘place the country on a sound economic footing’ and promised that national ideals would not be compromised

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<sup>27</sup> Dáil Debates, vol. 5, col. 673, 2 Nov. 1923 (Blythe). This point was emphasised by Dr. Garret FitzGerald in an interview at his home in May 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Girvin, *Between two worlds*, p. 34.

<sup>29</sup> Séamus Hughes to Ernest Blythe, 17 Sept. 1924 (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/453/1).

in the effort.<sup>30</sup> Government priority now necessitated the pursuit of unpopular policies which would not endear them to either rank-and-file supporters or the electorate at large.

On 23 November 1923, the terms of the national loan were outlined in a statement by Kevin O'Higgins to the Dáil. O'Higgins pointed out the advantageous terms of the Irish Free State loan in comparison to 'gilt edged issues at present on the market'.<sup>31</sup> Ireland's national loan was to consist of £10m of 5% stock issued at 95 whereas the British 5% war loan was quoted at over 100. The central fund was offered as security for the loan. In order to further reduce credit risk, the government set aside a sinking fund - a fund established for the purpose of clearing or reducing outstanding loans or debts - in connection with the loan. £750,000 was to be set aside annually for the purpose of paying interest on the loan with the balance going to the sinking fund. According to O'Higgins, the sinking fund would tend to keep the market price up after issue and would be used to purchase stock issued on the market at or under par.<sup>32</sup>

There were many advantages in issuing an internal loan. As we have seen, this was precisely what investors abroad wanted to see, a demonstration of the financial and economic independence of the state, but there were other advantages and these were outlined by O'Higgins. A loan issued abroad would have been less appealing as the terms offered would have been less favourable to investors. In addition, the interest yields of home investors would swell their incomes, bolstering the government's yearly tax yield.<sup>33</sup> Dividends issued to foreign investors would bring no such rewards to domestic revenue. Moreover, borrowing abroad or continuing to look to the Irish banks for money would probably lead to inflation. It was a principle of sound finance, O'Higgins argued, that Free State individuals with deposits in the Irish banks transfer them to the government by investing in the loan. Such a step would not place an inflationary pressure on the economy. But the real benefit to the country of a successful national loan was spelled out. The establishment of sound national credit in the Free State's infancy would contribute directly to the financing of the state on a cheaper basis in the future. If the state proved its ability to raise money at home, and pursued a sensible financial policy, it would only be a matter of time before the government could make its debut on the international lending markets.

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<sup>30</sup> O'Higgins's draft letter to Fr. Malachy Brennan, 9 Jan. 1925 (UCDA, Desmond FitzGerald papers, P80/1065/3).

<sup>31</sup> Dáil Debates, vol. 5, col. 1192, 23 Nov. 1923 (Kevin O'Higgins).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Dáil Debates, vol. 5, col. 1194, 23 Nov. 1923 (Kevin O'Higgins).

By the end of 1923 the government had succeeded in creating an image of itself and the new state as financially orthodox, responsible and self-contained. The Free State would conform to the prevailing post-war economic narrative by keeping government spending down and reducing the taxation burden. It had provided for its own immediate financial requirements through the raising of an internal loan and had been brave enough to impose the pinch of retrenchment on teachers,<sup>34</sup> soldiers, pensioners and civil servants. For *The Economist*, the future was bright with growing confidence in the stability of the Free State. A ‘strong, firm and sympathetic government had the majority of the people with them’ while the national loan stood in excess of its issue price.<sup>35</sup> Apart from a brief slump in the value of the loan’s price, caused by the political instability of March 1924, the national loan had been a success with its oversubscription underpinning the reality that the country’s economic independence had been secured.

### **Limited industrial development**

In 1924, the economic development of the state occupied much of the government’s energy. As early as 1922 and 1923 it had been a government priority to examine the prospects of Irish industrial growth. Nevertheless, throughout its time in government Cumann na nGaedheal would regard agriculture as the engine of Irish growth and prosperity. The Provisional Government had shown a willingness to ascertain the immediate problems facing the economy and appointed a Commission on Prices on 7 November 1922.<sup>36</sup> Before resigning from the government in March 1924, Joe McGrath had also been curious about electrification schemes undertaken in various European countries, particularly Germany,<sup>37</sup> where Thomas McLaughlin worked as an employee of Siemens-Schuckert.<sup>38</sup> As outlined in the government approved Governor General’s speech on the opening of the third Dáil,<sup>39</sup> pursuing a scheme of electrification would be a priority for the government. In Europe, electrical expansion was providing growth in new industries as

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<sup>34</sup> Second Executive Council, minutes of meeting, 27 Oct. 1923 (NAI, Department of the Taoiseach, G2/1).

<sup>35</sup> *The Economist*, 26 Jan. 1924.

<sup>36</sup> Commission on Prices, draft report for submission to the Minister for Industry and Commerce, undated (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/319)

<sup>37</sup> Thomas McLoughlin to Fred Allen, 28 May 1923 (UCDA, Eoin MacNeill papers, LA1/P/24).

<sup>38</sup> Ciara Meehan, *The Cosgrave party: a history of Cumann na nGaedheal, 1923-33* (Dublin, 2010), p. 55.

<sup>39</sup> Second Executive Council, minutes of meeting, 29 Sept. 1923 (NAI, Department of the Taoiseach, G2/1).

traditional sectors such as textiles, metals and mining declined.<sup>40</sup> On 26 February 1924<sup>41</sup> the Executive Council asked the German firm Siemens to outline a commercially viable scheme for the hydro-electric exploitation of the river Shannon and the electrification of the Free State. Siemens' proposal was to be scrutinised by European experts on completion. On replacing McGrath as minister for Industry and Commerce, McGilligan enthusiastically embraced the task of spearheading the electrification scheme. His papers reveal a commitment to understanding precedents set by the electricity industry abroad.<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, the government was represented at the 1924 World Power Conference in London by Fred Allen. Between 30 June and 10 July, the conference heard a total of 420 papers submitted by leading engineering and scientific experts. Allen seems to have been briefed to procure as much information for the government as possible and used his attendance at the conference to ascertain the various models then prevalent, and the levels of government control, adopted in countries that had recently embarked on electrification schemes.<sup>43</sup> Having sought the views of delegates to the conference, Allen came to the conclusion that schemes in Canada, Germany, Italy, Sweden and Switzerland were among the best. He also learned that European and American delegates considered Britain to have made poor progress towards electrification.

Subsequently, the government used whatever channels of communication at its disposal to learn of best practice internationally in rolling out its electrification policy. Schemes developed in Ontario, Switzerland, Germany and the Scandinavian countries aroused particular interest.<sup>44</sup> The move towards hydro-electrification in Europe was noted by Allen as was the 'rapid growth of electro-chemical and electro-metallurgical industries in Norway, Sweden and Switzerland'. These spin-off industries demonstrated the extent to which industry could follow electrification, and the possible benefits of such new industries in a country such as Ireland.<sup>45</sup> In Norway, a scheme of electrical supply had been drawn up in 1922 at a cost of £16m, with Denmark agreeing to import the country's surplus power. The consequent development of a nitrates industry in Norway made it an important supplier on the world market and in particular to its agricultural neighbour

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<sup>40</sup> Kitchen, *Europe between the wars*, p. 73.

<sup>41</sup> Second Executive Council, minutes of meeting, 26 Feb. 1924 (NAI, Department of the Taoiseach, G2/1).

<sup>42</sup> Maurice Manning and Moore McDowell, *Electricity supply in Ireland: the history of the ESB* (Dublin, 1984), pp 21-3.

<sup>43</sup> Preliminary memorandum by Fred Allen, 'World Power Conference, Wembley 30 June to 10 July 1924' (UCDA, Patrick McGilligan papers, P35a/1/1).

<sup>44</sup> National Electrical Schemes, 8 Mar. 1924 (ibid., P35/3).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.



Denmark. The development of a nitrates industry in Ireland was believed to be economically viable. In other countries, railways had been electrified, while both agriculture and industry benefitted from electrification. Electrification meant industrial progress in mid 1920s Europe, a fact which the Free State government was acutely aware of. Siemens published their scheme later that year and in September, in accordance with the original agreement of February, the government appointed four international experts to scrutinise their proposal.

The so called 'Shannon Scheme' developed by Siemens made explicit reference to the success of electrification policies in other European countries. Explaining why the 'mighty Shannon' poured its energy into the ocean while water power had been developed elsewhere, the document claimed British rule had hindered economic development and promised that the Free State government would devote itself to catching up so as to 'raise their country to the same degree of cultural and industrial development enjoyed by the other nations of Europe'.<sup>46</sup> The scheme booklet was at pains to point out the advantages to existing industry of providing cheaper power supply, the potential for new industries as evidenced by the experience of countries such as Norway, and the benefits to Irish agriculture of using electricity to lessen 'the dullness and hardship' of the farmer's life.<sup>47</sup>

In a further effort to bolster the country's move towards the development of native Irish industry, in the autumn of 1924 the government took steps towards a more coordinated approach to economic development by appointing a committee to advise it.<sup>48</sup> Subsequently, the government announced that it would consider proposals from sugar manufacturers for the establishment of a beet sugar factory in the Free State. On 3 November 1924 two members of an interdepartmental committee, established to examine the feasibility of an Irish sugar beet industry, were authorised to meet with representatives of French, Belgian, Dutch and British sugar manufacturers to ascertain if they would be interested in contributing to the setting up of such an industry in Ireland and on what terms.<sup>49</sup> In March 1925 an agreement was entered into with Maurice Lippens of Brussels to grant a ten year government subsidy in respect of sugar produced from home grown beet at a factory to be built at a location selected by him. Lippens established the Irish Sugar

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<sup>46</sup> The Electrification of the Irish Free State-The Shannon Scheme developed by Siemens-Schuckert, Oct. 1924 (ibid., P35/5).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Second Executive Council, minutes of meeting 10 Oct. 1924 (NAI, Department of the Taoiseach, G2/1).

<sup>49</sup> Second Executive Council, minutes of meeting 3 Nov. 1924 (ibid.).

Manufacturing Company in December 1925 with a share capital of £400,000. The company had Irish, Czechoslovak and Belgian directors.<sup>50</sup> Sugar beet was a profitable product and its growth had been encouraged in countries such as Czechoslovakia.<sup>51</sup> A site for the new factory was eventually selected outside Carlow town and the department of Agriculture undertook trials and experiments with farmers during 1925 and 1926 to familiarise them with the cultivation of sugar beet and to determine the likely yearly crop yield in Ireland. The company was inundated with offers to supply its sugar beet requirements with counties Carlow, Wexford, Laois, Tipperary, Kildare, Offaly and Waterford providing the bulk of supplies.

Where it lacked expertise, the government was keen to look outside the Free State for guidance. As Mary Daly has noted, the two major initiatives towards industrialisation under Cumann na nGaedheal were developed ‘by foreign, though non-British, companies’.<sup>52</sup> Creeping German influence within the Free State was a source of some anxiety in both Britain and Ireland. It seemed to some observers that the newly independent state was being prepared for a future German invasion. Between 1924 and 1928 the Free State’s relations with German industry were the source of comment in British publications such as the *Daily Mail*, *Northern Whig* and the *National Review*. British industry had lost out as the Free State turned increasingly to German imports and negotiated local and national government contracts with German firms. Surely in the background a powerful brain was working to ‘regulate the advance of an invading army’?<sup>53</sup> The *Irish Times* too was wary of undue German influence in Ireland. The paper disagreed that Cumann na nGaedheal was oblivious to the danger of peaceful penetration by Germany pointing to Siemens’ willingness to accept the government’s stipulations that Irish labour and raw materials were to be used in the construction of the Ardnacrusha power station where possible. However, the paper stated that Germany was a country with ‘a crowded and increasing population, with highly developed industries and with a prodigious technical equipment’. She also had a vast war debt while her ability to trade had been shattered by the Great War. For Germany ‘our Free State, underdeveloped, ambitious,

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<sup>50</sup> Correspondence between Desmond FitzGerald and John Steele, the London correspondent of the Chicago Tribune, Apr. 1927. FitzGerald’s response to Steele’s query about the Carlow sugar factory includes Department of Agriculture notes on the factory (UCDA, Desmond FitzGerald papers, P80/448/a).

<sup>51</sup> Clavin, *Great Depression*, p. 78.

<sup>52</sup> Mary Daly, ‘An Irish-Ireland for business?: the Control of Manufactures Acts, 1932 and 1934’ in *IHS*, xxiv, no. 94 (November 1984), pp 246-72.

<sup>53</sup> Newspaper clipping from the *National Review*, Nov. 1928 (UCDA, Patrick McGilligan papers, P35/11).

partly in ruins, humming with schemes of reconstruction, must offer the same temptation which Australia offers to the Japanese'.<sup>54</sup> Germany remained a threat to those of a pro-British outlook.

Cumann na nGaedheal was often castigated by Republican opponents for its apparent willingness to placate the British, but as these articles show, we must not underestimate the perception that the new Irish state was a threat to British security. This was in part a consequence of the Cumann na nGaedheal government's determination to assert the state's independence and to secure the best terms for the country without due consideration of British sensibilities. With the Shannon-Scheme, the government seemed to be flouting the importance of its most indispensable customer in favour of the German enemy. Cumann na nGaedheal for its part was anxious to allay such fears. The party faced a difficult balancing act in asserting Irish independence from Britain, in securing the best international advice and skills for the state and in attempting to institute fair and friendly relations with its nearest neighbour. *The Times* of London covered an important speech made by O'Higgins at Dungarvan in Co. Waterford on 18 October 1925.<sup>55</sup> In his contribution, O'Higgins denied that anti-British trade tendencies were manifesting themselves in the Free State. He intimated that had British firms made competitive offers they would have been given due consideration by the government. Ireland, he claimed, was an underdeveloped country, with no shortage of proposals for expansion, and when British engineers saw that potential which the Germans and Belgians had been quick to notice, they would find a government in Ireland prepared to do business with them.<sup>56</sup> The Free State was growing in confidence and under Cumann na nGaedheal it was sure of its nationalism, self-reliant and self-supporting but equally unprepared to engage in the type of anglophobia it knew would be damaging to the country's vital interests.

Despite modest successes, the party's industrial policy in the 1920s remained disappointing. Conditions in Ireland did not favour industrial development and the government was slow to address the deficiency. Low prices led to dumping on the Irish market by British firms. A lack of skilled workers also mitigated against development, as

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<sup>54</sup> *Irish Times*, 4 July 1924.

<sup>55</sup> *The Times*, 19 Oct. 1925.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, Undated text of speech given at Dungarvan to reflect on three years of the Free State [Oct. 1925?] (UCDA, Kevin O'Higgins papers, P197/142).

did high costs and wages.<sup>57</sup> Failure to industrialise, even accounting for difficult circumstances, meant that emigration would remain a fact of Irish life after independence.

### **Competing in a world market**

Arthur Griffith, founder of Sinn Féin and icon to many in Cumann na nGaedheal, had established the concept of ‘ourselves alone’ and applied it to both his political and economic teachings. For Griffith, and his numerous adherents within the ranks of Cumann na nGaedheal at every level, self-sufficiency combined with protective tariffs was the route to Irish economic development. Nationalists had always blamed Ireland’s economic woes and failure to industrialise on the Act of Union, and British sponsorship of free trade, which had suffocated Irish industrial growth by opening Irish markets to bigger British firms.<sup>58</sup> As such, the economic nationalist line of thought argued that industrialisation could be advanced through the imposition of tariffs and duties on imports, which would encourage the growth of Irish firms by protecting them from foreign competition, which was particularly intense in the 1920s. As the party of Arthur Griffith, surely this kind of economic nationalism would characterise Cumann na nGaedheal government?

Even before the establishment of the Free State, it was clear to some in the separatist movement that protection could prove a double-edged sword.<sup>59</sup> Already, leading firms in numerous industrialised countries were trying to offset the effects of tariffs and the imposition of barriers to world trade by establishing factories in overseas markets. In wartime, the British government’s imposition of the McKenna duties in 1915 (named after Reginald McKenna the Chancellor of the Exchequer) led to the establishment of foreign engineering firms within the UK and was a factor in Ford’s decision to locate in Cork. Fiscal autonomy for the Free State in 1923 brought automatic protection for the Irish tobacco industry, which led to the establishment in Ireland of British tobacco factories, Gallahers and Imperial Tobacco.<sup>60</sup> Irish producers and politicians alike noted this development.<sup>61</sup> Not only could foreign companies jump the trade barrier by locating in Ireland, they were better organised than native concerns and could pay higher wages.

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<sup>57</sup> Daly, *Social and economic history*, pp143-4.

<sup>58</sup> Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland: a new economic history, 1780-1939* (New York, 1994), p. 396.

<sup>59</sup> Daly, ‘An Irish-Ireland for business?’, p. 246.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, Memorandum concerning the rights and liabilities of foreign companies in various countries, 18 Oct. 1928, T. Barrington (UCDA, Patrick McGilligan papers, P35b/14).

<sup>61</sup> C.H. Oldham, ‘After the Fiscal Inquiry Report’ in *Studies*, 13, no. 49 (March 1924), pp2-5.

Another reason why Cumann na nGaedheal baulked at pursuing an avowedly protectionist agenda was that it knew there was a lack of native industrial capital and a shortage of skilled labour in Ireland. In addition, Hogan, O'Higgins and the department of Finance were opposed to a wholesale tariff policy on ideological grounds. Moreover, as stated, the Fiscal Inquiry Committee of July 1923 reinforced free trade tendencies in the new state.<sup>62</sup> McGilligan and his department were more pragmatic on the question of tariffs and displayed a more interventionist approach to policy in general.<sup>63</sup> Opposition to free trade was symbolised by J.J. Walsh and elements within the parliamentary party and party organisation. Cumann na nGaedheal policy in government through the 1920s did little to reassure the malcontents.

As discussed in chapter six, there was another reason why independent Ireland did not pursue the protectionist policy that might have been expected of it. In the period after the Great War, much of the world, particularly those who had been on the winning side, sought a return to the orthodoxies of the pre-1914 economic order of balanced budgets and free trade. As a member of the Commonwealth, it was natural that the Free State should seek to take advantage of the opportunities afforded it by free trade. By the mid 1920s the economic argument in most countries stabilised around a return to gold standard orthodoxy.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, the spectre of Soviet Russia cast a shadow over the whole continent,<sup>65</sup> and probably was one of a number of indicators that the pre-war economic order could not be re-created; that the world had changed too much. Britain returned to gold in 1925 further pushing it towards a tough, deflationary policy. It made sense that the Free State participate in the re-assertion of economic liberalism in the 1920s given that its most important trading partner was leading the charge. Evidence suggests, that O'Higgins' adherence to liberal economics rested on an assumption that 'Ulster unionism was based solely on its economic relationship with Britain and the Empire'.<sup>66</sup> O'Higgins believed simple economics could tempt the Northern state into a united Ireland; for this to occur, the government needed to prove its financial credentials and that it was not, what we might now term, a 'rogue state'. In speeches, articles and correspondence, O'Higgins revealed a clear belief that the country had to prove itself capable of stable government. Hostility with

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<sup>62</sup> Girvin, *Between two worlds*, pp18-21.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>64</sup> Clavin, *Great Depression*, p. 45.

