

**The Banshee's Kiss: Conciliation, Class and
Conflict in Cork and the All for Ireland
League.**

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ABSTRACT

Historians have frequently portrayed constitutional nationalism as being homogeneous - 'the Home Rule movement' - after the reunification of the Irish parliamentary party in 1900. Yet there were elements of nationalist heterodoxy all over the country, but it was only in Cork where dissent took an organised form in the only formal breakaway from the Irish party when the All for Ireland League (A.F.I.L.) was launched in 1910. The AFIL took eight of the nine parliamentary seats in Cork and gained control of local government in the city and county the following year. Existing historical accounts do not adequately explain why support for the Home Rule movement collapsed in Cork, but also why the AFIL flourished there but failed, despite the aspiration of its name, to expand beyond its regional base.

The AFIL is chiefly remembered for its visionary policy of conciliation with unionists following the Damascene conversion of its leader William O'Brien, transformed from the enemy of the landed classes to an apostle of a new kind of bi-confessional politics. This would, he claimed, end the 'Banshee's Kiss', a cycle of conflict in which each new generation attempts to achieve Irish freedom. However, conciliation was a policy which was unpopular with both nationalists and unionists and O'Brien therefore needed to develop an electoral base by other means with more popular policies. He did this primarily by co-opting labour dissent: firstly, in Cork city because of divisions between skilled and unskilled workers; and secondly, harnessing discontent amongst elements of the rural working class which arose following the Wyndham land act of 1903, which excluded small farmers, evicted tenants and farm labourers from the new dispensation. The AFIL ran populist campaigns in which it presented itself as an alternative to the hegemonic grip of the Home Rule movement. However, as this study will demonstrate, there was little to choose on social and economic issues between the O'Brienites and the Home Rule movement and the only policy which fundamentally divided the two parties was conciliation.

Disaffection in elements of the working class in Cork, which precipitated the rise of the AFIL, both pre-dated and outlasted its existence. This thesis will, therefore, explore these fault lines over a more extended period from the Parnell split in 1890-1891 to the party's launch in 1910 and beyond its demise in 1918 to the revolutionary years when the underlying issue of working class dissent, which the AFIL had co-opted and obfuscated, manifested itself again. The AFIL's record in both parliamentary and local government is considered during its most active period from 1910 to 1914, through the successive crises of the Parliament act, the Home Rule bill and the outbreak of war. The Easter Rising and the rise of Sinn Féin administered the *coup de grâce* to the AFIL (as it did to the Home Rule movement), and the narrow ground of compromise and conciliation was lost.

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Abbreviations

A.F.I.L.	All for Ireland League
A.O.H.	Ancient Order of Hibernians
A.W.B.	Agricultural Wages Board
B.M.H.	Bureau of Military History
C.C.C.A.	Cork City and County Archives
C.C.C.L.A.	Cork City and County Labour Association
C.D.T.L.C.	Cork District Trades and Labour Council
C.U.T.L.C.	Cork United Trades and Labour Council
D.O.R.A.	Defence of the Realm Act
G.A.A.	Gaelic Athletic Association
I.D.L.	Irish Dominion league
I.L.L.A.	Irish Land and Labour Association
I.T.G.W.U	Irish Transport and General Workers Union
I.R.A.	Irish Republican Army
I.R.B.	Irish Republican Brotherhood
L.L.A.	Land and Labour Association
N.L.I.	National Library of Ireland
R.D.C.	Rural District Council
R.I.C.	Royal Irish Constabulary
U.V.F.	Ulster Volunteer Force
U.C.C.	University College Cork
U.C.D.	University College Dublin
U.D.C.	Urban District Council
U.I.L.	United Irish League
U.T.A.	United Trades Association

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The Banshee's Kiss: Conciliation, Class and Conflict in Cork and the All for Ireland League.

INTRODUCTION

Change pervaded Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first elections held under the new local government act of 1898 handed power to nationalists all over the country except in the North-East; the Irish parliamentary party, with a powerful new grassroots movement in the United Irish League (U.I.L.), was reunited after the trauma of the Parnell split of the previous decade; Balfour's policy of constructive unionism offered hope that a resolution of the land question was imminent; and there was a belief amongst many nationalists that self-government was coming, even if, as David Fitzpatrick notes, 'the geography of the Home Rule paradise was not discussed.'¹ At the *fin de siècle* however, most nationalists believed that this paradise would exist within the United Kingdom. There was also a cultural shift amongst Catholic nationalists 'from deference to resentment which expressed itself in the oscillation between a sense of inferiority and spiritual superiority based on the innocence of the victim.'² This Irish moral exceptionalism was increasingly reflected in a convergence of nationalism and Catholicism which reflected a suspicion of modernism, a preference for the rural over the urban, the spread of Anglophobia and the 'rediscovery' of a largely-imagined Gaelic past. In addition, as Eric Hobsbawm argues, there was in general, a process of mutation within political nationalism which included 'the growing tendency to assume that "national self-determination" could not be satisfied by any form of autonomy less than full state independence.'³

This tendency was not on popular display in August 1903 when King Edward visited Cork as part of an Irish tour and, apart from a small demonstration by advanced nationalists, he was warmly received by large crowds and given an effusive

¹ D. Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life 1913-1921: Provincial Experience of War and Revolution* (Cork, 1998).

² P. O'Mahony and G. Delanty, *Rethinking Irish History: Nationalism, Identity and Ideology* (New York, 2001), p. 5.

³ E. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914* (London, 1987), p.144.

welcome from the Lord Mayor Edward Fitzgerald.⁴ The *Cork Examiner* thought that the city got the balance right: ‘Nationalist Ireland did not grovel before Royalty. It met and recognised a true gentleman and courageous Sovereign, who has spoken well and kindly of the country and of the things and ideals which we cherish [...]’⁵ This occasion, however, hid not only a nascent separatism which would make Cork the fulcrum of the armed struggle for a republic seventeen years later, it also concealed deep social divisions and a fissure in nationalism which, over the next decade, would lead to the sundering of the Home Rule movement in Cork and the rise of the All for Ireland League (A.F.I.L). This claimed to be a political insurgency which, as Patrick Maume argues, ‘produced the most sustained and extensive attempts at unionist-nationalist co-operation in the twentieth century’.⁶

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This study will explore the AFIL in both a national and local context and seek to answer questions which the existing historiography fails to explain. Firstly, how did the AFIL persuade so many Catholic nationalists to break the bonds of communal solidarity and vote against the Home Rule movement? Secondly, what were the precipitating causes which triggered the rise of the AFIL? Thirdly, why did the AFIL thrive in Cork but not in other parts of the country? Fourthly, what, if any, was the legacy of the AFIL? The rise, fall, and legacy of the AFIL will be explored through two themes: the evisceration of the urban and rural labour movements and the obfuscation of class conflict by conservative nationalism, and the struggle between two contrasting visions of a new self-governing Ireland, of nationalists and unionists sharing power, or an ethnocentric drive for nationalist supremacy.

⁴ Fitzgerald was given a baronetcy by the King soon after his visit to Cork but was vilified by Cork nationalists for what was seen as his over-enthusiastic welcome to the sovereign and his reputation never recovered.

⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 3 August 1903.

⁶ P. Maume, *The Long Gestation: Irish Nationalist Life 1891-1918* (New York, 1999), p. 68.

Apart from an admirable dissertation by Friedrich K. Schilling there has been no detailed research relating to the AFIL.⁷ When the party is included in general histories of the period, it is located within the context of established historical narratives of the rise and post-1916 fall of the Home Rule movement. Existing historiography does not explain why the hegemonic power of the Irish party in Cork so spectacularly collapsed in 1910 just at the time when it found itself holding the balance of power at Westminster, its most advantageous position since the Parnell split.⁸ Moreover, why, if there was widespread but ineffective dissensus, did an organised and successful political insurgency manifest itself only in Cork. Practically all accounts of the rise of the AFIL focus on William O'Brien as the catalyst.⁹ This argument has some merit as in the first decade of the twentieth century his star was in the ascendant. He was given credit for launching the UIL and reuniting the Irish party and was seen as the architect of the Wyndham land act.¹⁰ However, if O'Brien had not existed would there have been another spark to ignite the political insurgency in Cork? In another context David Fitzpatrick, using the example of the legendary Longford Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.) leader Sean Mac Eoin, observed: 'Without willing helpers, the blacksmith of Ballinalee [McEoin] could not have set Longford alight; without the blacksmith, the helpers would have found another leader.'¹¹ In a similar vein, it will be argued that, although William O'Brien was integral to the rise of the AFIL, working class discontent, both in Cork city and in rural areas of the county, reached a level that, if the AFIL had not been launched, it would have found some other means of expressing that dissent.