<sup>65</sup> Mark Mazower, *Dark continent: Europe's twentieth century* (Bath, 1998), pp 107-8.

<sup>66</sup> John Regan, *The Irish counter revolution, 1921-1936: Treatyite politics and settlement in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), p. 254.

Britain or ‘the North’ would be disastrous, spelling economic ruin for the country,<sup>67</sup> while in lamenting the disappointing Cumann na nGaedheal election result of June 1927, O’Higgins claimed that the government had been making progress towards Irish unity before the election, only to see it derailed by its weakened position. According to O’Higgins, the state’s economic policies had engendered a feeling of envy north of the border where taxation remained high.<sup>68</sup> Aside from domestic considerations and financial constraints it is difficult to see how the Free State could have traversed the road of economic nationalism at a time of international free trade and a return to gold. The time was not yet ripe for wholesale protection and economic autarky.

Instead, the government plotted something of a middle road and experimented in 1924 and 1925 with a policy of selective tariffs conceived as much as a revenue-raising device as a new means of stimulating Irish industry. Blythe’s budgets of 1924 and 1925 shifted necessary import duties from articles Irish industry could not produce to ones it could.<sup>69</sup> The boot tariff introduced in 1924 proved successful in raising revenue, creating employment and boosting wages. As such, in the following year, the tariff experiment was extended to articles of clothing, blanketing, rugs, bedsteads and wooden furniture, while the duty on black and green bottles was applied all glass bottles and jars. All of these tariffs resulted in increased employment in the protected industries.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, the revenue raised from the imposition of the new duties compensated partly for the loss to revenue caused by the reduction in income tax and the abolition of duties on tea, coffee and cocoa.<sup>71</sup> George O’Brien agreed with Blythe’s decision to reduce the tax burden and to abolish the duties on the ‘poor man’s luxuries’, claiming that the country had a relatively small public debt. O’Brien criticised the decision not to reduce the super tax on the highest earners and suggested that the retention of the corporation profits tax was a ‘clog on industrial enterprise’.<sup>72</sup> Blythe had not gone far enough to please O’Brien’s orthodox sentiments.

The government accepted that the Free State was primarily an agricultural country and worked on the basis that Irish agricultural produce needed to be of a high quality to

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<sup>67</sup> Undated text of speech given at Dungarvan to reflect on three years of the Free State [Oct. 1925?] (UCDA, Kevin O’Higgins papers, P197/142).

<sup>68</sup> Kevin O’Higgins to Frank MacDermott, 17 June 1927 (NAI, Frank MacDermott papers, 1065/1/2).

<sup>69</sup> *The Economist*, 25 Apr. 1925.

<sup>70</sup> Dáil debates, vol. 17, col. 382, 1 Dec. 1926 (Patrick McGilligan).

<sup>71</sup> The Budget, by George O’Brien, undated [May 1925?] (UCDA, Patrick McGilligan papers, P35a/8).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

maintain its position of dominance in the British market.<sup>73</sup> In a memo to his government colleagues in early January 1924, Hogan stated that ‘national development in Ireland, for our generation at least, is practically synonymous with agricultural development and [...] therefore, we must enunciate as soon as possible a policy for the development of agriculture which will get the sympathy and support of the intelligent and go-ahead farmers of the country’.<sup>74</sup> Hogan urged his colleagues to consider his memo before the Cumann na nGaedheal annual convention of 29 January in order to pre-empt the criticism of farmers. Hogan’s memo cited the high cost of living, unemployment in congested districts and the need for agricultural loans as problems that needed to be tackled. Additionally, Hogan planned to take steps towards improving the quality of Irish agricultural produce. A national brand for butter, bacon and eggs was needed, as was a livestock policy to produce cattle and pigs ‘of equal or better quality than the Danish animal’. Denmark, a frequent source of comparison in the 1920s,<sup>75</sup> was a substantial supplier of agricultural produce to Britain.<sup>76</sup> Primary, secondary and university education in agricultural practices was also flagged as important in maintaining the farming sector as an important wealth generator for the country. Agriculture was the Free State’s largest source of employment while Irish farmers were primarily exporters. A free trade policy entailed keeping farm costs low, helping Irish farmers remain competitive at a time of fierce international competition.<sup>77</sup>

Efforts towards improvement were hampered initially by two wet years in 1923 and 1924 and also by the post war economic readjustment that saw Irish agriculture lose the position of artificial prosperity it had enjoyed during the Great War, when Irish farmers had been able to supply the eggs and dairy produce which Britain’s war economy had been starved of. All of Europe was affected by the changed post-War climate and Ireland was no different. European agriculture suffered as the United States and Canada extended cultivation after the war.<sup>78</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal continued to believe national prosperity depended on agriculture. Key to the success of Irish agriculture would be its ability to compete on the more competitive world market with strong continental rivals such as Denmark. The Shannon-Scheme report itself had referred to the need to keep farm costs

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<sup>73</sup> David Johnson, *The interwar economy in Ireland* (Dundalk, 1989), p. 10.

<sup>74</sup> Memorandum by Patrick Hogan, 25 Jan. 1924 (UCDA, Patrick McGilligan papers, P35b/2).

<sup>75</sup> Ó Gráda, *A new economic history*, p. 380.

<sup>76</sup> W. Glyn Jones, *Nations of the modern world: Denmark* (London, 1970), p. 135.

<sup>77</sup> Daly, *Social and economic history*, pp140-1.

<sup>78</sup> Mazower, *Dark continent*, p. 113.

down. Electrification would help effect the reductions in the cost of production that were critical to equipping Irish farmers for the task ahead.<sup>79</sup> For now, mass production was not an option in agriculture or industry, so the focus shifted to the production of high quality products that would be synonymous with the Free State.

The government were fortunate in that substantial progress had been made in the decades before independence towards land reform and the transfer of the ownership of agricultural land from landlords to tenant farmers. By 1920, owner occupancy had reached 97% of the island's land area.<sup>80</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal's Land Purchase Act of 1923 aimed to complete the process south of the border, by mandating the Land Commission to compulsorily purchase all remaining leasehold land. However, as shown by Terence Dooley the land question would remain of central importance in the politics of independent Ireland for many decades. There simply was not enough land to appease everybody. Many of the owner occupied farms were too small to be economically viable and a sense that the government favoured the strong farmers would hurt the Cumann na nGaedheal vote in many western constituencies (see chapter three).

In order to maintain agricultural exports and for the country to hold its place in the competitive world markets, steps had to be taken to improve the quality of Irish produce. In a wide-ranging, often quoted, address to the Irish society at Oxford University on 31 October 1924, Kevin O'Higgins indicated that this would be a priority for the government in the coming years.<sup>81</sup> For O'Higgins, the 1923 Land Act had been designed to relieve a congestion problem 'that is a disgrace to any civilised country'. Maintaining a competitive export industry in agriculture was underpinned by the acts passed in 1924 to govern the production of eggs and butter. Eggs intended for export had to be tested, graded and packed in a prescribed manner and were subject to government inspection. In addition, it was made a criminal offence to sell eggs which were dirty or in any way unfit for human consumption.<sup>82</sup> After the act became operative, there were 23 prosecutions in the first eight months. Similar legislation regulating butter production was passed. Exporters had to register and premises, equipment and produce were subject to inspection. The new State was modernising and involving itself in aspects of the country's economic life that had

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<sup>79</sup> The Electrification of the Irish Free State: the Shannon Scheme developed by Siemens-Schuckert, Oct. 1924 (UCDA, Patrick McGilligan papers, P35/5).

<sup>80</sup> Ronan Fanning, *Independent Ireland* (Dublin, 1983), p. 73.

<sup>81</sup> 'Three Years Hard Labour' address by Kevin O'Higgins to the Irish society in Oxford University, 31 Oct. 1924 (UCDA, Kevin O'Higgins papers, P197/146).

<sup>82</sup> Johnson, *Interwar economy*, p. 11.



been left untouched by the *ancien regime*. In 1925, similar attempts were made to improve the quality of Irish cattle by making it an offence to keep a bull unlicensed with the department of agriculture. In the first inspection of Irish bulls in the autumn of 1925, the department demonstrated that it was taking the matter seriously as 4,000 of the 18,000 beasts inspected were rejected.<sup>83</sup>

Another important plank in the government's attempts to modernise and improve the country's agricultural industry came in 1927 with the establishment of the Agricultural Credit Corporation. The ACC, as its name suggests, was set up as a state body to provide medium and long-term loans to Irish farmers. This policy probably arrived too late to be successful with the worldwide slump of 1929 and 1930, causing prices to fall, agriculture to become depressed and making it even more difficult for farmers to repay loans they had taken out.<sup>84</sup> The world wide post-war depression in agriculture forced governments everywhere to give considerable attention to reform of the industry, as the Free State had been doing on a small scale. In 1927, the government wanted to reform the Irish dairying industry. A memo on the Irish dairying industry reveals that the government was aware that in numerous countries, the sale of agricultural commodities was controlled by a board, citing the pool system in grain in both Canada and Australia.<sup>85</sup> The same memo, compiled by Hogan, described dairying as the 'foundation of our agricultural industry, and on it depends our cattle and pig trade'. Mixed farming, the production of dairy produce, eggs, cattle, pigs etc, was to remain the 'only sound system of farming here' until world conditions improved. As we will see in the next chapter, this was an analysis with which *The Economist* agreed, since economic thinking remained grounded in financial orthodoxy. In parts of the country where mixed farming was not practiced, acute depression was the result and efforts were made to introduce mixed farming to the primarily barley-growing districts.

Hogan proposed three ways of reorganising the dairying industry along more commercial lines and away from the 'unprofitable' practice of home butter-making. The third proposal involved state purchase of the Limerick based Condensed Milk Company of Ireland's 114 creameries at the cost of £350,000. Creameries appeared in Ireland towards the end of the nineteenth century with the first one emerging in Limerick in 1884.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>85</sup> Memorandum on the dairying industry, undated [Jan. 1927?], (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/175).

Creameries allowed for the faster and more thorough separation of cream from milk, and made the most of new technologies developed in Germany in the 1870s.<sup>86</sup> By independence, there were too many private and cooperative creameries competing for business. In attempting to reorganise dairying, Hogan's proposal implied the establishment of a state company to take over all private creameries and to transfer them, and insolvent cooperatives, to surviving cooperatives.<sup>87</sup> The measure would stamp the government's authority over the organisation of dairying, possibly encouraging farmers in non-dairying districts such as Clare, the midlands and the North West to take it up.<sup>88</sup> To this end, the Dairy Disposal Company was established in 1927 with the remit of taking over insolvent cooperatives and private creameries. Within three years, 170 private creameries were acquired, half of which were closed down, and the establishment of new creameries was to be controlled by a new licensing system introduced in the 1928 Creameries Act. However, for most of its period in office Cumann na nGaedheal kept state interference to a minimum though Irish agriculture performed reasonably well until 1930.<sup>89</sup>

### **Financial Orthodoxy**

Cumann na nGaedheal government pursued an orthodox financial policy throughout its period in power. As alluded to throughout this chapter, the stark reality of Irish independence meant that the government simply did not have the resources to embark on building a nationalistic or socialistic utopia, that is if indeed they wanted to. Instead, like most governments in Europe, they continued in the vein established during 1922 and 1923 of endeavouring to keep the budget balanced (what was regarded by George O'Brien as the 'most important and gratifying feature' of the 1925 budget) and to limit government action to providing the means for private interests to take the initiative towards expansion and to use surplus revenue to relieve the tax burden. The Free State had complete fiscal and monetary independence and could have embarked on a more experimental policy, as other countries (generally losers in the Great War), did with disastrous consequences. Germany succumbed to the temptation to print whatever money was required, leading to inflation

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<sup>86</sup> Proinnsias Breathnach, 'The evolution of the spatial structure of the Irish dairy processing industry' in *Irish Geography* 33, no. 2,(2000), p. 167.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 169-70.

<sup>88</sup> Memorandum on the dairying industry, undated [Jan. 1927?] (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/175).

<sup>89</sup> Daly, *social and economic history*, p. 141.

and hyperinflation that destroyed its currency, and shattered the economic and social cohesion of the middle class,<sup>90</sup> (but wiped out war debt). Though the lessons learned from those crises themselves had negative long-term consequences as governments tried to avoid inflation at all costs. Despite the appeal of currency schemes, monetary practice was not meddled with in either the 1920s or 30s.<sup>91</sup> Instead, the Free State government borrowed to overcome short-term problems because it was fortunate enough that its credit stood high. The Free State was a creditor nation based on capital outflows during the nineteenth century, steady exports and investment in British government stock during the Great War.<sup>92</sup> In addition, agreements with Britain in 1925 and 1926 reduced the state's liability for service of the British public debt. As such the state's credit stood higher than that of most other European countries.

Blythe as Finance Minister, and his all powerful department, maintained their cautious approach to budgetary policy and, as such, services remained underdeveloped.<sup>93</sup> In following through on an orthodox approach to finance, a conscious attempt was made to keep the taxation burden as low as possible. Revenue had been boosted by experimental tariffs during 1924 and the policy of experiment was continued in 1925. A deficit had been predicted in the budget of 1924 but prudent management of the State's resources had resulted in a modest surplus. *The Economist* believed that a remission of taxation was now necessary and that the tariff experiments of the previous year had proved successful in increasing employment in the protected industries.<sup>94</sup> Blythe was thinking along the same lines.<sup>95</sup> Determined to relieve the taxation burden, the opportunity was seized upon in the lead-up to the budget of 1925. Anticipating a modest surplus of revenue,<sup>96</sup> the government was able to reduce income tax from five shillings to four shillings in the pound. In addition, duties on tea, cocoa and coffee, the poor man's luxuries, were abolished, as pointed out on Cumann na nGaedheal platforms around the country. Revenue had been boosted by tariff experiments such as the boot tax and charges placed on clothing, blanketing, rugs, bedsteads and wooden furniture and all glass bottles and jars. Cumann na

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<sup>90</sup> Richard J. Evans, *The coming of the third Reich: how the Nazis destroyed democracy and seized power in Germany* (London, 2004), pp 103-11.

<sup>91</sup> Ó Gráda, *New economic history*, p. 425.

<sup>92</sup> Daly, *Social and economic history*, p. 9.

<sup>93</sup> Jackson, 'The two Irelands', p. 72.

<sup>94</sup> *The Economist*, 14 Mar. 1925.

<sup>95</sup> Note on the margin available for a reduction of taxation in 1925-26, 3 Apr. 1925 (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/25/4).

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

nGaedheal was praised for shifting the burden to commodities which could be produced in Ireland.<sup>97</sup> The government was prepared to borrow modest sums to spend on non-recurrent items (or what would now be regarded as ‘capital projects’ such as the Shannon development) but saw borrowing for recurrent items such as the national army as a ‘dead weight’.<sup>98</sup>

### **Legitimacy and stability**

Kevin O’Higgins is often credited with the successful re-establishment of law and order in the aftermath of the Civil War. As Minister for Home Affairs, later Justice after the enactment of the Ministers and Secretaries Act of 1924,<sup>99</sup> he presided over the establishment of an unarmed police force, An Garda Síochána, which quickly gained the respect of Free Staters and Republicans alike. The government wanted a return to normalcy as quickly as possible after the upheavals of the Civil War and the decision not to arm the Garda was a major factor in the population’s acceptance of the force. The RIC had been viewed with suspicion by large segments of the population, so having the new police force accepted was an important step on the road to legitimising the state. By 1925, O’Higgins was pleased with the progress he had made. In the aforementioned 18 October speech in Dungarvan, O’Higgins told his audience he had little now to complain about as Justice Minister and would have been delighted in 1922 to have known how settled the country would have become by 1925. Crime had also decreased and the people were increasingly cooperative with the forces of law and order.<sup>100</sup> Around this time, the *New York Times* commented on the relative calm that had descended on Ireland. It reported that the radicalism of the Irish people had been replaced by conservatism.<sup>101</sup>

Treatyite hard-man Eoin O’Duffy headed up the police as Garda Commissioner. O’Duffy was a well respected figure within Treatyite circles. He was sent for in 1924 at the time of the army mutiny and was appointed General officer commanding the Defence

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<sup>97</sup> *The Economist*, 25 Apr. 1925.

<sup>98</sup> Note on the margin available for a reduction of taxation in 1925-26, 3 Apr. 1925 (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/25/4).

<sup>99</sup> Ministers and Secretaries Act 1924, available at: [www.irishstatutebook.ie](http://www.irishstatutebook.ie) [accessed, 1 Sept. 2010].

<sup>100</sup> Undated text of speech given at Dungarvan to reflect on three years of the Free State [Oct. 1925?] (UCDA, Kevin O’Higgins papers, P197/142).

<sup>101</sup> *New York Times*, 11 Oct. 1925.

forces of the Free State.<sup>102</sup> As police chief O'Duffy built up a respected and reliable force although he was prone to exaggeration and displayed an over-enthusiastic interest in political crime. O'Duffy readily saw conspiracy and states of emergency where there were none and relations between O'Higgins and O'Duffy became increasingly strained. Following an IRA attack on twelve police barracks on 14 November 1926, an investigation authorised by the Justice Minister revealed that gardaí in Waterford had assaulted republican prisoners arrested in connection with the attacks. O'Higgins apologised in the Dáil and promised to compensate the victims. On being asked by O'Higgins to dismiss the accused officers, O'Duffy resisted threatening to resign himself. O'Higgins had called his bluff, O'Duffy could resign if he so wished. O'Duffy stayed on and the accused instead were disciplined.<sup>103</sup> In response to the attacks, O'Duffy called on the government to arm the police force of which he was Commissioner. In a lengthy, almost hysterically worded memo, O'Duffy claimed that the Irish people had long been at war with authority and inhibiting national progress was a lack of appreciation of 'the rights and responsibilities of citizenship'. So long as a segment of the population believed authority could be overcome, efforts to build were wasted.<sup>104</sup> Citizenship, until learned by the people at school and through the teachings of the statesmen and priests on platforms, had to be enforced by an armed police force capable of aggression. O'Duffy was proposing an aggressive role for the state in making citizens of the people. O'Higgins' annotations on the memo betray his feelings towards O'Duffy. The most offensive sentences in the memo were underlined by O'Higgins such as that dealing with the 'Extermination of the type that is incapable or unwilling to assume the responsibilities of citizenship'. On 3 January 1927, O'Higgins sat down to pen his opposition to O'Duffy's proposals. In his response, O'Higgins indicated that arming the guards would send out the wrong signal, invite undue aggression and that the success of the force was based on it being un-armed. Arming the garda would create the wrong impression at home and abroad and would provoke attack.<sup>105</sup> O'Duffy's proposal was officially rejected by the government on 24 January,<sup>106</sup> while for O'Higgins

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<sup>102</sup> Second Executive Council, minutes of meeting 10 Mar. 1924 (NAI, Department of the Taoiseach, G2/1).