Intra-nationalist working class conflict was evident during the Parnell split where pitched battles between Parnellites and anti-Parnellites were symptomatic of underlying social and economic tensions, which erupted again in 1909 when James

⁷ F. K. Schilling, 'William O'Brien and the All-for-Ireland League', (unpublished B.Litt. dissertation, Trinity College Dublin, 1956). Schilling's work is predominantly focused on the conciliation policies of William O'Brien and the AFIL but does not deal in any depth with the party's political base or underlying causes of its emergence in 1910.

⁸ See, for example, T. Garvin, *Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics* (London, 1981), p. 94.

⁹ J. V. O'Brien, *William O'Brien and the Course of Irish Politics 1881-1918* (Berkeley, 1976); S. Warwick-Haller, *William O'Brien and the Irish Land War* (Dublin, 1990).

¹⁰ For example, D. English, *Irish Freedom, The History of Irish Nationalism in Ireland* (London 2005), p. 225; C. Townshend, *Ireland: The 20th Century* (London, 1999), pp. 34-5.

¹¹ D. Fitzpatrick, 'The Geography of Irish Nationalism 1910-1921' in *Past & Present*, No. 78 (Feb. 1978), p. 118.

Larkin attempted to organise dock labourers. This led to a split in the local trades council where the O'Brienite-Redmondite conflict became enmeshed in the politics of the labour movement. The other fault line which O'Brien skillfully exploited was discontent amongst elements of the rural working class in North and West Cork relating to wages and living conditions for farm labourers and land purchase for small tenant farmers, and he used the Irish Land and Labour Association (I.L.L.A.), which split as a result, as a proxy organisation.

For O'Brien, the 1903 land act was the apotheosis of his life's work. After its passage, he continued to campaign to ensure that its benefits were as widely spread as possible and he and his Land and Labour League ally D. D. Sheehan campaigned, as did the Irish party, to improve the lives of farm labourers. O'Brien's biographer J.V. O'Brien argues that 'More than any other supporter of the Irish party he put the interests of Ireland's rural poor in the forefront of the national program.'¹² O'Brien is often described as being a revolutionary and, given his background, some affinity with the left would have been consistent. He had spent his earlier years in political struggles against injustice and in the interests of the poor and the powerless. From his earliest days as a journalist on the *Freeman's Journal*, through his campaigns of rural agitation during the Land War and the Plan of Campaign, there was no doubt that he was on the side of the poor and the powerless. However, O'Brien's political instincts were close to that of his mentor and friend Charles Stewart Parnell, whose strategy was 'to achieve a controlled, scrupled, social cleavage.'¹³ O'Brien's vision of the good society was economically and socially conservative and he was intensely antagonistic to socialism and suspicious of trade unions and the urban labour movement. The AFIL was a party made in his image, not because he was an autocratic leader who laid down a strict political manifesto which his party was expected to follow, but because his views mirrored those of his wealthier nationalist and unionist supporters who formed the core of the party. For them, the containment of radical labour was as much a priority as conciliation or self-government. For example, soon after the launch of the

¹² O'Brien, *William O'Brien*, p. 102.

¹³ F. Callanan, *The Parnell Split: 1890-91* (Cork, 1992), p. 279.

party, his key unionist ally Lord Dunraven, wrote to the Foreign Secretary Lord Grey: 'If socialism is to be successfully fought and a satisfactory measure of Home Rule attained it can only be through William O'Brien's new movement.'¹⁴

The Parnell split revealed the deep divisions which the Irish party preferred to conceal within the folds of an all-encompassing national movement focused on the national question and land reform. The split illustrated the nationalist party's profound unease in its dealings with the urban working class underpinned by suspicion of subterranean ideological currents and foreign influences (in the 1890s there was widespread hostility to British amalgamated unions) and the ever-present dread of socialism. While the Irish party contained strong labour influences, the core of the Home Rule movement was profoundly conservative. The upper echelons of the party were populated by merchants, publicans, strong farmers, and the professions who dictated its ideological priorities.¹⁵ The movement was more at ease with the agrarian struggle (within prescribed limits) which, at least up to the Wyndham land act of 1903, could be presented as a binary struggle between an autochthonous oppressed class of impoverished tenant farmers and an alien Protestant *haute bourgeoisie*. In part, because of the fear of socialism, Irish nationalism was ill at ease with urban labour. As James McConnel argues, even labour-nationalist MPs, 'experienced considerable difficulty in reconciling urban working class priorities to a nationalist agenda shaped by rural middle-class concerns'.¹⁶ As the Cork lock-out of 1909 and the Dublin lock-out of 1913 demonstrated, urban labour was far more volatile, and consequently dangerous, to conservative nationalism than was the more biddable rural working class.

The social and economic changes brought about by land purchase, which accelerated the rise of a Catholic strong farmer class but did not benefit

¹⁴ Quoted in O'Brien, *William O'Brien*, p. 203.

¹⁵ L. P. Curtis, 'Ireland in 1914' in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A New History of Ireland, Vol. VI, Ireland Under the Union 1871-1921* (Oxford, 1996), p. 185.

¹⁶ J. McConnel, 'The Irish Parliamentary Party, industrial relations and the 1913 Dublin Lockout' in *Saothar*, vol. 28 (2003), p. 26.

small farmers and the agricultural working class, needed to be obfuscated by the Irish party. Once electoral reform had largely been achieved following the 1898 Local Government act, and land purchase extended after 1903, nationalism emphasised duty to the national cause and not individual rights or the amelioration of social ills. D.D. Sheehan noted that impoverished elements of the rural working class lived in dire conditions, ‘one would not kennel a dog, or house any of the lower animals in the vile abominations called human dwellings which tens of thousands of God’s comfortless creatures were huddled together in indiscriminate wretchedness’¹⁷ However, they found little solace in the new dispensation of nationalist rural Ireland where Catholic tenant-proprietors were, by and large, no more likely to offer improved wages and living conditions than was the Ascendency. Although the Irish party supported progressive legislation such as the Farm Labourers acts of 1906 and 1911, and Willie Redmond claimed Irish party credit for every labour advancement over the previous twenty-five years,¹⁸ both Parnellites and Redmondites made promises to the labour movement but failed to deliver on many of them and were quick to deflect blame relating to their indolence. As F.S.L. Lyons notes, when John Dillon talked of the terrible poverty of the Dublin slums he invariably fell back, ‘on the time-honoured tendency of nationalists to explain away local evils they had done nothing about by blaming them on the iniquitous, but convenient, British connection’.¹⁹

Nationalism's failure to deliver on its promises to the working class was, in essence, the impetus for the political insurgency which gave rise to the AFIL. The party colonised a political vacuum based on the refusal of nationalism to incorporate the class struggle into its campaign, and of the failure of the labour movement not only to effectively improve the lives of working people but also to integrate all sections of the working class into its struggle. Discontented workers from urban and rural Cork, alienated from the Home

¹⁷ D.D. Sheehan, *Ireland Since Parnell*, Chapter XIV (Documents/historical/Sheehan.htm) (12 May 2016).

¹⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 30 April 1909.

¹⁹ F.S.L. Lyons, *John Dillon* (London, 1968), p. 336.