<sup>103</sup> John P. McCarthy, *Kevin O'Higgins: builder of the Irish state* (Dublin, 2006), pp 181-3.

<sup>104</sup> State of Emergency-The Garda, armed or unarmed, Eoin O'Duffy memo, 6 Dec. 1926 (UCDA, Kevin O'Higgins papers P197/170).

<sup>105</sup> Department of Justice memo, 3 Jan. 1927 (ibid.).

<sup>106</sup> Second Executive Council, minutes of meeting 24 Jan. 1927 (NAI, Department of the Taoiseach, G2/5).

there was no state of emergency in the first place. The attacks of 14 November were a ‘stunt’ and ‘not to be taken seriously’.<sup>107</sup>

In the administration of Justice, the government again seemed to move as if having scant regard for political popularity. In a series of legislative measures, O’Higgins managed to alienate interest group after interest group, something that smaller parties such as the National League were all happy to exploit. Particularly harmful to his party’s electoral prospects was the Intoxicating Liquor Act of 1927. Announced on the eve of the election, the Act responded to the recommendations of a Commission established by O’Higgins in 1925 in that it sought to reduce the number of licensed premises to one per 400 people and to restrict opening hours. The measure was opposed by publicans and made life difficult for Cumann na nGaedheal candidates in June 1927.

### **External affairs**

The term ‘British Commonwealth of Nations’ was first used in the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 to convey the near autonomy of those former British colonies which had attained Dominion status.<sup>108</sup> In the decades before the Great War Britain had granted such status to Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the Union of South Africa. The Irish Free State was a co-equal member of the Commonwealth, with the same status of Canada, and the Cumann na nGaedheal government used diplomacy to assert the country’s position within the Commonwealth. The Free State did not just depend on Imperial diplomacy, it asserted its independence in other ways too. The Free State ‘threw itself into the maelstrom of post-war Europe’ and was determined that its presence would be felt at ‘Geneva and in the capitals of a few relevant states’.<sup>109</sup> The League of Nations had been established to keep peace after the Great War and in early 1923 the newly independent state was keen to join. In February, Kevin O’Shiel, assistant legal adviser to the government, wrote to ministers criticising Britain’s new representative on the council of the League of Nations. Lord Balfour’s replacement, Ronald MacNeill was described as ‘a violent partisan of the Northern secession movement’ with his appointment ‘tantamount to giving the

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<sup>107</sup> McCarthy, *Kevin O’Higgins*, p. 182.

<sup>108</sup> Niall Ferguson, *Empire: how Britain made the modern world* (London, 2003), p.342; D.W. Harkness, *The restless Dominion: the Irish Free State and the British Commonwealth of Nations, 1921-31* (London, 1969), p. 12.

<sup>109</sup> Harkness, *Restless Dominion*, p. 31.

Government of the Six Counties direct representation in the council'. In O'Shiel's view, the government needed to 'make haste' in applying to join the League of Nations.<sup>110</sup> An annotation by Cosgrave on the letter indicated his agreement.

Over the summer further steps were taken to prepare Ireland's application for membership of the League. Hugh Kennedy, the Attorney General, played an important role in drafting the necessary legislation. The North Eastern Boundary Bureau, established in 1922 to prepare the Free State's case for the Boundary Commission envisaged in article twelve of the Treaty, believed the state's position could be furthered through membership of the League. In the event of failure on the Boundary Commission, the government could appeal to the League.<sup>111</sup> The writer Francis Hackett also believed the League would provide a forum where the boundary position could be settled and 'the personality of Ireland conveyed to best advantage to the world'. The League was deadlocked on account of the cross purposes of the great powers, France and Britain, with smaller countries not venturing to take a lead. An Irish delegate would be welcome:

The entire liberal press, continental and American, is ready for a strong injection of sincerity by an Irish delegate. The dominions I gather, see in Ireland a force that can be active and positive so far as their own expansive tendencies are concerned.<sup>112</sup>

On 11 September 1923, Cosgrave returned to Ireland from Geneva having secured Irish membership of the League of Nations. Cumann na nGaedheal, arranged a reception, 'as non political as possible', to greet their leader on his return.<sup>113</sup> As a member of the League, the Free State became the first Commonwealth country to establish a permanent delegation in Geneva. Within weeks of joining, the government decided to register the Treaty with the League.<sup>114</sup> Against the wishes of Britain, the Treaty was formally registered as an international document on 11 July 1924. Cumann na nGaedheal continued to distrust the British in the first year or so of independence.<sup>115</sup> At an Executive Council meeting on 18 December 1923 the government decided not to attend the forthcoming

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<sup>110</sup> Kevin O'Shiel, to each member of the Executive Council, 20 Feb. 1923 (UCDA, Desmond FitzGerald papers, P80/517).

<sup>111</sup> 'Ireland and the League of Nations', Kevin O'Shiel to each member of the Executive Council, undated [Mar. 1923?] (UCDA, Desmond FitzGerald papers, P80/518).

<sup>112</sup> Francis Hackett, to Senator James Douglas, 1 July 1923 (UCDA, Desmond FitzGerald papers, P80/521).

<sup>113</sup> Paul Banim, secretary to the President, to Desmond FitzGerald, 11 Sept. 1923 (UCDA, Desmond FitzGerald papers, P80/530).

<sup>114</sup> Second Executive Council, minutes of meeting 27 Oct. 1923, (NAI, Department of the Taoiseach, G2/2).

<sup>115</sup> Harkness, *Restless Dominion*, p. 32.

British Empire exhibition,<sup>116</sup> while in 1924 the government took steps to sidestep the colonial office in London by opening its own diplomatic relations albeit on a small scale. While the department of External Affairs remained small but diligent throughout the lifetime of the government, and use was continually made of the Imperial relationship in learning of events overseas, the Free State was again pioneering among the Dominions in opening its own channels of diplomacy with non Commonwealth countries. The United States became the first non Commonwealth country to receive a Free State representative through the appointment of a Minister Plenipotentiary in Washington. The proposed representative would be the official channel of communication between the United States and Dublin concerning matters exclusively affecting the Free State. During conversations at the colonial office in London on 21 and 23 June 1924, FitzGerald met with the British to discuss the remit of the proposed new ambassador. This was new territory for the British and it seemed to alarm them to some extent that a Dominion would seek to appoint its own diplomatic representative in Washington. They wanted the proposed Minister plenipotentiary to remain in close contact with the British embassy in Washington in the event of any question proving of interest to the rest of the Commonwealth and empire. They were keen to impress on FitzGerald that the services of the British embassy would remain at the disposal of the Free State representative.<sup>117</sup> On 23 June, FitzGerald was shown the drafts of three telegrams the foreign office planned to send the British embassy in Washington relating to the relationship between it and the Free State representative. He concurred with the terms and in return the British agreed with the Free State's draft set of instructions to their proposed Minister plenipotentiary.<sup>118</sup> Professor T.A. Smiddy, formerly chair of the Fiscal Inquiry Commission, was subsequently appointed to the post as the Free State asserted its newfound place among, not just the Dominions, but the nations of the world. The previous year, Eoin MacNeill's brother James had been appointed Free State High Commissioner in London.<sup>119</sup> While progress towards Free State representation abroad was slow, a commercial attaché was appointed for Paris and Brussels while by 1929 delegates had been sent to Berlin and the Vatican. The diplomatic relationship between the Dominions and foreign governments was discussed at the 1926 Imperial

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<sup>116</sup> Second Executive Council, minutes of meeting 18 Dec. 1923 (NAI, Department of Taoiseach, G2/3).

<sup>117</sup> Notes of conversation at the Colonial office on Saturday 21 June 1924 (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/155/3).

<sup>118</sup> Notes of conversation at the Colonial office on Monday 23 June 1924 (ibid., P24/155/6).

<sup>119</sup> Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth-century Ireland: revolution and state building* (Dublin, 2005), p. 50.



Conference. The summary of proceedings noted that since the previous conference the Free State government had appointed a representative in Washington. Showing that the Free State had seized the initiative, and was somewhat in advance of Commonwealth thinking in this regard, the report simply stated that there had been fruitful results of this endeavour.<sup>120</sup>

In foreign policy, the Free State was an active participant at the League of Nations and at the Imperial Conferences, where it played a leading role. The Imperial Conference of 1923 proved a steep learning curve for the Irish delegates who, at the time, were preoccupied with domestic issues. Real progress was made by the Free State at the Conferences of 1926 and 1930. O'Higgins flourished on the diplomatic stage at both League of Nations and Imperial Conferences. In a letter to his wife from a 1925 conference in Geneva, the Vice President demonstrated a sharp awareness of world politics. For him, the League was a step in the right direction, though the time had not yet arrived where 'nations, like the individual, will lay aside the stone-axe and submit themselves to a Code'.<sup>121</sup> There was a great deal about the League that O'Higgins, as a delegate from a small country trying to assert its independence, did not like. He disliked the selfishness of the great powers which adhered to the principles of the League so long as it suited their interests. O'Higgins found it distasteful that they were quite prepared to indulge in the grubby politics of packed meetings to achieve their policy goals. O'Higgins also had an aversion to what he termed the 'semi-official involvement' of the United States. They were not members of the League but Americans were 'darting' everywhere like 'bluebottles'.<sup>122</sup> O'Higgins and FitzGerald had been invited to lunch by the Americans where they hoped to gain publicity for the 'North-Eastern Situation'. O'Higgins was unimpressed with the hearing they received.

O'Higgins seems to have excelled when in direct negotiations with the British,<sup>123</sup> as would happen at a Geneva conference on armaments limitation in June 1927. He was able to both cajole and work with them, as the case demanded, in asserting the constitutional position of the Dominions. At Geneva, O'Higgins showed his brilliance in separate meetings that were arranged with the British delegation to the conference. The equality of

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<sup>120</sup> Imperial Conference 1926, Summary of Proceedings (London, 1926) p. 26 (UCDA, Kevin O'Higgins papers, P197/171).

<sup>121</sup> Kevin O'Higgins to his wife Brigid O'Higgins, undated [Sept. 1925?] (ibid., P197/91).

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Terence de Vere White, *Kevin O'Higgins* (Dublin, 1986), pp 188-90

status between Britain and the Dominions had been recognised at the 1926 Imperial Conference. However, the Free State remained sensitive to any perceived British attempt to override this position, while the British remained unenthusiastic about the participation of Dominions in the League. The British were keen to stress at international conferences their predominance of the Commonwealth. At Geneva in 1927, Britain aimed to gain support for limitations to naval armament. However, it remained Britain's aim to ensure at all League of Nations conferences that treaties were not to be regarded as regulating relations between the component parts of the Commonwealth.<sup>124</sup> London wanted to preserve a unity of interests on the world stage. Previously the League has inserted clauses to specifically state that agreements did not affect territories forming part of the same sovereign state, even if individually they were members of the League. In 1925, the Dutch tried to secure a similar proviso to allow their government freedom of action in the East Indies. However, the Free State was unimpressed with such a continued curtailment of its freedom in international affairs and O'Higgins prepared to confront the issue.

Once again, Britain's position at Geneva in 1927 implied that the Commonwealth was a single international unit and that the Dominions were not sovereign on the international stage.<sup>125</sup> It is worth remembering at this point that the Free State had, in previous years, tried to assert an independent position at the League. It had put itself forward for election to the council of the League of Nations in an effort to demonstrate its independence. Czechoslovakia unexpectedly won election to the council with the help of the votes of the displeased British delegate. At home, Fianna Fáil portrayed this setback as proof the other delegates regarded the 'Free State as part of England'.<sup>126</sup>

Given Britain's stance at the Geneva conference of 1927, the Free State, as stated, again felt the need to assert its independence and balked at continued use of the term 'Empire' which, it argued, had been expunged in the Treaty. If Ireland's constitutional position was acknowledged and safeguarded by Britain, the Free State delegation would be willing to support British attempts to gain support at Geneva for proposals to limit naval armament.<sup>127</sup> O'Higgins showed his skill by impressing upon the British the fact that the Free State was 'an independent unit of the British Commonwealth in the matter of Treaty

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., pp 188-90.

<sup>126</sup> Notes for specimen speech, undated [Jan. 1932?] (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/351/65).

<sup>127</sup> S.P. Breatnach, to the secretary of the Executive Council, reporting on the proceedings of Geneva Conference on the limiting of armaments, 30 June 1927 (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/158).

making'. In essence, the Irish government was free to act independently of Britain at the conference and threatened that it would do so unless this fundamental principle was accepted by the British. O'Higgins read a memo that summarised the views of the Cumann na nGaedheal government. The government objected to Britain's continued use of the term 'British Empire' as it misrepresented the position of the self governing dominions of the Commonwealth and implied that they were all part of a single constitutional group. Dominions could form their own policy according to O'Higgins and their group character should be described by an expression such as 'the Component states of the British Commonwealth' or some such term as would 'emphasise its plurality'.<sup>128</sup> The British agreed to cross out the term British Empire in discussing the dominions and O'Higgins had secured the government's objective in emphasising the independence of the dominions.

### **More retrenchment and a second national loan**

At the end of 1927, O'Higgins had been assassinated and Fianna Fáil had taken their seats in the Dáil. De Valera had broken with the hardliners in Sinn Féin and it seemed that the legitimacy of the state was increasingly respected at home. The government decided that the time was now ripe to make its debut on the international money market. Between 1923 and 1927, the government had earned its stripes, first by raising the national loan and then by pursuing a policy of financial orthodoxy, balancing the budget, cutting taxes and showing a willingness to trim public spending. It had successfully raised a £10m national loan within the borders of the Free State and had embarked upon at times unpopular, but prudent, financial policies that proved it was a good student of gold standard orthodoxy. In 1927 Free State investors were asked to contribute £4m, while the more substantial part of the loan would see \$15m raised abroad.<sup>129</sup> The new loan would be floated in two stages, the second part in 1929. Somewhat controversially and in a further slight to Britain, New York was chosen over London for the external issue of the loan. In 1923, the government was at pains to paint a picture of a settled and self-reliant country with a government which subscribed to the financial and economic 'rules of the game' in power. In 1927, in its foray into international markets, a new challenge faced Cumann na nGaedheal. This time there

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> *The Times*, 5 Dec. 1927.

was a real prospect that a new government could come to power in the near future and what of the financial commitments entered into by Cumann na nGaedheal then? As *The Times* put it, there were grave doubts about the financial intentions of Fianna Fáil. Would a new government honour existing pledges? Would Fianna Fáil carry out its promise to withhold the land annuities? These were the concerns of investors in 1927. Blythe himself tried to allay such fears in the lead-up to the announcement of the second Free State loan. Addressing incorporated auditors and accountants, he suggested that while policy might change with the advent of a de Valera led government, in his view, there would be no repudiation of the financial commitments entered into by Cumann na nGaedheal and he believed a Fianna Fáil government would honour the financial obligations it would inherit from the outgoing administration.<sup>130</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal remained keen to give the impression of a stable polity which would not be shaken by a change of government.

By 1928 the financial position in the country had already begun to take a downward turn. As Patricia Clavin has stated, the Great Depression in many ways pre-dated the 1929 Wall Street crash by as much as two years, though it was probably 1930 before its effects were truly felt in Ireland. Revenue dipped during 1928 and Finance demanded spending reductions to meet the deficit so as to prevent tax increases. In a letter to the heads of all departments in September 1928, McElligott outlined the remedy as a ‘rigid and unswerving policy of retrenchment’.<sup>131</sup> This was in line with mainstream economic thinking at the time. The letter continued that in the early years of the state’s existence, heavy spending on reconstruction and development had been necessary but that now it was ‘reasonable and proper to postpone the initiation of services which, however desirable, are not urgently necessary’. Ministers were told they were not to agree to proposals that might place an additional tax burden on the community. On the political side, Cosgrave took the letter seriously. He called a meeting with the heads of the departments for 4 October 1928. Addressing the meeting, Cosgrave outlined the seriousness of the situation. This was not, he claimed, a rhetorical repetition of the annual demand for economy and accounting officers were asked to immediately make the maximum effort towards new savings.<sup>132</sup> Balancing the budget would prove difficult and the government was particularly concerned with the effects of a fall in the yield of taxation and any failure to reduce spending in the

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> McElligott to heads of all departments, 17 Sept. 1928 (UCDA, Patrick McGilligan papers, P35/125).

<sup>132</sup> Meeting of the heads of all Departments, 4 Oct. 1928 (ibid.).

budgets of subsequent years. So far, revenue for 1928 was lower than estimated and, ‘in order that the Budget of the current year may balance’ large savings had to be effected. Cosgrave seemed to care little for the political fallout from this request and urged that ‘No Head of a Department should advance any project involving increased expenditure without giving it the fullest consideration’.<sup>133</sup> Only proposals ‘absolutely essential for the public welfare’ were to be advanced. Using the language of the state in danger Cosgrave concluded: ‘If as a result of your efforts economies on the scale desired are secured you will have added a most potent contribution to the future prosperity of the country’.

Between 1923 and 1928, Cumann na nGaedheal came through an extraordinarily challenging period in government. World economic conditions proved difficult as prices collapsed in the aftermath of the Great War and Irish agriculture in particular lost its position of wartime prosperity. Europe suffered as the United States, Canada and Japan had grown during the Great War to reduce the economic dominance of the European powers. The Free State government faced up to the Civil War legacy of lawlessness, political instability and destruction by establishing an unarmed police force, facilitating de Valera’s entrance to the Dáil and embarking on policies of reconstruction which helped provide employment in the mid 1920s.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, the financial and economic independence of the state was established through the successful raising of the national loan and a demonstration of fiscal rectitude while the ambitious Shannon-Scheme laid the basis for future growth. Cumann na nGaedheal in this period showed itself to be an orthodox though reforming government that managed the affairs of state with limited resources. For many, the pace of change was slow but the Free State had attained a level of stability other countries could only dream of. However, if Cumann na nGaedheal’s first five years in power had proven difficult, the challenges it would face in its final years as the government party would prove an even sterner test.

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Second Executive Council, minutes of meeting, 9 Jan. 1925 (NAI, Department of the Taoiseach, G2/4).