Rule movement, were attracted to an AFIL populist platform like iron filings to a magnet. It offered them a cause to rally behind, a charismatic leader, and identified a clear enemy – the Irish parliamentary party and its affiliates - while promising relief for grievances such as the extension of land purchase for small tenant farmers, cottages for farm labourers, and better housing for the urban poor. As early as 1904, William O’Brien prophesied that the plight of the labourers would now take precedence over every other issue other than Home Rule.²⁰ However, both O’Brien and Redmond had little affinity with both rural and urban organised labour and had previously opposed the farm labourers union the Land and Labour Association, which O’Brien now espoused and used as a proxy organisation once his rift with the UIL deepened.²¹ Many in the labour movement, unsurprisingly, remained deeply suspicious of his intentions and rhetoric.

With the defeat of landlordism and relative peace in the countryside, O’Brien and the AFIL needed urban labour. Indeed, without the essential dynamic of working class alienation and its co-option by William O’Brien, the AFIL would not have had the traction required to achieve its brief flowering in Cork. A parallel dynamic underpinned the Irish party who depended on working class votes and, as James McConnel notes ‘was markedly *petit bourgeois* in character’.²² As this study will demonstrate, conciliation was not the driving force for many AFIL supporters who looked to O’Brien and the party as an alternative to the hegemonic power of the Irish parliamentary party. Neither was conciliation the primary reason why many Cork unionists supported the AFIL, for as Ian d’Alton claims, William O’Brien and Tim Healy’s opposition to Lloyd George’s ‘People’s Budget’, was a more important consideration.²³ The AFIL was a small party with a broad spectrum of interests and aspirations, from the landed gentry and well-heeled merchants, to the poor of Cork’s lanes and tenements; from the earl of Dunraven’s estates and elegant manor house in

²⁰ *Cork Examiner*, 17 December 1904.

²¹ D. Bradley, *Farm Labourers Irish Struggle 1900-1976* (Belfast 1988), p. 27.

²² James McConnel, ‘The Irish Parliamentary Part, Industrial Relations and the 193 Dublin Lockout’ in Saothar, Vol. 28 (2003), p. 25.

²³ I. d’Alton, ‘Cork Unionism: Its Role in Parliamentary and Local Election 1885-1914’ in *Studia Hibernica*, no. 15 (1975), p.158.

Adare, to farm labourers' hovels; and from some who wanted to maintain the closest of ties with Westminster, to those who wanted federal self-government, and others who would not be satisfied with less than full and unadulterated Home Rule.

At the core of the AFIL, there was a deep and profound disjuncture between the self-interest and ideology of the leadership and its principal backers and the interests of its working class supporters, between alienated parts of the urban and rural working class who demanded representation and social and economic betterment, and those in the leadership of the AFIL who were ambivalent or, in some cases hostile, to this cause.. The internal contradictions of this incendiary mix could not have endured for long, especially as the AFIL was launched into the most turbulent political waters with recurrent crises relating to the Lords' veto, Home Rule, the First World War, and the Easter Rising. Although the primary aspiration of the AFIL was to attract all shades of political and religious opinion, the majority of its supporters were Catholic nationalists who were asked to reject traditional nationalist principles and make common cause with unionists. The O'Brienite political insurgency, therefore, proposed a breach with a fundamental tenet of Irish nationalist tradition: communal solidarity, which regarded dissent and division as a form of betrayal. As Tom Garvin observes, 'the split is the original sin of Irish politics'.²⁴ This was also true for the other side, 'Rejection of Unionism by a Protestant was socially as suicidal as that of Nationalism by a Catholic'.²⁵ This acted as a significant disincentive to potential dissidents and explains why no other breakaway party from either the constitutional wing of the nationalist movement or unionism emerged before the AFIL.

The second theme of this study is conciliation: the attempt by the AFIL to develop policies aimed at bringing the two traditions together to build a tolerant, self-governing Ireland. This is now remembered as the party's solitary lodestar, and it is often presented as a somewhat quixotic collection of mavericks led by William O'Brien.²⁶ O'Brien's dedication to the cause of land reform was legendary, and he was widely admired as a leader of adamant determination and

²⁴ Garvin, *Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*, p. 7.

²⁵ Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, p. 47.

²⁶ See, for example, R.F. Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland 1890-1923* (London, 2014), p. 170.

unimpeachable integrity. His physical resemblance to an Old Testament prophet spoke of his willingness to suffer for the greater good, a man of fierce integrity and unbending will. However, it was O'Brien's character that also proved to be a significant impediment to the success of the AFIL and the very attributes which many of his followers found admirable also contained the essence of a messianic and obsessive quality; he was, in the words of the Liberal chief whip the Master of Elibank, 'An honest fanatic - a kind of Mad Mullah'.²⁷ Ireland, in the first decade of the twentieth century, was also a society still acutely aware of caste, class, religion and ethnic difference. For many unionists, the metamorphosis of O'Brien, a Catholic from a modest background with Fenian connections who had for many years been the *bête noire* of landlords, to the apostle of conciliation, was a step too far and many Protestant unionists from the landed classes were unable to accept him as an equal or listen to his overtures.

In 1903 William O'Brien resigned both from the Irish party and parliament because of John Redmond's refusal to publicly distance himself from a rejection of conciliation by John Dillon, Michael Davitt, and the *Freeman's Journal*. O'Brien took up the cause of conciliation (which for him became an almost evangelical crusade) after the successful Land Conference which led to the Wyndham Land act and was adopted by the National Directory of the UIL in 1903. This precipitated both a lethal rift in constitutional nationalism and the opening of another political space which O'Brien could occupy. To the end of his life he held to the opinion that a historic opportunity was lost:

Three men [Redmond, Dillon and Davitt] of great and deserved weight in the national counsels managed to convince themselves, and subsequently to satisfy a small but active section of the Irish Party, that the whole Land Conference policy covered some insidious conspiracy against the power and indeed the existence of that party in the interests of insatiable landlords and Tory conspirators.²⁸

²⁷ A. C. Murray, *Master and Builder: Murrays of Elibank* (London, 1945), p. 48.

²⁸ W. O'Brien, *An Olive Branch for Ireland and its History* (London, 1910), https://ia601709.us.archive.org/1/items/cihm_99414/cihm_99414.pdf (2 March 2016), p. xxv.

This was the catalyst for his rupture with the Home Rule movement and allowed O'Brien, after his resignation from parliament in 1903, to present himself as the champion of land purchase in contrast to the Irish party and the UIL who, he claimed, wanted to frustrate it. The truth, of course, was much more nuanced. However, land purchase and O'Brien's argument that it was under threat from Redmond and Dillon, allowed him to differentiate his nascent political movement from the Irish party. Both O'Brien and Redmond, with varying degrees of conviction, held to the Parnellite nostrum that Westminster was more likely to concede Irish self-government if progressive landlords could be incorporated into the Home Rule movement; but this could only be achieved through a prior settlement of the land question. O'Brien's party, if it had fulfilled its aspiration of becoming a successful all-Ireland movement with a policy of reconciliation between nationalists and unionists, Catholics and Protestants, would have presented an existential threat to the Home Rule movement following the success of the 1903 land act.

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The 'Decade of Centenaries', commemorating the founding of the Irish state, has brought a renewed interest not only in the revolutionary period but also in the decline of constitutional nationalism and it is in this context that the present study is located. There are, however, differing accounts of the demise of the Home Rule movement on offer. Tom Garvin, for example, argues that the Irish parliamentary party was fatally weakened by its support for the First World War and the British government's failure to deliver on Home Rule.²⁹ Indeed, recent Irish historiography now emphasises the war as a critical point in the hollowing out of support for the Home Rule movement before the *coup de grace* of 1916.³⁰ In Garvin's much-quoted phrase, 'The Rising of 1916 merely administered a final push to an edifice that was already on the verge of collapse.'³¹ F.S.L. Lyons, amongst other historians, took the

²⁹ Garvin, *Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics* (London, 1981), p. 99.

³⁰ For example, R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1922* (London, 1989), pp. 471-6; D. Ferriter, *A Nation and not a Rabble: The Irish revolution 1913-1923* (London, 2015), pp. 137-50; J. Borgonovo, *The Dynamics of War and Revolution: Cork City, 1916-1918* (Cork, 2017). In contrast, F.S.L. Lyons' *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland 1890-1939* (Oxford, 1979), attaches little importance to the war and its relation to the Easter Rising.

³¹ Garvin, *Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*, p. 99.

view that the party never recovered from the Parnell split,³² a perspective also taken by William O'Brien who is credited with being the saviour of the party in 1900 but who later observed that it, 'was reunified rather than reformed'.³³

The alternative view is of a movement with deep and broad roots in local communities which, because it did not burden itself with an overarching ideology, allowed it to be flexible enough to respond to a rapidly changing political landscape. It displayed what David Fitzpatrick called a 'vampiric' quality which allowed it take to control of organisations or movements which could pose a potential threat, such as the Irish Volunteers in 1914, and to ensure that labour demands remained grounded within the parameters of modest reform that did not threaten its conservative interests.³⁴ However, Fitzpatrick also identifies a central weakness: that Irish party unity during the Parnell era was an aberration, and its natural state was an unstable coalition of influential individuals, interests, and factions that existed with the ever-present threat of another split.³⁵ Patrick Maume's detailed study of this period also shows that the party 'was a loose network at local rather than parliamentary level and was centred on nuclei based around the individual leaders, each of whom had an inner core of confidants and an outer ring of followers, and held together by the reserved, respectful and mildly suspicious relationship between Redmond and Dillon'.³⁶

The Irish parliamentary party has also been accused of chicanery, as R. F. Foster argues, the ethos of the party 'was a curious blend of Trollopian fixers, political journalists, respectable ex-Fenians and closet imperialists. They excelled in the politics of sleight of hand[...]'³⁷ This was not, however, seen by many nationalists in a negative light given the widespread Anglophobic view that Irish politicians supping at Westminster needed a very long spoon. Yeats' lines, written during the Dublin lock-out of 1913, of tawdry politicians who 'fumble in a greasy till' has been

³² F. S. L. Lyons, *The Irish Parliamentary Party 1890-1910* (London, 1951), p. 10.

³³ O'Brien, *Olive Branch* (6 April 2016), p. 123.

³⁴ Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, pp. 72-104.

³⁵ D. Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands, 1912-1939* (Oxford, 1998), p. 185.

³⁶ Maume, *Long Gestation*, p. 77.

³⁷ R.F. Foster, 'Thinking from Hand to Mouth: Anglo-Irish Literature, Gaelic Nationalism and Irish Politics in the 1890s' in idem *Paddy and Mr Punch: Connections in Irish and British History* (London, 1993), p. 265.

portrayed as emblematic of widespread disenchantment with a corrupt and morally bankrupt movement. However, as James McConnel argues, before the Easter Rising the Irish party was not widely perceived as such. Public dissatisfaction related more to the payment of parliamentary salaries rather than any evidence of widespread graft, and 'the brokerage role of MPs' was seen by many as an integral part of their position: a necessary corrective to a system biased against Catholic nationalists.'³⁸

Although the Irish parliamentary party was a disciplined and pledge-bound organisation, it was by no means monolithic, and both Paul Bew and Patrick Maume deal extensively with the widespread but unorganised dissent both inside the party and in its affiliates.³⁹ Tom Garvin argues that there was 'A distaste for what was, in effect, one-party rule at local level [which] appeared to have existed in incoherent and underground form throughout the country.⁴⁰ If self-government was the *raison d'être* of Irish nationalism, an even more emotionally powerful issue for many Catholics at the beginning of the twentieth century was land. In an important study of the politics of land reform and agrarian agitation, Bew identifies two distinct strands in the Irish party and its affiliates in the first decade of the twentieth century: 'Parnellites' and 'Radical Agrarians', representing conciliatory and uncompromising approaches to the land question.⁴¹ In understanding the rise of the AFIL this is a critical debate. Bew's meticulous research has done much to illuminate an understudied period, but the designation of Parnellites and radical agrarians can be less than helpful as there is sometimes no hard demarcation between the two camps as even a brief glimpse of William O'Brien's career illustrates for he was both an arch-Parnellite but also an erstwhile anti-Parnellite leader, and both an agrarian radical and apostle of conciliation.

Philip Bull argues that John Dillon and Michael Davitt believed that the ending of the Land War and the settlement of rural class conflict would remove a fundamental

³⁸ J. McConnel, 'Jobbing with Tory and Liberal: Irish Nationalists and the Politics of Patronage 1880-1914' in *Past & Present*, no. 188 (August 2005), pp. 123-130.

³⁹ Maume, *Long Gestation*; Paul Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation in Ireland* (New York, 1989).

⁴⁰ Garvin claims that 'O'Brien was able to take the entire Cork organisation out of the party in 1910' (*Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*, p. 94). This assertion is incorrect as although a large part of the UIL defected to the AFIL the Home Rule movement maintained a strong and viable organisation in Cork and was able to wrest control of local government back from the AFIL by 1914.

⁴¹ Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*.

dynamic from the Irish nationalist struggle to its detriment. If the land hunger of Irish peasants was satiated and the ancestral enemy of Protestant Anglo-Irish landlords was eliminated, then nationalism would lose its atavistic momentum: contentment would breed apathy, and the desire for Home Rule would atrophy. The triumph of this analysis, Bull, contends, confined the Home Rule movement to a narrow and unattractive brand of nationalism.⁴² Fergus Campbell however, presents an alternative scenario: that landlord intransigence relating to land sales and purchase price played a significant part in forcing Redmond to abandon his Parnellite principles and accept the Dillonite position after 1903.⁴³ Although O'Brien in public praised landlords for their enthusiastic embrace of conciliation and land reform, in private he railed against their 'unreasonable demands'.⁴⁴ However, the view that the leadership of the Irish party, through a loss of courage (Redmond) and a lack of vision (Dillon and Davitt), failed to grasp a golden opportunity and build on the success of the 1902 Land Conference and the Wyndham Land act the following year is one that is widely accepted by historians. Alvin Jackson, for example, argues that 'The Home Rule movement would now be sustained by Dillon's traditional ideas. It would remain an essentially ethnic nationalist movement, which principally articulated the concerns of a narrow rural constituency.'⁴⁵

Jackson also makes a 'tentative suggestion' that the Land Conference of 1902 was a distant ancestor to the Good Friday Agreement and explores a long history of attempts to reconcile the two traditions.⁴⁶ R. F. Foster, in an elegant dissection of F.S.L Lyons' *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland* with its deterministic view of 'the battle of the two civilisations', argues for the subtleties of pre-independence Ireland with its sometimes understated integration and many cultural crossing points. This complexity has often been forgotten in a historiography which, until recently, emphasised the triumph of a narrow nationalism 'the winning side convincing

⁴² P. Bull, *Land, Politics, and Nationalism: A Study of the Irish Land Question* (Dublin, 1996).

⁴³ F. Campbell, *Land, and Revolution: Nationalist Politics in the West of Ireland 1891-1921* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 42-84

⁴⁴ O'Brien to Dunraven, 12 November 1903 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/2).

⁴⁵ Jackson, *Home Rule*, p. 110

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 376-8

themselves that their myopia had been vindicated by history'.⁴⁷ For all its limitations the AFIL attempted to offer an alternative vision.

This study locates the emergence of the AFIL as a manifestation of working class dissent. This existed before the party came into being and evolved after its demise, and it is therefore necessary to ask what, if any, was the legacy of the AFIL?