## Free State government Policy, 1928-33

In the preceding chapter, Cumann na nGaedheal's policy in government during the state's formative years was analysed. Europe was beginning to stabilise around the economic consensus of *laissez-faire* and Cumann na nGaedheal proved its orthodox credentials. Difficult decisions were taken while the government made progress in asserting the state's independence at Geneva and the Imperial Conferences. In this chapter, the analysis of Free State government policy is taken through the collapse of the world economy from 1929, the international discrediting of the type of policy pursued by Cumann na nGaedheal and the change of government in 1932 as we try to understand the long-lasting political realignment that occurred in Ireland. Here we show that Cumann na nGaedheal's limited response to the economic crisis remained grounded in liberalism. In 1932, the Cumann na nGaedheal administration was one of many governments to collapse under the strain of the Great Depression and here the elections of the early 1930s are understood in that context. In this chapter we also evaluate the radicalising impact on Irish politics of the rapid political and economic changes that took place across the world.

Cumann na nGaedheal's final years in power coincided with the onset of the deepest economic slump of the twentieth century. Economic difficulties from the late 1920s and early 1930s placed a considerable strain on governments of various persuasions across the globe. An early to mid 1920s investment boom in the new electrical and chemical industries of the second industrial revolution had seemed to justify a deep-rooted desire to recreate the pre-1914 liberal world economy.<sup>1</sup> However, the cessation of such outlay in those industries towards the end of the decade as the depression struck and the subsequent failure of conventional financial and economic policies to meet the new challenges, forced

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<sup>1</sup> Frank B. Tipton and Robert Aldrich, *An economic and social history of Europe, 1918-1939* (London, 1987), p. 164.

countries to rethink their policies in the early 1930s. In broad terms, European economies in the aftermath of the Great War had been marked by over-capacity, excess production, low prices and the dominance of ‘gold standard orthodoxy’. In Ireland too there was an assumption among those intellectuals with economic expertise that ‘the post-war world would be the pre-war world restored and improved’.<sup>2</sup> However, as Depression deepened in the early 1930s, many producers, workers and employers clamoured for governments to change their policies while opposition leaders, of both a democratic and non-democratic instinct, were quick to exploit the political opportunity afforded them by the economic collapse. In Ireland, Cumann na nGaedheal’s political difficulties in the late 1920s and early 1930s were exacerbated by the presence of a viable, de Valera-led alternative government from August 1927. Economic malaise in Western Europe in particular forced a re-evaluation of the prevailing financial and economic policies that had, to contemporary observers, quite clearly failed.<sup>3</sup> In this period, governments facing up to their domestic woes could no longer rely on robust global conditions to provide the basis for economic recovery at home as export prices collapsed everywhere, dragging down trade and forcing governments to seek national solutions.<sup>4</sup>

Initially governments clung to deflationary policies, public spending cuts and balanced national budgets. Balancing the budget itself became increasingly difficult as unemployment rose, affecting the economic life of countries and placing a further drain on their exchequers as more and more people depended on welfare provision.<sup>5</sup> Underlying economic difficulties in small countries such as the Irish Free State were exacerbated after the Wall Street crash of 1929 as US immigration restrictions forced a reduction in emigration and eventually the return home of many émigrés.<sup>6</sup> As was evident at the end of the previous chapter, the difficult economic conditions that emerged soon after Cumann na nGaedheal’s election victory in September 1927 were about to force even more difficult decisions on a government which had already come through a period of financial and political crisis during its first five years in office.

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<sup>2</sup> James Meenan, *George O’Brien: a biographical memoir* (Dublin, 1980), p. 100.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Kitchen, *Europe between the wars* (London, 2006), p. 78.

<sup>6</sup> Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth-century Ireland: revolution and state building* (Dublin, 2005), p. 38.

## The last Cumann na nGaedheal government

In 1967, Kevin B. Nowlan wrote an article analysing W.T. Cosgrave's last government. He wrote that it 'maintained a rather fixed political course, which could easily give the impression of an unbending rigidity, a too ready acceptance of the conventional, especially in relation to economic policy and social reform'.<sup>7</sup> As it embarked on a second period in government, Cumann na nGaedheal's approach seemed to be working. In its review of 1928, *The Economist*, a pillar of economic liberalism, believed that the Free State government had made progress and praised its agricultural policy in particular. Dairying had expanded under Hogan's direction, cattle prices had improved and exports of meat and live cattle had increased. Government inspection had resulted in better agricultural produce as Ireland tried to compete with her continental rivals, particularly Denmark. The magazine was satisfied with steps taken by the Executive Council to tackle an adverse balance of trade while claiming that the protected industries of clothes, boots and shoes were producing in greater quantities for the domestic market. Additionally, the Shannon-Scheme was on schedule, the semi-state Electricity Supply Board was gearing up to provide for the electrification of the country and a new currency (tied to sterling) had successfully been established in 1927. Cumann na nGaedheal was also praised by the *Manchester Guardian* for opposing a Labour proposal 'that was not really taken too seriously by anybody'. Labour had called on the government to raise a loan to provide work for the unemployed but Cumann na nGaedheal had displayed a 'a far better grasp of the issue' and had demonstrated their credentials.<sup>8</sup> It was not, according to the paper, a duty of a political party to force agricultural or industrial interests to re-orientate their businesses. Economic progress remained dependent on private enterprise and the paper claimed Fianna Fáil was learning its trade from the Cumann na nGaedheal government.<sup>9</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal remained a firm proponent of financial orthodoxy and was keen that its position be known internationally. In April 1929, Cosgrave told the *New York Times* the country was settled and was sound financially and socially.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Kevin B. Nowlan, 'President Cosgrave's last administration' in Francis MacManus (ed.), *The years of the great test, 1926-39* (Cork, 1967), p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 31 Oct. 1927.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *New York Times*, 12 Apr. 1929.



Against this optimistic assessment however, was a forecast of a more difficult 1929 as economic clouds gathered on the horizon. As acknowledged in speeches by Blythe, the pool of income tax arrears being dipped into by the government was near exhaustion and a decline in duties from beer and spirits meant that there were rocks on the road to his desired budgetary position.<sup>11</sup> As such, Ireland's 1929 budget would require a renewed focus on retrenchment or tax increases.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, but for the success of the second national loan of 1927, Ernest Blythe would have faced a substantial deficit in preparing his budget for 1929. In advance of the budget speech, the *Irish Times* urged reduced expenditure and relief for taxpayers, given that 'Mr Blythe has managed to balance his budget at the Free State taxpayers' cost'.<sup>13</sup> According to the paper, the British 'fairy godmother has gone and, henceforward the Saorstát's coat must be cut according to its rather exiguous cloth'. However, given that exports would likely be hit by the downturn, there would be little opportunity in the years ahead to reduce the burden on the taxpayer. On the contrary, it seems fair to suggest that Blythe and his colleagues had probably gone too far in cutting tax in previous budgets even if they had done so in an attempt to send out the right economic signals. Throughout the 1920s Cumann na nGaedheal had been a tax cutting government and there was scarcely room for further cuts by 1928/29. As evidenced by the previous chapter, income tax had been cut considerably from six shillings in the pound in 1922 to three shillings in the pound by 1928. The *Manchester Guardian* believed Cumann na nGaedheal had gone too far in cutting taxes given the clamours for increased spending on education and other services.<sup>14</sup> It seems low taxation was generally regarded as 'a symbol of the Free State's fitness for self-government'.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, the *Irish Independent* was fearful that Blythe would follow the precedent set by Winston Churchill by introducing a tax on petrol or even a new tax on tyres.<sup>16</sup> The *Irish Independent* was partially right as new motoring charges were introduced, although petrol was left untouched.

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<sup>11</sup> Blythe lamented the exhaustion of arrears and the 'fact that the people of this country were becoming soberer and soberer'. *Irish Times*, 6 Dec. 1928.

<sup>12</sup> *The Economist*, 9 Feb. 1929.

<sup>13</sup> *Irish Times*, 18 Apr. 1928.

<sup>14</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 27 Dec. 1928.

<sup>15</sup> Kieran Coleman and John Considine, 'The no income tax campaign: twenty-first century tax philosophy in 1920s Ireland' in *Economic and Social History*, 33 (2006), p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Irish Independent*, 25 Apr. 1928.

Blythe's budget of April 1928 contained little comfort for anybody in the Free State. Blythe outlined the reasons why he had not been able to choose an easy course in his budget:

In the next few years we shall require considerable capital sums for constructive undertakings. Our credit is now such that we can borrow in the international money market on terms of which no country need be ashamed. In the interests of national development, it is vital that this position be maintained. Investors at home and abroad have subscribed to our loans because our financial policy has satisfied them that the Saorstát will pay its way; that it will so handle its budgetary problems that debt will be incurred only for legitimate purposes and that no type of currency inflation will take place. We must continue so to regulate our taxation and expenditure as to maintain the confidence of onlookers in the stability of the State and in the probity of its Parliament and Government, for on that confidence our credit depends, and on our credit depends whether schemes of development can or cannot be economically carried out. Moreover, maintenance of the credit of the State is necessary for the security and expansion of private enterprise.<sup>17</sup>

This indicated that Cumann na nGaedheal's economic and fiscal policies would continue in the same cautious vein that saw the government reap the praise of conservative publications such as *The Economist* in previous years. In order to meet an estimated deficit of £1,148,803 in 1929, Blythe proposed to collect the remaining arrears in income tax, to gather the property tax in one instalment instead of two, to extend the McKenna duties (see previous chapter) to commercial vehicles and tyres, and to introduce slight increases in the sugar tax and the cost of telegrams. Collectively, these budget measures amounted to £1,166,000, covering the deficit and resulting in a surplus of £17,197, which was used to abolish the entertainment tax for race meetings and remove the duties on imported medicine bottles. A year in advance of the Wall Street crash, there was little evidence to suggest that Cumann na nGaedheal would be capable of imaginatively dealing with a new economic crisis as budget preparation continued to resemble an exercise in good bookkeeping. While events did force some changes in Cosgrave's policy, and it has been argued that de Valera's party 'should get neither all the blame nor all the credit'<sup>18</sup> for the lurch towards economic nationalism in the 1930s (discussed below), Fianna Fáil's long ideological commitment to an alternative economic policy ensured that the piecemeal changes forced on Cumann na nGaedheal by world conditions became part of a more substantial Free State policy agenda after the change of government in 1932.

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<sup>17</sup> Dáil Debates, vol. 23 col. 345, 25 Apr. 1925 (Ernest Blythe).

<sup>18</sup> J. Peter Neary and Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Protection, economic war and structural change: the 1930s in Ireland' in *IHS*, xxvii, no. 107 (May 1991), p. 253.

Economic activity in the Free State peaked in 1929 on the eve of the Wall Street crash,<sup>19</sup> an event which compounded existing structural weaknesses in the world system.<sup>20</sup> In 1929, Irish exports were valued at £47m, a figure not reached again until 1948. The actual volume of exports that year was not again matched until 1960.<sup>21</sup> Various sources of instability began to act together as investment, particularly in Germany, peaked and then declined from 1928. A reduction in American interest rates in 1927 reinforced a speculative tendency in the stock market on that side of the Atlantic. Between 1925 and 1929 the value of stocks and shares had grown by 250%.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, in Europe, interest rates rose in some countries, serving to restrict credit, further curtailing investment there. Patricia Clavin argues that America's dominant role in the world economy after the Great War required that it play a leading role, but that it failed to do so, putting its own interests first. In order to be successful, the 'business as usual' approach needed a greater degree of international cooperation and uniformity in approach than was present in the late 1920s. When the Federal Reserve tried to reduce the amount of money in circulation and cool the speculative boom, the effects were not just felt in the United States. Panic selling in October reduced by almost half the index of share prices on the New York stock exchange. More damaging than a comparatively small loss of wealth, was the effect on confidence. Shown on newsreels around the world, the crash shattered American confidence. The decline in the United States had a severe impact everywhere else.<sup>23</sup> The problem was made worse in Europe as fear of inflation and continued adherence to the gold standard added further deflationary pressure at a time of economic slump.<sup>24</sup> Tight monetary policies were not the answer to the crisis but that was not yet realised by stunned policy makers.

Alternatives were in gestation in 1929-30 and they would be ready for application within a year or two. In Britain, *The Observer* complained that the country had become decadent with her 'long economic supremacy' blinding her 'to the fact that times had changed'.<sup>25</sup> The paper acknowledged that unemployment was a world problem but did not propose global solutions. Instead, 'foresighted national strategies' were advocated as remedies to unemployment given that each country's economic woes had a unity of their

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>20</sup> Tipton and Aldrich, *Economic and social history of Europe*, pp 220-6.

<sup>21</sup> James Meenan, 'From free trade to self-sufficiency' in Francis MacManus (ed.), *The years of the great test, 1926-39* (Cork, 1967), p. 72.

<sup>22</sup> Patricia Clavin, *The Great Depression in Europe, 1929-1939* (London, 2000), p. 96.

<sup>23</sup> Tipton and Aldrich, *Economic and social history of Europe*, p. 225.

<sup>24</sup> Clavin, *Great Depression*, p. 98.

<sup>25</sup> *The Observer*, 30 Mar. 1930, newspaper cutting (UCDA, Desmond FitzGerald papers, P80/1043/3).

own. Britain in 1930 was 'out of date' and public works schemes represented a better investment than the dole payment given that there was ample work for the idle hands to do. Moreover, the author of the article believed that 'tariffs need to be taken up in a more serious and modern attitude than at present' (The Conservatives supported tariffs) and blamed the understanding reached between Labour and the Liberals for the failure to make adequate progress towards all out protectionism. The article encapsulates the economic changes that would characterise the 1930s as European governments increasingly began to intervene in their economies, along national lines, through a mixture of public works, rearmament and protectionism.

As a primarily agricultural producer, committed to economic liberalism,<sup>26</sup> the Free State under Cumann na nGaedheal was particularly vulnerable to any potential collapse in world trade. Throughout the 1920s, the Free State ranked alongside Holland and Britain as a low tariff economy. Ireland relied heavily on agriculture, and particularly on finding and developing export markets for its surplus produce. Britain remained the country's most important trade partner and the Free State's agriculture competed with Denmark, and Dominions such as New Zealand for the lion's share of British agricultural imports. Understandably, the country's economic problems from 1929 prompted increased clamours for government intervention and protection. Irish agricultural exports suffered from about 1930 as rivals lowered prices.<sup>27</sup> Like most governments at the time, Cumann na nGaedheal remained reluctant to change course, simply believing things would improve. Moreover, Cumann na nGaedheal seemed to believe that the rapport it had built up with Britain would safeguard the country's trade relationship with its nearest neighbour. Addressing the Dáil on 19 November 1930, Cosgrave offered a stout defence of his party's agricultural policies by stating:

We can only speculate, but in our speculation we must take cognisance of the ominous fact that, with the exception of butter, the fall in prices of live stock and other products is far less than the fall in the prices of cereals. Our economy consists, in the main, in the production of live stock and live stock products; the economy of countries like Canada and Australia consists in the main in the production of cereals for sale. I am not at present concerned with politics or politicians but with farmers, and every farmer in the country knows that the price of cattle, sheep, beef, mutton, bacon and eggs, has fallen far less than the price of feeding - barley, oats, maize and particularly wheat. We are all discontented with the price of our live stock products, but what is the position of the farmer who is growing wheat or oats for sale as such? There is at least one claim which we are entitled to make in this year, 1930, and that is that the policy which we have consistently urged on farmers, viz., to produce live stock and live stock products, and to use grain as their

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<sup>26</sup> Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A new economic history, 1780-1939* (New York, 1994), p. 388.

<sup>27</sup> Mary E. Daly, *Social and economic history of Ireland since 1800* (Dublin, 1981), p. 144.

raw materials, has saved this country from the deplorable conditions existing in agricultural countries which, either from necessity or choice, have concentrated on the production of cereals, and especially wheat.<sup>28</sup>

In the same speech, Cosgrave gave a critique of the policies being put forward by the opposition. He stated that Fianna Fáil's demands for increased wheat production (see below) were 'not worth considering' given the 'unbelievably low level' of world prices and reminded the other parties that international conferences at Geneva had warned against the erection of trade barriers between countries. Furthermore, Cosgrave described self-sufficiency as short-sighted and warned that the 'doctrine may indeed amount to recklessness if based on neglect to study world conditions'.<sup>29</sup> While using the speech to announce the allocation of £300,000 for the provision of employment in rural areas adversely affected by bad weather conditions, it is clear Cosgrave wanted to highlight what his party saw as the shortcomings in Fianna Fáil's economic policies. In his response, de Valera linked the traditional British policy of economic liberalism with the disasters of Irish history, including the Great Famine, and charged that Cumann na nGaedheal was merely continuing the tradition. This emphasised the opposition's attempt to portray the government as pro-British. Moreover, de Valera lamented the reduction in tillage and reiterated his belief that an acre of wheat would generate more wealth than an acre under grass.<sup>30</sup> Once again, *The Economist* took Cosgrave's side. In its review of 1930, the magazine pointed out the low costs of production for the Free State farmer given the falling price of grain and feeding. Furthermore, the magazine commented that 'the difference between the movements of beef and butter prices shows the wisdom of a diversified farming system, and justifies the insistence by the Department of Agriculture on the breeding of dual-purpose cattle'.<sup>31</sup> Also praised was Cumann na nGaedheal's mixed approach to protection. Progress had been made in the few protected industries while the continued import of the protected articles contributed to government revenue. It agreed that 'the best line of development of Free State industries lies in the direction of manufacturing specialised high-grade articles for export rather than in attempting to encourage a variety

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<sup>28</sup> Dáil Debates, vol. 36, col. 66, 19 Nov. 1930 (W.T. Cosgrave).

<sup>29</sup> Dáil Debates, vol. 36, col. 68, 19 Nov. 1930 (W.T. Cosgrave).

<sup>30</sup> Dáil Debates, vol. 36, col. 76, 19 Nov. 1930 (Eamon deValera).

<sup>31</sup> *The Economist*, 14 Feb. 1931.

of small industries behind a tariff wall'.<sup>32</sup> Orthodox observers considered the Fianna Fáil alternative economically unviable and tended to support the government's policies.

While their opponents saw them as bootstrap liberals, Cumann na nGaedheal ministers such as Paddy Hogan considered themselves pragmatists rather than free traders. Ministers argued that they had experimented with tariffs since 1924 and had set up a Tariff Commission in 1926 to investigate each appeal on its merits on a case-by-case basis. As stated, its cautious approach was determined by the results of the Fiscal Inquiry Commission of 1923. As Ó Gráda argues (but probably overstates), from 1930-31, the party increasingly gave way to protectionist pressure and in keeping with world trends probably would have become still more protectionist had it won the 1932 election, such was the climate of the time.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, Ó Gráda suggests that the 1931 general election in Britain, which produced a national government committed to increased protection for British agriculture, particularly in those areas in which the Irish farmer specialised, made a continuance of the Cumann na nGaedheal policy impractical. This, he argues, further reduced the importance and appeal of Cosgrave's policies and made a Free State policy *volte face* more likely. This would appear to also suggest that a changed trading relationship between Britain and the Free State would have been the natural outcome in 1932 regardless of whether Cosgrave or de Valera had been in power.