However, the historiography of the period after 1918 is fiercely contested territory. Tom Garvin's *The Birth of Irish Democracy* was mainly sympathetic to the pro-Treaty side and the view that republican irreconcilables made Civil War inevitable.⁴⁸ This is contested by John M. Regan's *The Irish Counter-Revolution*, which argues that a continuity of the more reactionary elements in the Home Rule movement, backed by conservative forces in the Catholic Church, business and the British State, effectively defeated and neutered the prospects for anything more than a political revolution.⁴⁹ This argument is supported in Bill Kissane's *The Politics of the Irish Civil War* which rejects the view that this conflict was a desperate bid to save the Free State from the forces of darkness. He emphasises the long history of nationalist democracy to counter accusations that the fledgling state could have descended into chaos, and cites the repressive excesses of the Free State government.⁵⁰ As Patrick Maume notes, however, his arguments are undermined by 'a tendency to define democracy not in legal/political terms, but by reference to standards of individual liberty not found in most democracies until the 1960s and forms of participatory democracy which may not be attainable anywhere'.⁵¹ Richard Bourke highlights a dearth of research relating to the political thought of the Irish revolutionary period and warns of the danger of retrospectively assigning theories or models to political movements without understanding the contemporary experience which gave rise to their development.⁵² Both Tom Garvin's and David Fitzpatrick's work has gone some way to illuminating the parallels and continuities between the Home Rule movement and what followed its demise in 1918 and acts as a corrective to the

⁴⁷ Foster, 'Varieties of Irishness: Cultures and Anarchy in Ireland' in idem *Paddy and Mr Punch*, p. 25.

⁴⁸ T. Garvin, *The Birth of Irish Democracy* (London, 2005).

⁴⁹ J. M. Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution 1921-1936* (London, 2000).

⁵⁰ B. Kissane, *The Politics of the Irish Civil War* (Oxford, 2000).

⁵¹ P. Maume, 'Maume, on Kissane: The Politics of the Irish Civil War' (networks.h-net.org) (3 January 2018).

⁵² R. Bourke, 'Reflections on the Political Thought of the Irish Revolution' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, XXVII (2017), pp. 175-192.

binary distinction between the constitutional and revolutionary traditions.⁵³ As Conor Mulvagh notes, ‘Constitutionalism was not an ideology, it was a tactic’ which could be forged with extra-parliamentary activity depending on the exigencies of the moment.⁵⁴

Many general histories of the period treat the failure of organised labour to exert influence on the political and economic development of pre-independence Ireland as a consequence of the dominance of nationalism.⁵⁵ Specialist studies of the labour movement also see the suffocating embrace of nationalism as having stifled any attempt at labour militancy. Lane and Ó’Drisceoil identify the familiar three ‘P’s as the villains of the piece: the priest, the peasant, and the patriot,⁵⁶ (Maura Murphy notes trade union banners in Cork often bore symbols not only of their trades but also those of nationalism and religion).⁵⁷ In a similar vein, Arthur Mitchell argues that nationalism presented, ‘near-insurmountable difficulties’ to the development of labour as a political force.⁵⁸ While these studies deal comprehensively with the failure of Irish labour, they do not examine in any depth the distortions in a political culture which the absence of a strong labour movement caused. Labour militancy was stymied by nationalism and clerical opposition, but how did conservative nationalism channel this pent-up force? Moreover, did this shape the nature of political development, organisations, and structures that emerged? These are key research questions that the present study addresses. By using Cork as a microcosm, it will show that there was a level of labour militancy which, at different points - the Parnell split, the Cork lockout of 1909, and the farm strikes of 1919 to 1921 -

⁵³ Garvin, *Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*; Garvin, *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland, 1858-1928* (Oxford, 1987); Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*; Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands*.

⁵⁴ C. Mulvagh, *The Irish Parliamentary Party at Westminster, 1900–18* (Manchester, 2016), p. 25.

⁵⁵ For example, Richard English argues that ‘nationalism cut through and transcended class loyalty: it was a far more capacious vehicle for communal struggle towards power.’ (R. English, *Irish Freedom: The History of Nationalism in Ireland* (London, 2006), p. 265).

⁵⁶ F. Lane and D. Ó Drisceoil (eds), *Politics and the Irish Working Class, 1830–1945* (Basingstoke, 2006), p. 2.

⁵⁷ M. Murphy, ‘The Role of Organised Labour in the Political and Economic Life of Cork City 1820-1900’ (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Leicester, 1978), p. 475.

⁵⁸ A. Mitchell, *Labour in Irish Politics 1890-1930* (Dublin, 1974), p. 283.

manifested itself only to be overwhelmed by conservative forces opposed to working class empowerment.

One of the many paradoxes of the AFIL is that although its title and vision were national in aspiration, it did not manage to expand beyond Cork. Although much of this study is concerned with national issues, its focus is, by necessity, local. Given Cork's central role in the War of Independence, there has been a considerable body of research relating to the revolutionary years. John Borgonovo has extended that focus into the effects of the First World War on the development of nationalism in Cork, but there has been curiously little research in relation to the period from the beginning of the century to the start of the war (John O'Donovan's website 'Turbulent Cork' is a welcome exception).⁵⁹ Two studies relating to William O'Brien and Frank Callanan's admirable biography of Timothy Healy, in part, focus on Cork local politics.⁶⁰ There has also been detailed work on Cork's Protestant community by Ian d'Alton and Barry Keane as well as research on social and economic developments.⁶¹ This local perspective is particularly important in relation to the AFIL, for working class areas of Cork were split street by street into opposing political factions during the general election of 1892, replicated two decades later (although the geographical delineations were not precisely the same) with the AFIL-Redmondite conflict; and, as the frequent eruptions of communal violence during elections indicated, this was a bitterly-divided society. As T. K. Hoppen noted after the Parnell split, 'nationalist politics unravelled into mutual hostility as normalcy

⁵⁹ Borgonovo, *War and Revolution*; (J. O'Donovan 'Turbulent Cork' (<https://turbulentcork.wordpress.com>) (16 May 2017). See also J. O'Donovan, 'William O'Brien and the United Irish League in Cork 1900-1910' (unpublished M.Phil thesis, UCC 2011); 'Nationalist Political Conflict in Cork, 1910' in *Journal of Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, vol. 117 (2012), pp. 37-52; 'Class, conflict, and the United Irish League in Cork, 1900-1903, in *Saothar*, vol. 37 (2012), pp. 23-37.

⁶⁰ O'Brien, *William O'Brien*; Warwick-Haller, *William O'Brien*; F. Callanan, *T.M. Healy* (Cork, 1996).

⁶¹ I. d'Alton, 'Keeping Faith: An Evocation of the Cork Protestant Character, 1820-1920' in P. O'Flanagan and C. G. Buttimer (eds), *Cork History & Society* (Cork, 1993), pp. 759-791; and 'Cork Unionism: Its Role in Parliamentary and Local Election 1885-1914' in *Studia Hibernica*, no. 15, (1975), pp. 143-161; B. Keane, 'Protestant Cork 1911-26', (sites.google.com) (18 May 2017); S. McQuay-Reddick, 'Political and Industrial Labour in Cork 1899-1914' (unpublished MA thesis, University College Cork, 1984), p. 475; M. Cronin, 'Work and Workers in Cork City and County 1800-1900' in *Cork History & Society*, pp. 724-58; Murphy, 'Organised Labour', p. 475.

reasserted itself in the shape of dances around local gods'.⁶² In understanding the AFIL, therefore, it is necessary to explore its habitus which, much to O'Brien's chagrin, never extended beyond Cork.

iii

A wide range of source material has been used in this study, including census returns, police intelligence reports, memoirs and the archival collections of prominent figures in the Home Rule movement including John Redmond, John Dillon, Timothy Healy, and Michael Davitt and principally William O'Brien. Any study of the AFIL must include an examination not only of O'Brien's published work but also his private correspondence contained in two extensive collections in the archives of the National Library of Ireland and University College Cork which span almost forty years of extensive correspondence which are all available to researchers. O'Brien's handwriting was notoriously bad for which Tim Healy once gently chided him, 'Because one is so pampered by the typewriter now, your own mysterious monograms grow past riddling!'⁶³ His wife Sophie not only curated his correspondence but thankfully, also transcribed most of his letters. O'Brien's memoirs and journalism need to be interpreted in their personal and political context rather than taken at face value.⁶⁴ His letters, however, contribute to a more accurate assessment of the political dynamics relating to the rise and fall of the AFIL His correspondence with Tim Healy especially, offers a contrast between Healy's hard-headed, and sometimes, cynical pragmatism, and O'Brien's obduracy and frequent flights of fancy. Sophie O'Brien left two collections of letters, writings, and memoirs but these are dutifully loyal to her husband William O'Brien and of limited utility in an exploration of the AFIL.⁶⁵

⁶² T.K. Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: Conflict and Conformity* (London, 1988), p. 139.