Britain changed course from its time honoured practice of free trade in early 1932 to restrict imports.<sup>34</sup> She had already abandoned the gold standard in September 1931 facilitating an end to deflationary 'gold standard orthodoxy' policies. Now, the British economy need not sink with countries that remained tied to gold.<sup>35</sup> However, British economic nationalism did not automatically sound the death knell for Irish agricultural exports to Britain. Initially, newspapers such as *The Times* believed the depressed state of world trade would make Britain and the Free State more dependent on each other as friendly neighbours. As stated, the friendly relationship between the two since 1922 would have counted in Ireland's favour and as a Dominion, she could have expected a measure of preferential treatment against non-Dominion competitors (as initially happened). Britain imported eggs, butter and bacon in large quantities and in 1931/32 the Irish farmer could have expected to benefit from its longstanding relationship with Britain. With Britain

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ó Gráda, *A new economic history*, p. 387.

<sup>34</sup> *Irish Independent*, 4 Feb. 1932.

<sup>35</sup> Clavin, *Great Depression*, p. 133.

coming off the gold standard in September 1931, *The Times* seemed to think that the two countries would become more dependent upon each other and welcomed a speech by Cosgrave asking Free State citizens to buy Irish-produced goods in preference to imports and, crucially for *The Times*' readership, asking Irish people to buy British goods where that proved impractical.<sup>36</sup> In addition, figures in the McGilligan papers, and cited by Ó Gráda, show that the Free State agricultural exports to Britain remained competitive with those of Denmark until 1931<sup>37</sup> and that the Free State accounted for a higher proportion of overall British agricultural imports in 1930 (5.2%) than it did in 1928 (4.2%).<sup>38</sup> However, the Free State's proportion of agricultural exports to Britain declined substantially in 1933.<sup>39</sup> Her competitors, Denmark, New Zealand and the Netherlands more or less maintained the level of their exports to Britain, with New Zealand seeming to benefit most from the decline in Ireland's share of British agricultural imports from 1932 (British agricultural imports were down overall but this does not account for the collapse in Free State exports, expressed as a percentage of the total, which more than halved in 1933 and stayed at low levels throughout the 1930s).

Did the collapse in agricultural exports to Britain in 1932 have its root in the policy of Britain's new government or the actions of the new Fianna Fail administration in Ireland? The evidence suggests that the change in government in Ireland and the political choices made by Fianna Fáil in 1932 accounted for a large measure of the changed trade relationship between the Free State and Britain. As such, it cannot be asserted that policy changes in Britain would inevitably have forced a downturn in the percentage of Irish agricultural exports to Britain, given that she continued to import similar products from Denmark, Holland and New Zealand for the duration of the 1930s. By 1932 Cumann na nGaedheal would have been forced to adapt its traditional policy (as it had been doing), and de Valera's party was more in tune with world trends, but by that time Cosgrave's administration had enough goodwill points earned with the British to expect at least a measure of preferential treatment that could have maintained the value of her exports to Britain into the 1930s. When Britain turned to protectionism, she initially exempted the Dominions until November 1932 before deferring a final decision on preference to the

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<sup>36</sup> *The Times*, 24 Sept. 1931.

<sup>37</sup> Value of United Kingdom imports from Saorstát and Denmark, undated [1932?] (UCDA, Patrick McGilligan papers, P35b/27).

<sup>38</sup> Exports of United Kingdom and Saorstát Eireann, undated [1932?] (ibid.).

<sup>39</sup> Ó Gráda, *A new economic history*, p. 415.

Imperial Conference. *The Times* was confident that cooperation would pull Britain and the Dominions through the Depression.<sup>40</sup> As we shall see below, the radical departure embarked on by de Valera in March 1932 had seismic consequences, particularly in that goodwill between the two countries vanished, leaving the Free State isolated. As Clavin states, economic nationalism and a collapse in international economic cooperation inevitably led to more tense relations between countries.

### **Department of Finance**

As seen in previous chapters, the department of Finance was all-powerful within the Free State administrative structure. Its writ ran through all departments and its supremacy had both native and British antecedents, in the Dáil department of Michael Collins and the Treasury of the British administration in Ireland. Leading officials such as McElligott were committed free-traders and schooled in financial orthodoxy.<sup>41</sup> As noted, the department had wanted a greater reduction in the old-age pension than that conceded by Blythe in 1924 and as is evident in this thesis, its officials were quick to propose economies whenever the budget seemed unlikely to balance. Under Cumann na nGaedheal, like so many other governments, the Free State was slow to be ‘cured’<sup>42</sup> of its attachment to orthodox policies even though deflation was worsening the economic collapse. Given that Fianna Fáil worked with the same department from 1932, and policy changed considerably under the new government, it must be the case that the political affiliation of ministers remained the most important consideration that affected Free State policy, and that ultimately officials were the servants of their political masters. Cumann na nGaedheal too did not always toe Finance’s line. Not all retrenchment options suggested by officials were implemented (see below), while Ó Gráda points out that the party ignored some of the department’s deflationary proposals in 1931 as did Fianna Fáil in 1932.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, officials in the department probably found their Cumann na nGaedheal political masters easier to work with given that they shared the same broad ideological persuasions.

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<sup>40</sup> *The Times*, 9 Mar. 1932.

<sup>41</sup> Daly, *Social and economic history*, p. 144.

<sup>42</sup> Clavin, *Great Depression*, p. 129.

<sup>43</sup> Ó Gráda, *A new economic history*, p. 409.



Finance opposed tariffs and monopolies in regard to wheat on the grounds that they often led to inefficiency, higher prices and consumer discontent.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, due to administrative costs, producers would end up charging a higher price for bread which would lead to public discontent while the elimination of the ‘competition element’ would remove any incentive to greater efficiency in economical management. Given that the proposal came from Fianna Fáil, it was clear that it would take a change of government to effect real change in Free State economic policy. It was also clear that if a change of government occurred a more uneasy relationship would emerge between Fianna Fáil ministers and Finance officials who were diametrically opposed to their policies. However, by 1932 and in particular 1933 the world trend was turning away from deflationary policies towards more aggressive state intervention and reflationary pressures. Fianna Fáil’s coming to power in February 1932 coincided with changing economic attitudes as spiralling protectionism replaced the creeping tariffs of the 1920s.

### **Economic Committee**

Responding to pressure from de Valera during the summer of 1928, the government established a wide-ranging, all-party economic committee in November and charged it with examining the economic position of the Free State, how best to improve it and create more employment. In establishing the committee, Cosgrave was responding to the repeated demands and taunts of Fianna Fáil from the opposition benches. For its part, the *Irish Times* was pleased that the opposition party, which it criticised for its tendency to blame the government for all the country’s woes, was being asked, finally, to shoulder a portion of political responsibility.<sup>45</sup> On 21 November 1928, Cosgrave announced the personnel and terms of reference of a committee that would bring government ministers, opposition leaders, industrialists and academics together to discuss solutions to the Free State’s economic problems.<sup>46</sup> It was the first time since the Civil War that Treatyites and anti-Treatyites sat side by side around the same table to work on solutions to problems affecting the country,<sup>47</sup> a point picked up on by the *Irish Times*.<sup>48</sup> In the event, the division between

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<sup>44</sup> Economic Committee, Note on the proposal for the establishment of a wheat control board, (prepared by Finance), 19 Dec. 1928 (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P 24/ 214/F/12).

<sup>45</sup> *Irish Times*, 17 Nov. 1928.

<sup>46</sup> Dáil Debates, vol. 27, col. 429, 21 Nov. 1928 (W.T. Cosgrave).

<sup>47</sup> James Meenan, *George O’Brien*, p. 131.

the two parties ultimately proved unbridgeable, but records of the committee's proceedings in the Ernest Blythe papers shed some interesting light on the motivations behind the policies of both government and alternative government and are particularly useful here in that they are indicative of the influences on Cumann na nGaedheal's economic policies. Professor George O'Brien of UCD was a member of the committee as were the Governor of the Bank of Ireland (Captain A. Nutting), the vice president of the Irish Transport and General Worker's Union (Thomas Kennedy) and ministers Blythe, McGilligan and Hogan. For Fianna Fáil, de Valera, Lemass and James Ryan accepted invitations to sit on the committee as did Labour deputy Richard Anthony and independent T.D. Michael Brennan. Ernest Blythe chaired the committee's meetings while John Leydon of the department of Industry and Commerce acted as its secretary.

The committee spent most of its time discussing tariffs on imported flour and subsidies for wheat (with a view to helping the Irish flour-milling industry) and heard evidence from Irish producers of bread, biscuits and confectionary. The committee also discussed various proposals from Fianna Fáil, notably its suggestion for a control board for wheat as discussed above.<sup>49</sup> The 1926 census of production showed that the vast majority of wheat milled in the Free State had been imported, as had overall ingredients used in the biscuit, bread and confectionary industries.<sup>50</sup> Fianna Fáil had long advocated a shift towards tariffs, self-sufficiency and wheat production, and so favoured wheat subsidies and import duties on flour. Another motivating factor in the opposition party's position was the State's adverse balance of trade, which stood at just under £7,000,000 in 1928.<sup>51</sup>

An Economic Committee meeting on 12 March 1929 was attended by two representatives of Jacobs.<sup>52</sup> The problem before this meeting was the importation of high-grade flour from Britain which damaged the Irish mills. Unlike their British counterparts, Irish mills had no outlet for low-grade flour. Bread made from it could not be sold in competition with bread made from imported flour. As such, bakers had an incentive to import flour. Fianna Fáil members of the committee were always keen to press for protection particularly to encourage Irish wheat production, the Cumann na nGaedheal

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<sup>48</sup> *Irish Times*, 6 Dec. 1928.

<sup>49</sup> Memorandum for the Economic Committee 'Proposals for the encouragement of Home Production of wheat', 18 Dec. 1928 (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/214/F/12).

<sup>50</sup> The Census of Production 1926, wheat, flour, bread and bread, flour, confectionary and biscuit making industries (ibid.).

<sup>51</sup> Summary of External trade 1927-28 (ibid., P24/214/F/9).

<sup>52</sup> Economic Committee, thirteenth meeting, 12 Mar. 1929 (ibid. P24/213).

element usually opposed them or sought a compromise. For instance, Blythe proposed an arrangement whereby firms such as Jacobs engaged in the manufacture of biscuits for export would be allowed to import, free of a duty, any flour they required on promising not to use the imported flour for any other purpose especially sale.<sup>53</sup> However, tariffs were not always favoured by Irish manufacturers. For firms like Jacobs, protectionist measures could increase their costs while also reducing the quality of their produce. An experienced flour miller claimed that Irish wheat was difficult to work with given its high water content and that a tariff would do little to address the Irish millers' competitive disadvantage with British firms.<sup>54</sup> This point was emphasised by O'Brien who remained unenthusiastic about protection.

At another meeting McGilligan seemed to encapsulate the Cumann na nGaedheal position. While there was common ground with de Valera and Lemass in their willingness to consider proposals that would help native millers and producers, McGilligan wanted to know if the benefits brought about by the introduction of a tariff would be worth the various disadvantages that had been set out by O'Brien, Bridges and representatives of Jacobs. Bridges had warned that the introduction of a tariff would force the smaller Irish mills out of business and McGilligan feared that there would be no great increase in employment or working conditions (given that jobs would be lost in the closed mills) to justify driving the small mills out of business. McGilligan wanted to know if the country's demands could be supplied as cheaply under protection. He was told prices would increase with the introduction of a tariff. McGilligan also feared that large English firms would come into Ireland if a tariff was introduced.<sup>55</sup> In response he was told it would be impossible to keep English firms 'from looking at Ireland'. These exchanges reflect the cautious approach of Cumann na nGaedheal to protectionist policies and illustrate that they were grounded somewhat in genuine concerns that tariffs could create new problems, or at the very least fail to address the issue which they were intended to solve. Cumann na nGaedheal analysed each case on its merits and continued its cautious policy on tariffs. In this instance McGilligan seems to have judged that it was economically unviable for the Irish mills to reach 100% capacity and that the negative consequences might undermine the gains from such a policy.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> A. Bridges to John Leydon, secretary of the economic committee, 21 Jan. 1929 (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/214/B).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

The Committee produced a majority report in May stating that ‘from the point of view either of the farmer or of the nation there is no justification for any subsidy for wheat’. The report also went on to state that the rejection by the Tariff Commission of an application for a tariff on imported flour was the correct decision.<sup>56</sup> However, Fianna Fáil remained committed to the introduction of an import duty on flour. In a minority report compiled by Seán Lemass, and signed by the committee’s Labour member, the party’s position was set out clearly. Lemass claimed that the Tariff Commission’s judgement had been called into question as a result of the Economic Committee’s work and that the case for a tariff on flour had been strengthened.<sup>57</sup> Lemass’s minority report set out an alternative policy that would prohibit the milling or importation of flour other than straight-run. Lemass further recommended that an import duty be placed on all flour imported into the Free State with the exception of that imported under licence, to be issued by the department of Industry and Commerce, and for exclusive use in the manufacture of biscuits. Lemass also listed countries that had introduced high protective tariffs to conserve their flour milling industries: Finland, Czechoslovakia, Italy, USA, Poland, France, Germany, Japan, Norway and Sweden.

The document also admitted that Britain had over-milled since the war, making cheap British imports attractive to Irish firms, while acknowledging that the numbers of new jobs through the scheme would be negligible. Why introduce the tariff so? Lemass reasoned that the tariff would force Irish mills to work at full capacity, thereby providing more work days and better wages for existing workers. The work of the committee shows that there were pragmatists in both parties and the thinking that underpinned the policies adopted. They show too that where Cumann na nGaedheal policy might be motivated by the dictate of the market and economic logic, Fianna Fáil’s seems to have had at the heart of its economic nationalism a progressive commitment to better conditions for workers. While the committee received correspondence from firms seeking state help in creating employment through various business ventures, it was wound down in July 1929. Leydon wrote to Cosgrave stating that the committee’s members had unanimously agreed that further meetings could not be justified given the disparity between the Fianna Fáil and Cumann na nGaedheal positions. The *Irish Times*, noting that the Labour representative, who sided with Fianna Fáil’s minority report, had ‘made reservations on particular points’

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<sup>56</sup> *Irish Times*, 4 May 1929.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Flour’, report by Seán Lemass, undated (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/214/D).

added that it was clear that the policies of the two main parties were ‘diametrically opposed and few people believed that they could be reconciled at round-table conferences’.<sup>58</sup> The committee proved a failure but is of interest here in that it sheds light on the respective positions of the two main parties.

### **Eve of election Retrenchment 1931**

Ireland was slow to feel the effects of the Depression as the price of those goods the Free State imported fell more rapidly than those it exported. However, by 1931 its affects were clearly felt and it had created a considerable gap in the country’s budgetary position. While Income Tax and Corporation Profit taxes remained stable, decreased trade, particularly from 1930 onwards, affected customs and excise duties. As noted, reductions in alcohol consumption had already affected revenue in previous years and the depressed state of world trade worsened the position of the Free State’s finances. In the autumn and winter of 1929, the government demonstrated its continued adherence to economic liberalism and the eradication of trade barriers by entering into commercial treaties first with Portugal,<sup>59</sup> and then with Norway.<sup>60</sup> In signing the treaty with Portugal, the government asserted its autonomy by insisting that the Great Seal of the Free State be used. The British consented and it was the first time the state’s seal was used in an international document. However, trade continued to slide, and had an adverse effect on revenue. By September 1931, receipts were £721,500 less than the budget estimate, with the fall in customs and excise responsible for the greater part of the loss.<sup>61</sup> The extent to which the country’s trade was devastated by the world depression, is illustrated by the fact that, in the period July 1930 to June 1931, Free State imports and exports fell by some £8,000,000 each resulting in an overall reduction of trade valuing £16,300,000.<sup>62</sup> Trade had also fallen in the previous year, though not to the same extent. In preparatory work for the budget for the financial year 1932/33, the trade depression was taken into account with the result that revenue estimates were down by over one million pounds on the previous year. For the conservative officials of the department of Finance, government was still costing too much,

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<sup>58</sup> *Irish Times*, 25 July 1929.

<sup>59</sup> Fourth Executive Council, minutes of meeting, 1 Oct. 1929 (NAI, Department of the Taoiseach, G2/6)

<sup>60</sup> Fourth Executive Council, minutes of meeting, 12 Nov. 1929 (ibid.).

<sup>61</sup> Financial position, Supplementary memorandum from the Department of Finance, 15 Sept. 1931 (UCDA, Patrick McGilligan papers, P35a/11).

<sup>62</sup> *The Times*, 14 Aug. 1931.

with McElligott castigating the failure to effect sufficient administrative economies, such as reductions in the Governor General's establishment, as had been suggested in previous years.<sup>63</sup> A budget deficit of £2,460,500 was anticipated for the financial year 1932/33.

Of course Ireland was not unique. The world trade depression affected most countries and made the task of balancing the budget that bit more difficult. In fact, the Free State was one of very few countries that managed to balance its budget in 1930/31. That financial year had produced a very small surplus in Ireland while there were budget deficits of 2% in Czechoslovakia, 3% in France and Britain, 6 % in Germany and 22 % in the United States.<sup>64</sup> However, given the squeeze on the country's trade and the changed world conditions, balancing the following year's budget would prove even more difficult. Something would have to give. Taxation would have to increase or spending would need to be cut if Cumann na nGaedheal was to avoid having to implement policies that it had long opposed.

The problem of unemployment is synonymous with the history of inter-war Europe. However, in the predominantly agricultural Irish Free State, unemployment was not the problem that it was in more industrial nations such as Britain or Germany. Having failed to industrialise during the 1920s, Irish cities were not crowded with disenfranchised unemployed as characteristic of more highly industrialised centres in this period. Unemployment in the Free State is notoriously difficult to determine given the short-term nature of assistance,<sup>65</sup> and the fact that there had long been nationalist hostility to welfare provisions introduced by the British. The closure of the emigration outlet to North America meant that the country, as in 1918 (see previous chapters), contained more discontented people than usual by the time the election of February 1932 came along. Both employers and employees paid into the unemployment fund but less people claimed benefit than were registered as unemployed, perhaps as a consequence of the agricultural nature of the economy farming was able to absorb some of the unemployed workers.<sup>66</sup> In 1922 over 40,000 Irish people were out of work. The numbers unemployed remained high until the mid 1920s before falling dramatically to 21,019 in 1926. In September 1930 there were 20,652 on the live register. Emigration was an option available to Irish people who could

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<sup>63</sup> Estimates 1929-30, suggested economies (UCDA, Patrick McGilligan papers, P35a/10).

<sup>64</sup> The budget position in various countries, J.J. McElligott to Patrick McGilligan, 5 Feb. 1932 (ibid., P35a/12).

<sup>65</sup> Brian Girvin, *Between two worlds: politics and economy in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 1989), p. 35.

<sup>66</sup> Mel Cousins, *Explaining the Irish welfare state: an historical, comparative and political analysis* (New York, 2005), p. 13.

not find work in the mid 1920s. By the early 1930s, emigration to North America practically ceased as the United States, feeling the effects of the crash, restricted immigration resulting in a slight population increase in the Free State. As Britain recovered in the mid-1930s, Irish emigrants found a new destination. Cumann na nGaedheal adopted a conservative approach to unemployment believing it was not the business of government to create jobs and remained focussed on private enterprise.<sup>67</sup> Ireland's public finances continued to deteriorate given the world slump and a tax on petrol was introduced to finance a new agricultural grant. The party stood by its dictum that the farming sector was the state's primary economic interest.

In the autumn of 1931 it was clear that a supplementary budget was necessary to help bridge the gap between receipts and expenditure. The government needed to find £900,000 and decided to recover half that amount by increasing taxation by six pence in the pound and doubling the petrol duty. The remainder would come from retrenchment.<sup>68</sup> Tough austerity had been introduced in Germany the previous year,<sup>69</sup> while in September 1931, public sector pay cuts in Britain represented a last ditch attempt to stay on the gold standard.<sup>70</sup> Britain changed course eventually under a new government. In Ireland, Cumann na nGaedheal, nearing the end of its term, was unlikely to radically change its approach and so prepared to trim the state's wage bill. Numerous ways of saving money were proposed by the department of Finance. Among those options for consideration were reductions in garda pay, teacher's salaries and once again, old-age pensions.<sup>71</sup> On the eve of a general election, the discussion of such reductions, let alone their implementation, would do nothing to enhance the party's popularity with the electorate. Remaining committed to its orthodox policy, the government faced a difficult political choice.

With memories of the political backlash it faced in 1924 over the pension reduction, the government decided to target public salaries rather than cut the old age pension again. However, cutting teacher's salaries and garda pay provoked fierce resistance and proved politically damaging. Rumours of retrenchment and salary cuts for gardaí and teachers were widespread in the autumn of 1931. It was well known that people would be asked to make sacrifices given the difficulty of balancing the budget and many saw it as their

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<sup>67</sup> E. Rumpf and A.C. Hepburn, *Nationalism and socialism in twentieth-century Ireland* (Liverpool, 1977), p. 126.

<sup>68</sup> *The Economist*, 13 Feb. 1932.

<sup>69</sup> Clavin, *Great Depression*, p. 117.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>71</sup> *Economies*, 28 Oct. 1931 (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/147).

patriotic duty providing the cuts were fair. The government's economy committee had 'reported on the teachers' salaries as a likely source of Exchequer saving, even before the present stringent financial situation arose' reported the *Irish Times*, which predicted resistance unless teachers would be shown that other public servants would similarly be 'obliged to suffer in the national interest'.<sup>72</sup> Finance's memo argued that the savings from salaries were justified given that the cost of living had fallen since the scales were introduced in 1920.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, the document pointed out that the passage of the School Attendance Act would result in the appointment of 500 additional teachers thus placing a considerable drain on public finances. The government, keen to ensure that the political path to cuts would be as smooth as possible, arranged for a deputation of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation to meet with Blythe and John Marcus O'Sullivan, the Education minister. Teachers were asked to accept a 10% cut to their existing salaries (6% wage cut combined with new pension arrangements amounting to 4%). The Teacher's organisation accepted the cut before Christmas, saving the Exchequer some £300,000.<sup>74</sup>

Reducing police pay was to prove more problematic. By 12 January 1932 it was clear that Blythe's plan to cut government costs was to be extended to the gardaí, with all ranks subject to a 5% reduction.<sup>75</sup> In 1929 Blythe had told the Dáil that police pay was at rock bottom and that members of the force need not fear the economic axe. This made the announcement of January 1932 a particularly bitter bill for gardaí to swallow. Government platitudes about depressed world conditions and the need to balance the national budget did little to ease the pain. O'Duffy was incensed by the government's decision to reduce the pay of his force and made his views clear to his political masters in 'a memo, which verged on political blackmail'.<sup>76</sup> Showing his unsuitability for the role of police commissioner, O'Duffy claimed that the garda 'individually and collectively' had been a loyal and faithful servant of the government and had helped party organisers 'carry out their organising work'.<sup>77</sup> So much for Kevin O'Higgins' speech to the Dáil in 1924 when he said 'those who take the pay and wear the uniform of the State, be they soldiers or

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<sup>72</sup> *Irish Times*, 16 Nov. 1931.

<sup>73</sup> *Economies*, 28 Oct. 1931 (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/147).

<sup>74</sup> *Irish Times*, 21 Dec. 1931.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 Jan. 1932.

<sup>76</sup> Fearghal McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy: a self-made hero* (Oxford, 2005), p. 188.

<sup>77</sup> Confidential memo regarding further reduction in the pay of the Garda Síochana, 22 Jan. 1932 (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/488)



police, must be non-political servants of the State'.<sup>78</sup> In the memo, O'Duffy demonstrated his over-eagerness to involve himself in political matters and portrayed the force as the servants of the government party. He claimed, gardaí had helped Cumann na nGaedheal win votes and had dealt with interrupters at party meetings. The police commissioner further alleged that the government would cynically pay no heed to garda protests because they knew a Fianna Fáil government would be even more unsympathetic to their interests. Cumann na nGaedheal by then was growing ever more impatient with O'Duffy and would likely have dismissed him had they won the 1932 election.<sup>79</sup>

Also problematic for Cumann na nGaedheal as it campaigned for re-election in 1932, was a sense that it had been wrong not to introduce more tariffs. Cosgrave's introduction of new protectionist measures in 1931 seemed to indicate the party knew it had been wrong and was about to mimic the Fianna Fáil policy.<sup>80</sup> As stated numerous times, Cumann na nGaedheal adopted a cautious approach to protection given that such policies had been synonymous with Irish nationalist politics for decades and in particular with the Sinn Féin party of Arthur Griffith, from which it claimed a direct lineage. Yet the Free State under Cumann na nGaedheal was generally committed to liberal economics and by the time of the 1932 election, the state was an exception in that 'it was ruled by Europe's longest-serving democratic government, and it could claim (with some exaggeration) to be one of the world's last free-trading nations.'<sup>81</sup> Cosgrave's government continued to experiment with tariffs until 1932, slowly introducing new duties as had been the trend of 1920s Europe. Cosgrave, in the early 1930s, was slow to join the new tendency towards spiralling tariffs and was regarded by Keynes as a 'nineteenth century liberal'.<sup>82</sup> As the Depression worsened, tariffs were extended and in January 1931, Cumann na nGaedheal and Fianna Fáil joined forces to vote through the imposition of a new duty on imported butter.<sup>83</sup> In response, the November 1931 Customs Duties (Provisional Imposition) Act empowered the government to pass emergency charges to prevent the dumping of goods on the Irish market. As the Depression worsened, Fianna Fáil's economic policies seemed to be vindicated, putting Cumann na nGaedheal increasingly on the back foot. On the international arena, Cumann na nGaedheal representatives had always espoused a more

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<sup>78</sup> Dáil Debates, vol. 7, col. 3161, 26 June 1924 (Kevin O'Higgins).

<sup>79</sup> McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy*, p. 188.

<sup>80</sup> Fifth Executive Council, minutes of meeting, 21 Oct. 1931 (NAI, Department of the Taoiseach, G2/8)

<sup>81</sup> Ó Gráda, *A new economic history*, p. 386.

<sup>82</sup> Mel Cousins, *The birth of social welfare in Ireland, 1922-52* (Dublin, 2003), p. 30.

<sup>83</sup> *The Times*, 23 Jan. 1931.

avowedly protectionist position than that they pursued domestically, but that was probably more in keeping with a desire to assert Ireland's authority internationally as a small nation and not to allow the country be steamrolled by the agenda set by the bigger powers.<sup>84</sup> Duties introduced in 1929 on quilts and woollen goods had boosted revenue (helping to make up for that lost elsewhere) and resulted in modest employment increases as had previous duties on soaps, jams, confectionary, blankets and shirts. However, the same document exercised caution when it claimed that British exporters were forced to quote a lower price when home competition was effective and that certain imports could not be stamped out because people had a preference for a certain 'taste' or brand.<sup>85</sup>

### **The 1932 election: political, economic and social change?**

Retrenchment and the appearance of mimicking its opponent's policies was not a successful blueprint for electoral victory in any era. Yet, this is precisely how Cumann na nGaedheal entered the campaign in February 1932, although the latter point has probably been overstated by previous writers, as we shall see later. Of course, Cosgrave need not have called the election when he did; it may well have been beneficial to wait until the summer when the public pay cuts controversy had settled down. Anxious to avoid politicising July's Eucharistic Congress, Cosgrave decided to have the question of who should govern decided in advance.<sup>86</sup> Whoever won the election would face steep economic problems, but still each party fought intensely for the poisoned chalice.

One consequence of Cumann na nGaedheal's financial orthodoxy was that social services suffered. In an era before the welfare state, public services in the 1920s and 30s were still evolving and throughout this thesis it has been shown that the economic reality of independence, and the agricultural nature of Irish economic activity, meant that state resources of independent Ireland would be sparse limiting the scope for expansion in terms of the services provided by the state. A quite developed welfare system was inherited on independence. Irish nationalists and Catholics alike had never been enthusiastic about the welfare provisions introduced by the British government and it was likely these would not

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<sup>84</sup> As expressed by Blythe and O'Sullivan at the 1928 League of Nations Economic Conference, *Irish Independent*, 14 Sept.1928.

<sup>85</sup> Effect of tariffs on prices in the Saorstát, 14 Apr. 1931 (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers P24/321/2).

<sup>86</sup> Keogh, *Twentieth-century Ireland*, p. 51.

be extended after independence.<sup>87</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal chose to cut taxation and reduce spending which further limited the services provided under the Free State government. This was a policy choice made by the government and another consequence of its rigid adherence to economic liberalism. Blythe and his colleagues believed that sacrifices made during their time in government would be to the long term benefit of the country. Addressing a Cumann na nGaedheal meeting in Nenagh in April 1930 Blythe said his priority was not reckless social policy in the present but ‘the giving of an opportunity to the country to develop, so that in times to come, perhaps, much greater social benefits could be given without imposing such a burden as would be necessary now’.<sup>88</sup>

Having matured in opposition for five years, Fianna Fáil entered the 1932 contest looking more like a government in waiting than ever before. Fianna Fáil’s Dáil speeches, the proceedings of the Economic Committee and its by-election campaigns and propaganda hinted at the type of change that it would implement if elected to government. Fianna Fáil was likely to put more acres under tillage to the detriment of the commercial farmers who favoured Cumann na nGaedheal; divert more resources to native industry; and substantially expand Free State tariffs as it embarked on a policy of self-sufficiency. Irish agriculture’s focus would change from trade to subsistence. As noted by Terence Dooley, Fianna Fáil intimated it ‘would tackle the land question much more forcibly and radically than Cumann na nGaedheal’ and de Valera’s rhetoric promised to divide the grazing ranches among the labourers and young farmers.<sup>89</sup> The Depression made it difficult for many farmers to pay their land annuities and the main opposition party promised to withhold these in the Free State.<sup>90</sup> In this way Fianna Fáil was able to appeal to those discontented with the pace of change, pushing Cumann na nGaedheal further to a reactionary position.

As seen in earlier chapters, outrages were still a feature of Irish life and the IRA and Saor Éire were two increasingly left-wing and militant organisations that the government was acutely aware of. Given the opposition of these groups to Cumann na nGaedheal and the Free State, the fact that the government party’s policy position of economic liberalism was in retreat globally, and that Fianna Fáil was proposing radical changes, it was but a

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<sup>87</sup> Mel Cousins, *Birth of social welfare*, p. 21.

<sup>88</sup> *Nenagh Guardian*, 5 Apr. 1930.

<sup>89</sup> Terence Dooley, *The land for the people’: the land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), p. 99.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp100-1.

short leap for the party's propagandists to dream up the 'gunmen versus statesmen'<sup>91</sup> or 'Red scare' campaign that characterised the 1932 general election. Regan has shown how Treatyite intellectuals such as Tierney, Professor James Hogan and Desmond FitzGerald feared Fianna Fáil's social and economic programme and how their own response was intertwined with contemporary trends in Catholic social teaching, although he probably goes a little far in attributing it to paranoia within the party leadership.<sup>92</sup> It should not be forgotten that the opposition party threatened the core support of the urban middle class and commercial farmers who had subscribed to Cumann na nGaedheal's economic policies.<sup>93</sup> Through a combination of its tariff policy, its emphasis on putting more acres under tillage and its promotion of land division policies that Garvin describes as a 'wager on the weak',<sup>94</sup> the main opposition party, consciously or not posed as a party of political, social and economic change. Taken with intelligence reports in the late 1920s and early 1930s,<sup>95</sup> and attempts to depict the IRA as a front for Communist infiltration,<sup>96</sup> the 'Red scare' was a small leap of imagination in this deeply conservative society. Clearly, the momentum was with Fianna Fáil given the type of policies it was proposing as the economy contracted and the manner in which the government had antagonised various sections of the electorate in the lead-up to the campaign. On the defensive, Cumann na nGaedheal responded with its negative campaign in the hope of rallying its core support while once again posing as the party of stability. Cumann na nGaedheal promised to protect a state and a society that would be jeopardised should Fianna Fáil implement its policies. This negative campaign revealed the reality that the policies previously pursued by the government had been largely discredited.

Cumann na nGaedheal stood on its record in 1932, as the party that had upheld the Treaty and had ensured the Free State's credit was high internationally. The party also sought to highlight the successes of its External Affairs policy as ministers emphasised that Britain could not interfere in the Free State without incurring the wrath of the other Dominions (the Statute of Westminster 1931). However, as Ciara Meehan points out, there was little domestic political capital to be gained from much of the party's diplomatic

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<sup>91</sup> John M. Regan, *The Irish counter revolution, 1921-1936: Treatyite politics and settlement in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), p. 279.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 280-7.

<sup>93</sup> Ó Gráda, *A new economic history*, p. 386.

<sup>94</sup> Tom Garvin, *Preventing the future: why was Ireland so poor for so long?* (Dublin, 2005), p. 38

<sup>95</sup> Department of Justice report, 4 July 1929; Eoin O'Duffy to secretary of the department of Justice, 27 July 1931 (UCDA, Desmond FitzGerald papers, P80/851/21; P80/857).

<sup>96</sup> McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy*, p. 183.

achievements and the Statute of Westminster had come too late for its impact to be of electoral benefit to Cumann na nGaedheal.<sup>97</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal simply argued that the Free State was independent in an attempt to counter the Republican and irredentist card played by Fianna Fáil.<sup>98</sup> Essentially it stood for the status quo at a time when emigration outlets were closed off, people failed to see any material benefits for the sacrifices they had made, and the arguments for an alternative agenda seemed insurmountable given what has been described as the ‘beggar-my-neighbour character of international politics and trade in the 1930s’.<sup>99</sup> Fianna Fáil was the party of radical change, proposing a new departure in economic and social policy. Addressing an election meeting at Dunlavin, Lemass appealed to former supporters of other parties to join with Fianna Fáil in having ‘the spirit of Irish nationalism invoked in a sustained effort to solve their social and economic problems’.<sup>100</sup> A new epoch was ushered in as Fianna Fáil won the election inaugurating an immediate transformation, with far-reaching consequences.

### **Fianna Fáil in government**

Fianna Fáil governed with the support of the Labour party until January 1933. At its first cabinet meeting on 10 March 1932, the new government decided to release a great number of Republican prisoners and to immediately set about changing the State’s tariff policy.<sup>101</sup> If the implementation of tariffs under Cumann na nGaedheal had been piecemeal, those decided on at the first cabinet meeting by Fianna Fáil were revolutionary. The new government’s tariff policy was quite a contrast to the approach of the Cosgrave government as something in the region of 200 new tariffs were initiated, amounting to an immediate adoption of wholesale protectionism. Moreover, Fianna Fáil, as promised, withheld the land annuities, provoking a furious response from Britain. Whatever goodwill had existed between the state and Britain evaporated as the outbreak of a damaging Economic War between the two marked de Valera’s first year in power. Described by Keogh as a ‘costly diplomatic gaffe’,<sup>102</sup> and as a ‘silly political wrangle’ by Ó Gráda, the Economic War coming as it did at a time of worldwide depression, compounded the

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<sup>97</sup> Ciara Meehan, *The Cosgrave party: a history of Cumann na nGaedheal, 1923-33* (Dublin, 2010), p. 138.

<sup>98</sup> *Irish Independent*, 18 Jan. 1932.

<sup>99</sup> Garvin, *Preventing the future*, p. 32.

<sup>100</sup> *Irish Independent*, 1 Feb. 1932.

<sup>101</sup> Sixth Executive Council, minutes of meeting, 10 Mar. 1932 (NAI, Department of the Taoiseach, G3/1).

<sup>102</sup> Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth-century Ireland*, p. 90.

country's difficulties. As stated above, the initial round of tariffs introduced by Britain had no appreciable effect on trade in the Free State and the dominions were exempt. However, in its review of 1932, *The Economist* was clear that the retention of the land annuities by de Valera and Britain's subsequent retaliatory tariff were the causes of a trade war that 'obscured tendencies which otherwise would have been observed'.<sup>103</sup> In addition, the magazine correctly surmised that the trade war worked to Fianna Fáil's advantage in that it facilitated the new government's domestic policy agenda of self-sufficiency. Fianna Fáil would pursue considerable state intervention in the form of compulsion, subsidies and tariffs to bring about the self-sufficient national economy. However, the effect on southern agriculture was disastrous as traditional economic activity was doubly affected. Not only was the Free State excluded from Imperial preference, it was subjected to penal duties.<sup>104</sup> At a time when competition for the British market was more intense than ever, the Free State lost its traditional position. Johnson argues that Irish livestock exports to Britain 'would almost certainly have been given favourable treatment' were it not for the Economic war and British suspicion of de Valera's political motives.<sup>105</sup>

From the opposition benches, former Cumann na nGaedheal ministers speculated as to how the new government could square the circles of collapsed revenue, a likely deficit and ambitious programmes of social and economic reform that would cost a great deal of money at a time of economic contraction. This reflected the extent to which the party remained caught up in the orthodoxies that had characterised its decade in power. For Blythe, it was a 'strange and moving spectacle' that the Civil War vanquished should be 'handed over the control of the army, police force and Treasury of the Irish Free State'. It was a bitter pill for Blythe that the 'party now called Cumann na nGaedheal, led on the first occasion by the late Arthur Griffith and the late Michael Collins, and in the three subsequent elections by Mr. Cosgrave...[should now find itself] in a minority'.<sup>106</sup> Blythe pondered how a government committed to extending social services could do so given the perilous position of the Exchequer: 'Fianna Fail [sic], therefore, is faced with the problem of providing increased social services out of a revenue that will certainly be smaller than it

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<sup>103</sup> *The Economist*, 18 Feb. 1933.