⁶³ Healy to O'Brien, 14 September 1911 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/5).

⁶⁴ For example, O'Brien wrote *An Olive Branch* during a convalescence period in Italy soon after resigning his parliamentary seat in 1909. The book is an angry and florid polemic, and the title of the chapter on the AFIL is from Dante's *Inferno*, 'And thence we came forth to see again the stars', which, he recalls, was written following surgery on his leg after which he had to endure several months of having the wound 'kept open by the gentle process known to the surgeon as "packing" '. (*Olive Branch*, p. 457) (16 October 2016).

⁶⁵ National Library of Ireland and Cork City and County Archives.

O'Brien played a significant role in Irish political life and served for over thirty years as an MP, was spoken of by Parnell as a possible successor, founded the UIL and had a reputation as a rural agitator and organiser of enormous energy and charisma. Throughout his adult life, he was not only a prolific correspondent but also a journalist, essayist, and novelist. As a young reporter, he visited tenant farmers on landed estates in the Galtee mountains in 1877-78. This had a profound and radicalising influence which, as he recalls in his 1905 memoir *Recollections*, afforded him, 'the first intimate and never to be forgotten insight into the horrible realities of the Irish Land Question'.⁶⁶ His writing, often completed to the backdrop of political turbulence, was highly polemical and often hyperbolic, such as *An Olive Branch for Ireland and its History* (1910) and *The Irish Revolution and How it Came About* (1923). The former, written in the months after O'Brien and his followers were physically attacked by fellow nationalists and refused a platform at the so-called 'Baton Convention', is an angry polemic which ends at the launch of the AFIL in 1910. The latter book was published thirteen years later during the civil war and is also fuelled by a righteous anger which lays the blame for all Ireland's ills at what he perceived as the betrayal of the Home Rule movement led by a clique of unprincipled and self-serving charlatans. Both are unreliable memoirs in which even the most ambivalent words of support are often portrayed as promises of unswerving loyalty and are replete with wildly exaggerated claims for AFIL support.

Paradoxically, O'Brien's works of fiction illuminate his personal philosophy more than his memoirs and polemical writings. Like his mentor and hero Parnell, O'Brien took a conservative view of class relations. Although his rhetoric could be incendiary, he did not possess the instinctive hatred of landlords which animated Davitt, and to a lesser extent Dillon. He valued tradition and believed in the benefits of hierarchy. This is revealed in what is widely regarded as his finest novel *When We Were Boys* (1890).⁶⁷ Here, the villain is not the weak and self-indulgent landlord

⁶⁶ W. O'Brien, *Recollections* <https://archive.org/details/recollections1905obri> (22 May 2016), p.188.

⁶⁷ William O'Brien, *When We Were Boys* (London, 1890). The old Fenian, Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, in a letter to O'Brien remarked that his wife had read the book: 'Mrs O'D said it was beautifully written, I told her the beauty of it was spoiled by your having so much about Irishmen spies in it. I don't like having it said that if you put one Irishman on the spit you will get another Irishman to turn the spit.' (O'Donovan Rossa to William O'Brien, 30 December 1905, UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AO132). John Dillon had been the best man at O'Brien's wedding in 1890, and

Lord Drumshaughlin, but his land agent Harman and the local moneylender Dargan (as F.S.L. Lyons has noted, O'Brien had an inherent distrust of middlemen and saw landlord and peasant as having a shared interest).⁶⁸

The central figure of this study, by necessity, is William O'Brien because without his charismatic leadership, vision and money (or to be precise, his wife's money) the AFIL would not have existed. This is not, however, a biography of O'Brien but an exploration of the AFIL and the reasons for its phenomenal rise in Cork. O'Brien has been the subject of three biographical studies. J.V. O'Brien and Sally Warwick-Haller both deal with O'Brien's long political career, and the AFIL is located in both as a late-flowering adjunct to the central drama of the Land War, the Plan of Campaign, the Parnell split and the founding of the UIL.⁶⁹ Although the rise of the AFIL and its almost clean sweep of Cork's parliamentary seats in 1910 and local government the following year is examined in some detail by both writers, their exegeses of the AFIL focuses on its policy of conciliation with Protestant unionists and the O'Brienite-Redmondite conflict in Cork but do not explore in any depth the underlying causes of that conflict. A biography by Michael Mac Donagh has the advantage of the author's close personal knowledge of O'Brien but is primarily hagiography.⁷⁰

There are no surviving AFIL records such as membership lists or minutes of branch meetings, and it has therefore been necessary to rely mostly on press reports which carried extensive, if jaundiced reporting of local and national politics. David Fitzpatrick's description of pre-war newspaper commentary as 'reverent and loyal' to the Home Rule movement was not so in Cork where the cleavage in the nationalist movement was reflected in the local newspapers.⁷¹ Michael Wheatley's

O'Brien dedicated *When We Were Boys* to him with the words 'To John Dillon: In memory of anxious years and glorious hopes.'

⁶⁸ Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 76.

⁶⁹ O'Brien, *William O'Brien*; Warwick-Haller, *William O'Brien*; Michael Mac Donagh, *The Life of William O'Brien* (London, 1928).

⁷⁰ The sobriquet 'Molly' was widely used in Cork as a term of abuse for Redmondites. William O'Brien originally coined it as a pejorative description of Joseph Devlin's Ancient Order of Hibernians based on the Molly Maguires, an Irish-American secret society which originated in the coalfields of Pennsylvania.

⁷¹ Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, p. 77.

research of eighteen publications in the Irish midlands indicates more diversity with at least two, the *Roscommon Herald* and the *Midland Examiner*, owned by the Tully brothers, taking a hostile position to the Irish party.⁷² However, outside of Ulster, there were few other parts of the country where the press was so politicised and partisan. This was primarily because of the presence of O'Brien's paper the *Cork Free Press* which continually attacked the Home Rule movement both nationally and locally and forced the *Cork Examiner*, whose proprietor George Crosbie was a staunch Redmondite, into equally strident attacks on the O'Brienites. William O'Brien knew the influence that newspapers could exert for, as well as being a prolific writer, he was also an editor and publisher of several publications during his career, starting with the Parnellite *United Ireland* in 1881 which he described as 'an insurrection in print',⁷³ and later the *Irish People*, which O'Brien funded from his own resources. Following the launch of the AFIL in 1910 he published first the *Cork Accent*,⁷⁴ and then the *Cork Free Press*, which ran until 1916 and resulted in the depletion of his wife's fortune. Of the other local papers, the *Cork Constitution* was unionist and fiscally conservative and supported the AFIL. The other two local newspapers were weeklies. The *Southern Star*, founded in 1879, attempted to steer a middle course on the O'Brienite-Redmondite conflict (the AFIL MP D.D. Sheehan, was editor from 1899 to 1901). The *Skibbereen Eagle* (which in 1898 warned an over-ambitious Czar that the *Eagle* 'will keep its eye on the Emperor of Russia') was resolutely imperialist and hostile to the Home Rule movement and thus sympathetic to the AFIL. Of the national newspapers, the *Freeman's Journal* was the mouthpiece of the Irish parliamentary party and bitterly hostile to the AFIL which it usually referred to as 'factionalist'. The *Irish Independent*, founded in 1905, should have been sympathetic to the AFIL because of its proprietor William Martin Murphy's close friendship with Tim Healy. However, O'Brien frequently, and with justification, complained that its editor was a Redmondite and its editorial policy and reporting biased against him and the AFIL. The *Irish Times* was also less than

⁷² M. Wheatley, "Right Behind Mr. Redmond": Nationalism and the Irish Party in Provincial Ireland, 1910-14' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Surrey, 2002).

⁷³ Quoted in O'Brien, *William O'Brien*, p. 15.

⁷⁴ Named after the events at the so-called 'Baton Convention' in 1909 where O'Brien claimed that cattle drivers from the midlands armed with boxwood batons had, on the orders of the nationalist leadership, prevented anyone with a Cork accent from speaking. (O'Brien, *Olive Branch*, p. 345), (19 January 2017).

supportive of the AFIL telling its readers that there was little to choose between O'Brien and Redmond because of the AFIL's support for Home Rule.⁷⁵

It is also essential to record the sources that are missing. Many historical records were lost in the destruction of the Four Courts in Dublin in 1922, and Cork municipal and other records were also destroyed both in the accidental burning of the city Courthouse in 1890 and the deliberate burning of Cork City Hall by Crown forces in 1920. Although literacy rates in Ireland were quite high (census returns indicate that 88% of the population over the age of five could read in 1911) very little of the lives of ordinary people, written by themselves, has survived. The diaries of the Cork republican Liam de Roiste offer a useful, if polemical, insight into the evolving nature of advanced nationalism, as do witness statements from the Bureau of Military History which indicate links between the AFIL and members of the Cork Irish Volunteers and the IRA. The few contemporaneous accounts of life in this period are predominantly those of men. Suzanne Day's novel *The Amazing Philanthropists*, which recounts her experiences as a Poor Law Guardian in Cork is an exception.⁷⁶

iv

In his classic and still influential work *What is History?* E.H. Carr identifies a central dilemma the historian faces in trying to make sense of the past. He rejects the view that the past is waiting there to be discovered by a rigorous examination of primary sources, for he argues, 'the facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides which facts to give the floor, and in what order and context'.⁷⁷ There is always the temptation, conscious or otherwise, to fish for facts that support or undermine an argument or pre-conceived position. This is true of the AFIL: a party that does not fit easily into the lexicon of political movements and is seen mainly as the conjuration of William O'Brien and a few allies.⁷⁸ However, it is

⁷⁵ *Irish Times*, 1 April 1910.

⁷⁶ S. Day, *The Amazing Philanthropists* (London, 1916).

⁷⁷ E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (London, 1961), p. 5.

⁷⁸ For example, Jackson, *Home Rule*, p. 110; Lyons, *John Dillon*, p. 303. Foster somewhat facetiously refers to William O'Brien's attempts 'to put together a feel-good coalition of moderate nationalists' (Foster, *Vivid Faces*, p. 170).

necessary to look beyond these few notables to the ordinary supporters of the party, as Edward Thompson sought to do; to place, 'historical actors' (in his case the English working class) at the centre of history and rescue them from 'the enormous condescension of posterity'.⁷⁹ An attempt to understand the motivation of ordinary people, many from impoverished working class areas, who supported the AFIL is a central focus of this study.

The motif through which these questions and themes are explored is the nature of Irish political culture. Although the focus is local, the issues raised are of a broader concern and relate to the mechanisms by which political dissent and conflict have been co-opted and marginalised. How can the AFIL, a party with bi-confessional aspirations but predominantly supported by Catholic nationalists, be understood in this context? It is, of course, essential that contemporary political and cultural assumptions are not retrospectively imposed on past traditions and cultures. However, it is also useful to bring modern research and conceptions of understanding to bear on the past. In relation to the AFIL, the use of populism especially bears a close examination as it is a recurring theme in the rise and fall of the AFIL and offers an insight into how working class communities were co-opted into the O'Brienite political insurgency. Defining populism is, in itself, problematic, as Mudde and Kaltwasser note, populism 'is truly an essentially contested concept'.⁸⁰ A review of the extensive literature relating to this subject is beyond the bounds of the present study,⁸¹ but the difficulty of definition can be gleaned from the debate as to whether it is an ideology or an approach to political mobilisation. An 'ideational approach' sees populism as a 'thin-centered ideology' which is 'Manichaeic rather than pluralist, seeing politics in dualistic and teleological terms as a cosmic struggle between a knowing good and a knowing evil'.⁸² However, David Marquand offers an alternative definition, 'Populism is not a doctrine or a governing philosophy, still less an ideology. It is a disposition, perhaps a mood, a set

⁷⁹ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963), p. 12.

⁸⁰ C. Mudde. and C. R. Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2017), p. 3.

⁸¹ See, for example, G. Ionescu, and E. Gellner (eds.), *Populism: Its Meanings and National Characteristics* (New York, 1969); F. Panizza *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (London, 2005).

⁸² K.A. Hawkins, 'The *quid pro quo* Approach' in Carlos de la Torre (ed.) *Routledge Handbook of Global Populism* (London, 2018), p. 57.

of attitudes and above all a style.’⁸³ Daniel Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell offer a working definition which argues that populism is ‘an ideology that pits a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites and dangerous ‘others’ who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity, and voice’.⁸⁴

From its earliest appearance during the French revolution through to the ‘Know Nothings’, the People’s Party and Huey Long’s ‘Every Man a King’ campaigns in the United States,⁸⁵ to its more contemporary variations,⁸⁶ populism has had several common recurring themes. The charismatic leader; the blurring of complex social and economic issues into simple binary choices; the identification and demonisation of an enemy, usually a corrupt and plutocratic elite; and the iteration of the common people against this elite.

Using this framework, the AFIL can be described as a populist party. Its central and noble aim was the to build a movement which would bridge ethnic and religious divides in a tolerant, self-governing Ireland, but this was not a popular position for an insurgent party to adopt as its central policy, and it proved to be impossible to frame it in a populist style. The party, however, needed the electoral support of Catholic nationalists and used the charismatic leadership of William O’Brien and his reputation as a nationalist icon to harness it. Based on the themes outlined above, the AFIL ran populist campaigns on a grossly exaggerated portrayal of the Irish parliamentary party and its affiliates as a corrupt cabal of place-hunters led by the venal triumvirate of John Redmond, John Dillon and Joseph Devlin. It promised, albeit vaguely, that its supporters would see economic and social advancement if the AFIL was triumphant. Despite its central aim of conciliation between nationalists and unionists it unashamedly played to its nationalist supporters by emphasising the

⁸³ D. Marquand, ‘The people is sublime: the long history of populism, from Robespierre to Trump’ in *New Statesman*, 24 July 2018.

⁸⁴ D. Albertazzi and D. McDonnell, *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy* (New York and London, 2008), p. 3.

⁸⁵ R.P. Formisano, *American Populist Movements from the Revolution to the 1850s* (ebook central.proquest.com (2008) (9 January 2019).

⁸⁶ D. Stockemer (ed.) *Populism Around the World* (<https://link-springer-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org>, 2019) (9 January 2019).

heroic personal histories of some its key figures, such as William O'Brien's many incarcerations during the Land War, and the Fenian adventures of the West Cork MP James Gilhooly. In this context the AFIL located itself in the role of plucky insurgent against a powerful adversary, a shameless elision of a detested enemy, seamlessly replacing the British state and Ascendency landlords for the Irish party, the Ancient Order of Hibernians and John Redmond. Finally, in true populist style, the AFIL projected a *tabula rasa* onto which a broad spectrum of discontents could be projected. By any definition, this can be described as populist.

Historians have been curiously reluctant to explore populism in Irish political history. For example, three of the most important works dealing with the development of Irish political life by Tom Garvin, David Fitzpatrick and O'Mahony and Delanty do not deal with populism.⁸⁷ This is perhaps because most political actors, including the Irish parliamentary party, Sinn Féin and Ulster unionists were equally populist, and it may, therefore, be argued that if all Irish politics was populist, there is nothing to elucidate. The ubiquity of populism, however, does not invalidate its identification and exploration, particularly as a means of mass mobilisation. It is also useful as a means of understanding the AFIL, not least because the party's use of populism explains both its phenomenal rise in Cork, but also because its inability to frame its policies of conciliation through a populist message played a significant part in its demise. For conciliation needed a different style of politics, one which called for reason over emotion; compromise over absolutism; a more nuanced portrayal of history and culture over ethnic and religious nationalism, and an appeal 'to the better angels of our nature' over the curse of the Banshee's Kiss.⁸⁸

Benjamin Arditi identifies an inherent risk to democratic accountability in the unqualified endorsement of strong and charismatic leadership: 'the centrality of the

⁸⁷ Garvin, *Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*; Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*; O'Mahony and Delanty, *Rethinking Irish History*.