<sup>104</sup> David Johnson, *The interwar economy in Ireland* (Dundalk, 1989), p. 13.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>106</sup> Speech on the coming to power of Fianna Fáil, undated, [Mar.1932?] (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/515).

has been heretofore'.<sup>107</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal was sure that de Valera would come unstuck and that Cosgrave would soon be called on to form a government once more. In the meantime Blythe promised constructive opposition and that his party would 'cooperate in every step in which they can see a prospect of promoting the welfare of the nation'. Cumann na nGaedheal's first annual convention as an opposition party took place in April 1932. Delegates warned of the danger of the Free State pursuing an isolationist policy and called on the new government to continue the work of Cumann na nGaedheal. Fianna Fáil was warned against policies that would endanger the 'economic advantages of Commonwealth membership'. Delegates to the Cumann na nGaedheal convention passed resolutions stating that the party had restored order to a country it found in chaos during the Civil War and had handed over a balanced budget to its successors. Moreover, party members argued that the Free State inherited by the Fianna Fáil government was 'suffering less from the effect of economic depression than any other country in the world'.<sup>108</sup>

Tax increases were anticipated in Fianna Fáil's first budget to meet its 'ambitious schemes of social reform'.<sup>109</sup> In the event, taxation did increase, to the consternation of business interests and the Cumann na nGaedheal opposition. The party claimed that Fianna Fáil was imposing taxes that the community could not bear. Fianna Fáil brought taxation back to five shillings in the pound (it had been six shillings in 1922). The new government also introduced the Control of Manufacturers Act. This act aimed to limit the scope of foreign firms to establish plants in the Free State, therefore countering those who had argued against protected industries on the grounds that foreign competitors might seek shelter behind the tariff wall. Under the act, in a throwback to Lemass's work on the Economic Committee, such firms had to seek a special licence from the minister for Industry. Fianna Fáil believed the act would eliminate foreign competition thereby encouraging Irish capital to invest in native industry. Again Cumann na nGaedheal and business interests opposed the new measure with McGilligan arguing the act infringed on certain commercial treaties, entered into by the Cosgrave government.<sup>110</sup> Commercial farmers saw their wealth dwindle during 1933 and 1934 as cattle exports from the Free State collapsed in value. Johnson describes Fianna Fáil's agricultural policies as a failure with overall output falling and the increased tillage acreage failing to provide more

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 6 Apr. 1932.

<sup>109</sup> *The Times*, 9 May 1932.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 16 June 1932.

employment on the land.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, protectionism pushed Irish prices above world levels.

Such is the background to the political instability in the Free State in 1932-33.<sup>112</sup> The new government embarked on a radical overhaul of Free State policy. This challenged what Mike Cronin has called those voters who had prospered under the ‘sturdy, upright, Conservative government of Cosgrave’.<sup>113</sup> Those voters subsequently felt threatened by the political changes that were taking place and flocked to the ranks of the Blueshirts after Cumann na nGaedheal’s second defeat in January 1933. Perhaps de Valera had moved too swiftly to effect change? Political instability, ultimately the fruits of his crusade, proved devastating for the reputation of a country that was experiencing economic hardship. The *Wall Street Journal* was scathing in its criticism of Ireland’s new government. Lamenting the way Fianna Fáil had handled the state’s main economic activity, the journal claimed that Ireland had once been a leading cattle exporter.<sup>114</sup> De Valera was an abstract idealist whose supporters focussed on the intangible realities of Irish nationalism and envisaged an Ireland ‘absolutely independent of all ties whatsoever to any other nation’. Cosgrave’s supporters on the other hand focussed on the tangible realities proposing ‘to make the best of these, looking to the future for an “all Ireland” in *fact* [original emphasis] in full control of her national life, but meanwhile not caring much about those things which lie in the region of form and symbol’. The result of political change had been bitter divisions in Irish society and the mobilising of the IRA and the ‘white army’ (Blueshirts).<sup>115</sup> Similarly, the *Manchester Guardian* commented that Cosgrave had promoted friendly relations with Britain out of ‘economic necessity’.<sup>116</sup> The *New York Times* believed that the mainstay of the Irish economy under Cosgrave, the cattle market, was on the brink of collapse due to the trade war.<sup>117</sup> The price of dairy cows had fallen sharply leaving farmers reluctant to sell even if they would soon have no choice due to the cost of feeding the animals. On the same day, the *Herald Tribune* reported on the burning of Union Jacks in Dublin after an anti-imperialist meeting which had resulted in rioting in the city. The paper also reported that poppies had been snatched from their wearers as emboldened Republicans protested

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<sup>111</sup> Johnson, *Interwar economy*, p. 19.

<sup>112</sup> *The Times*, 20 Dec. 1933.

<sup>113</sup> RTÉ documentary, ‘Patriots to a Man’ (2000).

<sup>114</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, 19 Sept. 1932.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 5 Jan. 1933.

<sup>117</sup> *New York Times*, 11 Nov. 1932.



against the legacy of armistice day in the Free State.<sup>118</sup> Ireland, like numerous countries ravaged by the Depression seemed engulfed by economic and political chaos.

Cumann na nGaedheal's second electoral defeat within a year showed that it had not yet grappled with how to survive politically in the rapidly changing world of the early 1930s. As noted, the party had struck a more positive tone for the 1933 election by offering a programme of policies that would mark its return to government, and by introducing a 'talkie film' of Cosgrave.<sup>119</sup> Moreover the party attempted to reconnect with its nationalist background by using the tricolour on advertisements and trumpeting Cosgrave's national record. However, the election had come too soon for the party. Those who had benefitted under Fianna Fáil, the small farmers, new industrialists etc were unlikely to be won over and in fact constituted a broad coalition that would help keep de Valera in power for sixteen, continuous years. Meanwhile those who had suffered disproportionately from the effects of the Economic War, tended to gravitate towards the new National Centre Party as well as Cumann na nGaedheal.<sup>120</sup> The country seemed to be tearing itself apart again as it had done in 1922-23. The fourth National Loan launched in 1933 was affected as the political turmoil worried potential investors.

By September 1933 Cumann na nGaedheal had given way to a new, united opposition party, United Ireland Party-Fine Gael. The new party reflected the extent to which Cumann na nGaedheal had been weakened and discredited by the economic convulsions of the early 1930s. Its second electoral defeat left Cumann na nGaedheal 'demoralised and confused'.<sup>121</sup> It was compelled to accept merger on weaker terms than would have been likely the previous January had Alfie Byrne's 'Mansion House call' for merger come to fruition. This may not have been problematic for Cosgrave and his colleagues given that 'ideologically and culturally, Cumann na nGaedheal and the Centre party were by 1933 practically indistinguishable'.<sup>122</sup> United Ireland reflected some degree of continuity with Cumann na nGaedheal, but initially seemed to reject its parent party's brand of non interventionist economic policy. A manifesto was launched days after the merger on 8 September and a more detailed policy document was unveiled in November. Treatyite intellectuals such as James Hogan and Michael Tierney moved into the policy

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<sup>118</sup> *Herald Tribune*, 11 Nov. 1932.

<sup>119</sup> Meehan, *Cosgrave party*, pp 202-5.

<sup>120</sup> Ó Gráda, *A new economic history*, pp 416-33; Girvin, *Between two worlds*, p. 59

<sup>121</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 2 Sept. 1933.

<sup>122</sup> Regan, *Counter revolution*, p. 341.

vacuum caused by the discrediting of Cosgrave and his colleagues to shape the agenda of the new party.<sup>123</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal's scepticism about the self-sufficiency drive was reiterated, Fine Gael believing the Free State could not operate as a self contained economic unit. Agriculture was again viewed as the main source of future prosperity while 'old-time virtues of thrift, industry, enterprise and fair dealing' would be promoted. These were the 'backbone of success' and, where they were not honoured, 'capital will not come and durable prosperity will not be achieved'.<sup>124</sup> There was change too. While some of the old economic principles would be retained, Fine Gael half heartedly supported a corporatist agenda, as its solution to liberalism's failures.<sup>125</sup> However, the lukewarm support given by some party leaders, and the fact that it was quietly dropped in the mid 1930s suggests that Cumann na nGaedheal lived on in Fine Gael and experimental policies continued to be greeted with a degree of scepticism. The party's embracing of interventionist economic policies should be understood in the context of the global economic collapse and the discrediting of *laissez-faire*. Indeed, the uneasy alliance between Fine Gael and its shirted movement was only maintained initially by de Valera's attempts to coerce the Blueshirts.<sup>126</sup> After O'Duffy's resignation in September 1934, and his failure to retain the loyalty of a vast majority of the grass-roots,<sup>127</sup> the moderates began to take control of the party again. By the mid 1930s, the corporate idealists were lamenting that the new party had become Cumann na nGaedheal all over again. As expressed by Mike Cronin, 'the rejection of direct action and the dismissal of O'Duffy produced a reassertion of Cumann na nGaedheal traditionalism within the Party'.<sup>128</sup>

There was little doubt by 1933 that the pre-1914 order was a bygone era. The attempt to turn the clock back had not worked and the world had changed. German inflation and hyperinflation in the early 1920s had caused alarm and further contributed to the sponsorship of deflationary policies for the remainder of the decade. Moreover, budget deficits were initially frowned upon as any sense that a country's debt was more than it could hope to pay worried investors and experts alike. All that changed around the time of the 1932 election in Ireland. Britain left the gold standard in September 1931 and gradually

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<sup>123</sup> Heads of policy, 11 Nov.1933 (UCDA, Michael Tierney papers, LA30/342/1).

<sup>124</sup> Manifesto, 4 September 1933 (ibid., LA30/343/9).

<sup>125</sup> Eugene Broderick, 'The corporate labour policy of Fine Gael, 1934' in *IHS*, xxiv, no. 113 (May 1994), pp 88-99.

<sup>126</sup> McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy*, p. 228.

<sup>127</sup> McGarry, *Irish politics and the Spanish Civil War* (Cork, 1999), p. 20.

<sup>128</sup> Mike Cronin, *The Blueshirts and Irish politics* (Dublin, 1997), p. 155.

it came to be seen that deflation was actually a further negative force on the economy. Countries rowed back on economic integration in the early 1930s and focussed instead on domestic production and the home market. More and more governments introduced tariffs as a new era approached. Ireland too sought national solutions to its economic problems under de Valera though the upheaval this caused threatened political stability. Like much of inter-war Europe in 1932-33 these tensions in the Irish Free State increasingly spilled over into street politics as an unsettling and bleak future seemed to beckon.

## **Conclusion**

The politics of the Irish Free State was transformed in 1932-33 as Fianna Fáil replaced Cumann na nGaedheal as the largest party in the Dáil to begin a sixteen-year period of unbroken de Valera-led government. Fianna Fáil would emerge with a plurality of seats at every general election until it was consigned to third place behind Fine Gael and the Labour Party in the extraordinary electoral contest of February 2011. For Cumann na nGaedheal, and the subsequent political development of the Irish state, the general elections of 1932 and 1933 had far-reaching consequences. Cumann na nGaedheal jettisoned its own unique identity, in the process leaving what proved a largely fruitless inheritance to its successor party, Fine Gael. For much of the twentieth century and for the first decade of the twenty-first century, Fine Gael languished on the opposition benches and at times struggled to define itself against its major rival. This thesis attempted to understand the complex reasons that caused this dramatic realignment of Irish politics in the early 1930s.

### **Party organisation**

Working on the assertion of others that Cumann na nGaedheal was badly organised, and displayed many of the characteristics of a classic ‘cadre style party’, the first part of this thesis examined this proposition by conducting a study of the party’s structures in three representative constituencies. Cumann na nGaedheal’s organisational machine operated with varying degrees of success in the constituencies of Clare, Longford/Westmeath and Dublin North. In Clare the party struggled electorally and was dogged by internal organisational problems for much of the period. Clare, the bailiwick of the party’s arch rival Eamon de Valera, was something of an anomaly as Cumann na nGaedheal generally fared well in the western constituencies during its period of office

(although it ceded serious ground in the west to Fianna Fáil in 1932-33). In Longford/Westmeath the party's electoral fortunes improved from September 1927 and its organisational efforts there generally proved more successful than those in the barren territory of Clare. Dublin North was consistently one of Cumann na nGaedheal's electoral strongholds throughout the decade in question and was regarded as such by the other parties and even by local and national newspapers. Moreover, the party machine in Dublin North showed innovation in the party's formative days, in the setting up of a constituency social club in November 1927 and in its efforts to expand the cultural and sporting activities of Cumann na nGaedheal. Across all three constituencies efforts were made to expand local branches and to increase party membership between elections. Moreover, organisers such as R.J. Purcell frequently toured the country to build up new *cumainn*. Purcell was well respected by government party supporters across the Free State. After the March 1925 by-elections, various branches in Sligo/Leitrim voted thanks to Purcell on his 'herculean effort' in the campaign and he was presented with a 'wallet of notes' in a Cumann na nGaedheal victory celebration in Sligo on 23 March 1925.<sup>1</sup> On his death in January 1930, the tributes came in from grateful activists across the country as well as figures such as W.T. Cosgrave and Seán Milroy.<sup>2</sup>

Susan Scarrow, building on the work of Maurice Duverger, distinguishes mass parties from cadre parties, not by their success in enrolling a grass-root membership, but by the presence of an 'aspiration' to enlist supporters in a widespread branch organisation.<sup>3</sup> Mass parties were a response to the emergence of newly enfranchised electorates in the early part of the twentieth century, had permanent local structures and reinforced political identity through recreational clubs and party newspapers.<sup>4</sup> In essence, the mass parties of the early twentieth-century created political communities and aimed at the harnessing of their strong support through the organisational structures of the party. Cadre parties, on the other hand, were associated with the era of the more limited franchise. They were decentralised, loosely knit and usually organised around groups of local notables who understood the politics of their party. While largely obsolete by the end of the Great War, many features of the old cadre parties lived on in traditional liberal and conservative

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<sup>1</sup> *Sligo Champion*, 28 Mar. 1925.

<sup>2</sup> *The Star*, 1 Feb. 1930.

<sup>3</sup> Susan E. Scarrow, *Parties and their members: organizing for victory in Britain and Germany* (New York, 1996), pp 19-23.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 1-5.

parties. This was due to what Duverger calls a certain ‘repugnance of the middle class for political regimentation’.<sup>5</sup> While Cumann na nGaedheal displayed some of the characteristics of a cadre type party, particularly with regard to clerical leadership of numerous rural branches in Clare and Longford/Westmeath, it must nevertheless be regarded as a mass organised party of its time, albeit a less successful version than that later mastered by Fianna Fáil. Cumann na nGaedheal was often forced to throw money at organisational problems and on many occasions dispatched paid organisers to badly organised constituencies in advance of general elections to ensure selection conventions were thoroughly representative of party support. However, this practice also occurred in Fianna Fáil. In March 1927, Fianna Fáil delayed its selection convention in Monaghan so as to ‘enable the organisation to be established in certain centres where it did not yet exist’.<sup>6</sup> Reorganisation of the pro-Treaty party’s structures often took place between elections too. In 1925 Cumann na nGaedheal made a determined effort to build permanent structures in Counties such as Clare and Westmeath where previous efforts had proven unsuccessful.

For four years Cumann na nGaedheal operated without a party newspaper due to widespread support for the pro-Treaty position in the national, regional and local press. From 1927 onwards, *The Freeman*, *The Star* and the revived *United Irishman* served as Cumann na nGaedheal sheets while the *North Dublin Election News* carried its election time message to voters in Dublin North. In addition, advisory booklets were produced for rank-and-file members. In advance of the June 1927 poll Cumann na nGaedheal produced an election handbook and in 1932 published *Fighting points for Cumann na nGaedheal speakers and workers, general election 1932*. These publications directed grass-root activists in their electoral role and provided useful information to help with canvassing, rallies and polling day duties. Party publications and official newspapers, such as those produced by Cumann na nGaedheal, are yet another characteristic of mass membership parties in this period. As shown in chapter five, the innovative Dublin North constituency organisation also arranged recreational and cultural events. Such activities were also prevalent in Cumann na nGaedheal circles elsewhere and in 1933 the secretary of the Roscommon constituency urged members to arrange social functions suggesting concerts, dances, dramatic entertainments and card tournaments as examples of events that could

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<sup>5</sup> Maurice Duverger, *Political parties: their organization and activity in the modern state* (London, 1969), p. 67.

<sup>6</sup> National Executive, minutes of meeting, 18 Mar. 1927 (UCDA, Fianna Fáil papers, P176/351/6).

prove successful.<sup>7</sup> Like mass parties of the time, Cumann na nGaedheal aimed to enrol its supporters in a nationwide branch network and Dublin North's recreational activities were intended to strengthen supporters' identification with the party. Cumann na nGaedheal's clear desire to build a mass party also explains the recruitment of paid organisers to stir and expand its existing structures.

On leaving government in 1932 concerted efforts were made to improve the Cumann na nGaedheal grass-root organisation. Blythe wrote of the need to attract more young people into Cumann na nGaedheal and suggested the party make use of the Army Comrades Association in much the same way as Fianna Fáil had depended on the anti-Treaty IRA for much of its vitality in the mid to late 1920s.<sup>8</sup> A year later after its second electoral defeat in less than twelve months Cumann na nGaedheal front benchers established a reorganisation committee under the guidance of Richard Mulcahy. In the spring of 1933 Mulcahy produced numerous documents geared towards the breathing of new life into Cumann na nGaedheal's constituency structures. The former minister formulated a new scheme of organisation that would target the working classes, the labourers, the young and women voters.<sup>9</sup> Before the merger to form Fine Gael, Cumann na nGaedheal was already looking at ways to emulate Fianna Fáil's success at developing as a mass movement. In opposition, the party's leaders could devote more time to the development of its grass-root structures, Cosgrave took on the lead role in the organisation for the first time, and branch members themselves recognised their important new role. It is worth quoting the County Roscommon secretary again:

I do not propose in this letter to deal with the political situation beyond saying that I believe this Organisation will again be the one which will have to supply the next Government for this State and this being my opinion I would impress on you and your Members the need for keeping your Cumann in a good working condition, by having regular Meetings, by enrolling new[,] and if possible[,] young members and by being always prepared for any eventualities that may arise.<sup>10</sup>

Cumann na nGaedheal activists had less scope to influence policy than their anti-Treatyite counterparts. In Fianna Fáil each *cumann* was entitled to two delegates at the *Ard*

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<sup>7</sup> Roscommon County secretary to each *cumann*, Apr. 1933 (UCDA, Martin Conlon papers, P97/22/1).

<sup>8</sup> Note on organisation of Cumann na nGaedheal, undated [Feb. 1933?] (UCDA, Ernest Blythe papers, P24/652).

<sup>9</sup> Untitled and undated [Feb. 1933?] (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy papers, P7b/90/4).

<sup>10</sup> Roscommon county secretary to each *cumann*, Apr. 1933 (UCDA, Martin Conlon papers, P97/22/1).

*Fheis*, in Cumann na nGaedheal, from 1926 onwards, each branch could send one delegate to the party's annual convention. Given that it spent most of its life in government, Cumann na nGaedheal was unlikely to yield too much power to its grass-roots to the detriment of administrative probity in the early years of Irish statehood. Bad experiences during the Treaty debates ensured Treatyite leaders would not be tied to the resolutions passed by party militants in 'packed convention halls and rigged ballots'.<sup>11</sup> Power would rest with the parliamentary party and ultimately with the government. As noted by David Farrell, this was a characteristic of Irish parties generally. The 'predominant party model in Ireland' was one where the parliamentary party was independent of party structures (though they could sit on the organisation's committees) and headquarters' staffs, such as the general secretary, were answerable to the party leader. In post-independence Irish politics elected politicians were not subservient to their party machine and the grass-roots would generally have a limited role in the formation of policy.<sup>12</sup> Duverger argues that this is inevitable. Parliamentary parties are representative of the wider electorate and the voters who identify with the party's policies. National Committees and party conferences on the other hand are representative of paid up members, the party's militants. Parliamentary parties and governments know they cannot formulate policy on such a basis.

Having established Cumann na nGaedheal's status as a mass party, let us qualify this by stating that it was not as successful as Fianna Fáil in building up an extensive party machine. Cumann na nGaedheal possessed at most some 800 branches across the Free State (and this might even be an exaggeration), while Fianna Fáil's totals ranged from 435 to 1,307 between 1926 and 1932.<sup>13</sup> Fianna Fáil's first *Ard Fheis* was attended by 467 delegates and its conferences thereafter were more than double the attendance at Cumann na nGaedheal's annual convention reflecting greater emphasis on branch representation within de Valera's party. Fianna Fáil's second *Ard Fheis* was attended by 1,000 delegates representing 500 branches. Cumann na nGaedheal's 1927 party conference was attended by 325 delegates, each representing one *cumann*. While Sinn Féin had remained Cosgrave's main political opposition the organisational strength of the two parties was

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<sup>11</sup> John M. Regan, *The Irish counter revolution, 1921-1936: Treatyite politics and settlement in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), p. 131.

<sup>12</sup> David M. Farrell, 'Ireland: centralization, professionalization and competitive pressures' in, Richard S. Kratz and Peter Mair (eds), *How parties organize: change and adaptation in party organizations in western democracies* (London, 1994), pp 217-8.

<sup>13</sup> Brian A. Reynolds, 'The formation and development of Fianna Fáil, 1926- 1932' (Ph.D dissertation, TCD, March 1976), appendix vi.



quite evenly matched. In March 1925, there were 375 Sinn Féin branches, eighteen of which were in Britain.<sup>14</sup> When Fianna Fáil was founded, anti-Treatyite organisational prowess stepped up a couple of gears.

A common feature of both the Free State's main parties from 1927 was the tendency of total affiliated *cumann* to drop between elections. While there are no surviving Cumann na nGaedheal membership books to quote from, it is clear from the party's archive, private papers and contemporary newspaper reports that *cumann* were prone to lapse or were slow to affiliate between elections and this often necessitated the efforts of a paid organiser. However, this was also the case in Fianna Fáil. According to Reynolds, there were just 550 affiliated Fianna Fáil branches in 1930 (some of which were in England and Scotland).<sup>15</sup> This indicates that the number of Fianna Fáil *cumann* had halved between 1927 and 1930 before increasing again as the 1932 election approached. As such, a noted lapse in Cumann na nGaedheal's organisation between general elections,<sup>16</sup> was not a uniquely Treatyite phenomenon.

From 1927, Cumann na nGaedheal's organisation lagged behind that of the newly formed Fianna Fáil party which brought a new vigour to party mobilisation in Ireland. Cumann na nGaedheal's organisation had been able to match that of Sinn Féin in the early to mid 1920s but was quite clearly overshadowed by Fianna Fáil's deliberate strategy in the latter part of the decade and into the early 1930s. Fianna Fáil by 1932 was the most successful mass organised party to emerge in Ireland. Cumann na nGaedheal was less successful in part due to the predominantly conservative nature of its support base (inherited through its advocacy of the Treaty), the increasing unpopularity of its policies and because of the party leadership's preoccupation with the day-to-day business of government. Fianna Fáil's superior organisation was undoubtedly a feature in the demise of Cumann na nGaedheal, but caution should be exercised in over-emphasising it as a deciding factor. The policy choices made by Cosgrave's government and an appetite among sections of the electorate for a more strident version of Irish nationalism that dovetailed with wider world economic and political trends were the main factors in Ireland's political realignment of 1932/33. On formulating a new approach to party organisation in the spring of 1933, Mulcahy acknowledged the whirlwind in which the

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<sup>14</sup> Ard Chomairle, report of the honorary secretaries, 19 Mar. 1925 (CCCA, Séamus Fitzgerald papers, PR/6/136/1).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Regan, *Counter revolution*, p. 204.

world was then caught. In a ‘quickly changing world’, his party needed to ‘increase its vote by 75%’ if it was to regain power.<sup>17</sup> Within months, his own party had been swept away in the tide.

### **Wider trends**

Cumann na nGaedheal was a moderate, conservative party typical of those predominant in western Europe in the 1920s. As already stated by Alvin Jackson, it would be a mistake to equate Cumann na nGaedheal with some of the more callous right-wing regimes in Europe at the time.<sup>18</sup> Men and women over 21 were entitled to vote under the Free State constitution, the army mutiny was faced down by the civilian ministers, on balance the party’s political opponents were integrated into the parliamentary apparatus of the state and power was peacefully transferred to Fianna Fáil after the people had spoken through the ballot box in February 1932. By the time of Cumann na nGaedheal’s foundation in 1923 Europe was stabilising under the new post-war order. However, within a few years of the war it was clear that liberalism had been weakened in some countries as figures like Mussolini and de Rivera came to power around the time of the establishment of the Irish Free State. Left-wing urges unleashed during the war had been largely becalmed as the victors pressed ahead with fashioning the new European order in their own economic and political image. Germany and her allies had been defeated, while Britain, France and the United States aimed to perpetuate their own values in the aftermath of the war. As a result they set about recreating the ‘golden’ world of the *Belle Époque*: unfettered free trade, balanced budgets and the fixed exchange mechanism of the gold standard. Liberal democracy too was promoted by the victors of the war. In Britain and the United States the war was heralded as a victory for democracy and national self-determination.

However, there were serious obstacles in the way of a return to the pre-1914 order. The war itself had challenged the principles of economic liberalism as belligerents were forced to abandon the gold standard, accrued large debts and allowed public spending spiral to unprecedented levels. In addition, the pre-1914 order had operated largely in the era of empire. By 1918, Imperial Germany, Tsarist Russia, Austria-Hungary and the

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<sup>17</sup> Organisation, undated [Feb.1933?] (UCDA, Richard Mulcahy papers, P7b/90/15).

<sup>18</sup> Alvin Jackson, ‘The two Irelands’, in Robert Gerwarth (ed.), *Twisted paths: Europe, 1914-1945* (New York, 2007), p. 73.

Ottoman Empire had all been swept away to be replaced by a patchwork of nation states and the first experiment in state Socialism. Some of the new nation states of Eastern Europe were determined to protect their national economies ensuring that tariffs and charges reigned where there had previously been Imperial free trade. Initially, it seemed left-wing parties and trade unions would benefit from the extension of the franchise and the radical impulses unleashed by the war. However, centrist and centre-right parties largely countered this by appealing to national sentiment, warning against class warfare and pressing ahead with a democratic experiment that seemed inherently unstable to extremists. Moreover, the left was divided in many countries between Social Democrats, keen to work within the new democratic parameters, and those who looked to Bolshevik Russia for inspiration. In Britain and France, demobilised war veterans remembered their fallen comrades and were determined that such a conflict would never happen again. In Germany, Italy and Austria, such pacifism did not reign. These countries were ultimately left disappointed with their lot in the post-war order and 'stab in the back' myths lingered on with a desire to avenge the national wrong as militarism and politics converged.<sup>19</sup> Europe seemed caught in the middle between the emerging consumer society of the United States and the planned economy of Soviet Russia. Philosophers, politicians and demagogues clamoured to point the way forward as the continent came to terms with its greatest catastrophe to date. The redrawing of the map had social as well as economic consequences. Considerable dislocation was caused as various minority groups now found themselves on the wrong side of new national boundaries.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, war had speeded up the process of urbanisation and it was the major cities where underlying social and ethnic tensions were most noticeable as were cultural changes which made traditionalists wary.

Broadly speaking, by the mid 1920s, there seemed to be a consensus in favour of a return to prosperity generating free trade and reduced spending even though the world had been radically altered and what seemed like workable alternatives were in operation in countries such as Italy and Russia. To that end severe deflationary policies were pursued, particularly in the United States and Britain. Germany, Austria and Hungary initially preferred inflation but brought its own problems. Brief left-wing governments in Britain, Denmark and France failed to establish themselves in 1924 as gold standard orthodoxy once more became the measure by which a country's financial standing came to be

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<sup>19</sup> Martin Kitchen, *Europe between the wars* (London, 2006), pp 1-2.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

measured. It seemed to many observers in the mid 1920s that Europe would turn the corner economically.<sup>21</sup> Kevin O’Higgins once boasted that his party was the ‘most conservative minded group to put through a successful revolution’,<sup>22</sup> while many officials had been schooled in the conventions of the British Treasury before independence. Unsurprisingly then, Cumann na nGaedheal governments did not deviate from the status quo pursued by the United States and Britain. Sound financial principles were rigidly adhered to regardless of the electoral consequences. Spending was reduced, taxes were cut and a determined effort was made to balance the Free State’s national budget. Moreover, free trade was maintained with Britain as the government focussed on the production of a high-quality agricultural produce for the British market. Cumann na nGaedheal was lauded in conservative publications such as *The Economist* for its efforts to adhere to sound financial policies. Blythe and his colleagues were determined to show their resolve to take difficult decisions. However, even Cumann na nGaedheal’s infamously parsimonious nature was not enough to gain it the seal of approval in the state’s early years. In 1924 Ralph S. Rife was concerned that the government’s Land Purchase Scheme would place too great a burden on the country’s resources (chapter seven).

Cumann na nGaedheal might have been influenced by Arthur Griffith in its nationalism, but was divided on where it stood with regard to the lost leader’s economic teachings. A substantial group in the party favoured tariffs and an end to free trade but government policy sought a middle road that leaned towards free trade. The anti-Treatyites picked up the protectionist baton. From its foundation in 1926, Fianna Fáil preached an economic nationalist line that was committed to Irish self-sufficiency. Propitiously for it, the Wall Street crash of October 1929 shattered faith in *laissez-faire*. World trade collapsed, unemployment rose and government services had to be curtailed. Internationally, the argument for protection had been strengthened. In the Free State, Fianna Fáil was well placed to capitalise even though Ireland was spared the worst effects of the Depression. The country had not industrialised so Irish cities were not crowded with masses of laid-off workers in the early 1930s as were German and British urban centres. Nonetheless, from 1930 onwards, the effects of the Depression were felt in Ireland. Emigration outlets to North America were closed as the United States in particular reeled

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<sup>21</sup> Patricia Clavin, *The Great Depression in Europe, 1929-1939* (London, 2000), p. 70.

<sup>22</sup> Dáil Debates, vol. 2, col. 1909, 1 Mar. 1923 (Kevin O’Higgins).

from the effects of the crash. Prices fell and farmers found it increasingly difficult to pay the land annuities.

Countries struggled with the collapse in revenue and governments became increasingly unpopular as they reduced spending. Being tied to the gold standard entailed pursuing deflationary policies which made people's lives particularly difficult at a time of economic slump. Political change was the result of economic convulsions as parties of the left and right increased support. Moderate politicians - liberals, conservatives and reformist socialists - failed to stem the economic crisis of the early 1930s.<sup>23</sup> Liberalism was discredited as socialists, communists, and fascists pointed to its failings. Numerous countries lurched to the political extremes as the protection of national interests became the priority as resources dwindled. In 1931 Spain emerged from dictatorship to elect a left-wing, republican government. In Britain that same year a national coalition was formed to meet the crisis. The coalition took Britain off the gold standard freeing her to devalue and pursue a protectionist economic policy thus signalling that the era of gold standard orthodoxy was definitely over. At this time liberal democracy's most deadly enemy was emerging as a major political player in Germany. Street politics and clashes of rival gangs became a characteristic of European cities during this difficult time. International tension mounted as economic rivalry caused countries to implement protective tariffs. By November 1932 every European country had either enhanced existing protective measures or introduced new tariffs to safeguard the national economy.<sup>24</sup> Efforts to deal effectively with the Depression were hampered by a profound fear of inflation and budget deficits. Such paralysis initially worsened the Depression and enabled the less scrupulous proponents of change come to power in countries such as Germany. Weimar Germany was doomed to failure. Unemployment had destroyed self-respect in a country where a man's prestige derived from his job. In such a situation action seemed preferable to inaction,<sup>25</sup> and Hitler was able to extend his support by appealing to the newly discontented classes. It was the Depression that brought the Nazis to power.

In the year before the Depression hit Ireland, Irish agricultural exports were valued at £47m. They would not reach that value again until 1948 as global economic integration

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<sup>23</sup> Clavin, *Great Depression*, pp1-3.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Richard J. Evans, *The coming of the third Reich: how the Nazis destroyed democracy and seized power in Germany* (London, 2004), pp 232-44.

retreated.<sup>26</sup> After the crash, Cumann na nGaedheal's approach was no longer sustainable and the protectionist lobby grew ever louder. Yet the party continued to regard tariffs essentially as a revenue-raising device and the modest introduction of new duties was seen as a way of making good trade losses. Moreover, the party responded to the economic crisis by prescribing retrenchment for the gardaí and teachers. The 1932 election amounted to a rebuttal of Cumann na nGaedheal's policy as Ireland turned inwards and against economic liberalism. Cumann na nGaedheal, like other parties that were slow to realise that financial orthodoxy was sensible in a time of plenty but disastrous in a time of scarcity, was swept from office.

### **Political realignment in Ireland: domestic or international causes?**

Ireland did not exist in isolation from the extraordinary convulsions that swept the world in the early 1930s. In 1931 and 1932 the Depression had brought a national coalition to power in Britain, a republican government to Spain, political instability to many countries and would soon sweep the Nazis to power in Germany. The Irish electorate was also radicalised by the Depression. Cumann na nGaedheal had spent ten years building a state which would play its part in the world order which the Great War had seemingly brought into being. Instead, that order was crumbling by the time Irish voters went to the polls in February 1932. Internationally, policy makers and politicians were in the process of dismantling the economic system that had flourished in the first decade of peace. In some cases, the democratic political system that underpinned the post-war order was also being deconstructed.<sup>27</sup>

Irish voters had backed the Treatyite leadership in the debates of 1922. They had endorsed Cumann na nGaedheal's appeal to stability and progress in 1923 and showed little appetite for renewed national struggle with England in the elections of June and September 1927. In the aftermath of the assassination of O'Higgins, the Irish electorate had again solidly supported a continuation of President Cosgrave's policy while Fianna Fáil had increased anti-Treaty support essentially by moving closer to the Cumann na nGaedheal position on the Treaty and through the development of more innovative social and economic policies. Cumann na nGaedheal had won the debate on the Free State's

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<sup>26</sup> James Meenan, 'From free trade to self sufficiency' in, Francis MacManus (ed.), *The years of the great test, 1926-39* (Cork, 1967), p. 72.

<sup>27</sup> Mark Mazower, *Dark continent: Europe's Twentieth-century* (Bath, 1998), p. 31.

legitimacy, but as the economy slumped, Fianna Fáil was able to trump it on economic and social policy which it cleverly linked with its more aggressive nationalism.<sup>28</sup> This is what had changed by 1932. On balance, Irish voters had not discovered a sudden aversion to a Treaty they had decidedly endorsed a decade earlier. Neither had Fianna Fáil's superior organisational prowess, or more aggressive nationalism, alone been the deciding factors in the 1932 election. What had

Without dismissing outright all of the above contributory factors, they were but secondary to the worldwide economic Depression. There was little domestic capital to be won from Cumann na nGaedheal's solid achievements in statecraft and foreign policy. Most importantly, its economic policy was discredited by the slump in world trade. As the economic slump worsened, Cumann na nGaedheal failed to articulate a comprehensive response beyond the need to trim budgets. In response to the economic crisis, there was a minor extension of tariffs while further retrenchment was heaped upon a people already reeling from the effects of depressed trade, falling prices, closed emigration outlets and job losses. Fianna on the other hand offered radical change. It promised enhanced land distribution, protection of native industry, extended social services and a policy of economic self-sufficiency. Fianna Fáil appealed successfully to the national bourgeoisie, defined by Orridge as the class least dependent on the Commonwealth connection, and in the process hurt Cumann na nGaedheal's support in western constituencies.<sup>29</sup>

Political realignment in early 1930s Ireland, as elsewhere, formed part of a global trend. However, the world being ushered into existence in the early 1930s was a sinister one that led inevitably to a Second World War. International cooperation retreated, selfish national interests became paramount and liberals played an increasingly marginal role. In Ireland, the effects of the political realignment endured. On its foundation, Fine Gael abandoned Cumann na nGaedheal policy and instead clumsily endorsed the corporate state in a way that never sat easy on Cosgrave's shoulders. In power de Valera was able to exploit the collapse in world trade in pursuit of self-sufficiency and a changed political and constitutional relationship with Britain. Fianna Fáil's subsequent hegemony in Irish politics resulted in a largely peripheral role for the other parties. Fine Gael struggled to shake off its mishandling of its initial spell in opposition and in particular its flirtation with the Blueshirt movement. By 1935, with Cosgrave at the head of affairs once more, the

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<sup>28</sup> Brian Girvin, *Between two worlds: politics and economy in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 1989), p. 60.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew W. Orridge, 'The Blueshirts and the "Economic War": a study of Ireland in the context of dependency theory' in *Political Studies*, 31(1983), p. 355.

party began to take on the appearance of a rebranded Cumann na nGaedheal. Fine Gael would have to wait almost eighty years before a second ‘Depression’ would knock Fianna Fáil from the perch it had occupied since 1932.



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