⁸⁸ The Banshee's Kiss, in O'Brien's words, is 'The torch of Irish Nationality – Ireland one and indivisible and self-governed – will be carried on in the future, as it has been in the past, by the youth of the country generation after generation, until the crowning triumph is attained. The Banshee's Kiss may be fatally seductive to as many more in the future as it has been in the past to their undoing – to their loss of everything that is desirable and precious in life, ending in the prison or the grave, but its allurements remains irresistible all the same'. (Quoted in MacDonagh, *William O'Brien*, pp. 259-60).

leaders and their direct rapport with the ‘common man’ transforms them into something akin to infallible sovereigns in that their decisions are unquestionable because they are theirs.’⁸⁹ This accurately describes William O’Brien’s relationship both to his supporters and to his erstwhile colleagues in the AFIL. Because of his dominant personality; his reputation and standing as a hero of the Land War; and his willingness to use his wife’s resources to fund the AFIL, his political preferences, especially relating to conciliation with unionists, inevitably prevailed. Land purchase and improved conditions for farm labourers were two of O’Brien’s populist platforms, popular with the small farmers and landless labourers of North and West Cork who were the bedrock of AFIL support and which, to his advantage, widened the tribal cleavage with the Redmondites.

The AFIL existed from 1910 to 1918, although for the last two years of its existence it was, effectively, defunct. However, the aim of this study is not merely to chart the rise and fall of the AFIL but to place it in a continuum of working class dissent that was denied a platform through which its voice could be heard. The timeline of this study, therefore, takes a much longer perspective: from the Parnell split of 1890 to the rise of Fianna Fáil in 1927. In Victor Hugo's words, history is ‘An echo of the past in the future. A reflex from the future in the past’. Chapter One explores the origins of the AFIL, from the Parnell split through the discontent following the Wyndham land act to the political insurgency which led to the launch of the AFIL Chapter Two charts the successes of the AFIL in the two general elections of 1910 . Chapter Three looks at the AFIL in its most active period, during the Home Rule crisis. Chapter Four analyses its brief period in control of local government in Cork from 1911 to 1914. Chapter Five examines the two events which led to the decline of the AFIL: the First World War and the Easter Rising. Chapter Six considers the last years of the party from 1916 to the 1918 general election. Chapter Seven assesses the legacy of the AFIL through, the revolutionary years and the establishment of the Free State.

The AFIL, even in its heartland of Cork, has largely been forgotten and, like the Irish parliamentary party, was swept away in the electoral avalanche of

⁸⁹ B. Arditi, *Politics on the Edges of Liberalism: Difference, Populism, Revolution, Agitation* (Edinburgh, 2007), p. 5.

1918 and silenced by the same dismal amnesia to which the Home Rule movement was treated for many years by a triumphal republican historical narrative. Yet O'Brien and the AFIL, for all their shortcomings, kept alive the Parnellite flame of conciliation between the two traditions when many other sympathetic nationalists chose not to challenge the narrow Dillonite nationalism which dominated the Home Rule movement after 1903 and were instead content to reminisce on old glories, like the old Parnellite in Joyce's *Ivy Day in the Committee Room*, who recalls 'Musha, God be with them old times[...]there was some life in it then'.⁹⁰ The absence of the AFIL from the historical narrative is an omission that this study will therefore seek to correct.

⁹⁰ J. Joyce, 'Ivy Day in the Committee Room' in idem *Dubliners* <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/j/joyce/james/j8d/contents.html> (22 April 2019), p. 153.

CHAPTER ONE

'Tuppence Halfpenny Looking Down on Tuppence': The Origins of the All for Ireland League, 1890-1909

The origins of the All for Ireland League can, in part, be located in the fissure in the constitutional nationalist movement following the Wyndham land act of 1903, which had far-reaching effects in determining the future of the Irish parliamentary party. The events which led to this division triggered a fierce resentment against the party and its affiliates, what the AFIL leader William O'Brien maintained was a corrupt and venal hegemony. However, although discontent with the Home Rule movement festered throughout the country, it was only in the unique and volatile political maelstrom of Cork that this phenomenon managed to flourish. The febrile political climate in Cork was brought to life in Frank O'Connor's short story *The Coronet Player Who Betrayed Ireland* in which the young narrator (whose father is the eponymous coronet player) recalls parading with his friends on the streets to the north side of Cork city with tin cans and trumpets singing 'We'll hang Johnny Redmond from a sour apple tree'. On his way home from school, he comes across another 'group of poor misguided children barefoot and in rags' singing 'We'll hang William O'Brien from a sour apple tree. 'It left me', he says, 'with very little hope of Ireland.'¹

William O'Brien, the founder of the UIL, which was the central pillar of the Home Rule movement following its rebirth in 1900, also went on to become its foremost critic and leader of a schismatic movement ten years later. However, the fault lines which prefigured the rise of the AFIL go back even further and can be glimpsed in the bitter divisions of the Parnell split in Cork, and in the campaigns to improve the dreadful living and working conditions of the rural working class. The AFIL harnessed these grievances in an attempt to create a new centre party which would offer, in contemporary parlance, a 'third way' to nationalists alienated by the Home Rule movement, and progressive unionists willing to seek a new accommodation and accept some form of Irish self-government.

¹ F. O'Connor, 'The Coronet Player Who Betrayed Ireland' in *idem My Oedipus Complex and Other Stories* (London, 2005), p. 118.

The formation of the UIL in 1898 is heralded as being instrumental in the reunification of the Home Rule movement following the chaotic division of the Parnell split.² Yet this reunification, welcome as it was, papered over divisions in the nationalist movement which had existed since, and even predated, Parnell and appeared in different manifestations over the following decades. This was, in part, because the Irish parliamentary party was unable to deliver on its core objective of Home Rule and therefore unable to stem the rising tide of frustration felt by a generation of ambitious young nationalists who increasingly blamed Ireland's failure to achieve self-government for their thwarted aspirations.³ However, it was not only the educated middle class who felt their ambition stunted (by the hard-ethnic discrimination of the Castle administration), but also sections of the urban and rural working class who felt excluded by the hegemonic grip of the Irish parliamentary party who, through its affiliates, now dominated nationalist life.

From Parnell onwards, the Irish party had taken it as an axiomatic truth that it represented the interests of all Irish people including the urban and rural working class. As the *Freeman's Journal* argued, 'Long before the existence of the Labour Party, the cause of the workers in the House of Commons found constant, enthusiastic support from the Irish party, which was essentially a Labour Party.'⁴ This was a common obfuscation of the inherent class dynamics of the party which, after a brief flowering of radicalism following the launch of the UIL, became increasingly dominated by the new Catholic middle-class. The Home Rule movement's resilience relied on its ability to absorb and neutralise potential opposition which might challenge its dominance. Radical and socialist groups especially found it difficult to find a voice and a political space to challenge the conservative consensus. As O'Mahony and Delanty argue: 'Radical demands from within the nationalist front was the dog whose bark was stifled in late nineteenth and

² Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, pp. 33-69.

³ F. Campbell, 'Who Ruled Ireland? The Irish Administration, 1879-1914' in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (Sept., 2007), pp. 623-644.

⁴ *Freeman's Journal*, 9 July 1910.

twentieth century Ireland'.⁵ That 'stifled bark' found its voice in the AFIL, ironically with a leader, William O'Brien, who detested socialism and radical working class politics even more than the Home Rule movement from which he split.

Following the reunification of the Home Rule movement there were pockets of dissent all over the country, and as Tom Garvin has noted, 'A distaste for what was, in effect, one-party rule at a local level [which] appeared to have existed in incoherent and underground form throughout the country'.⁶ Following his rift with the Irish party in 1903, O'Brien's ambition was to harness the widespread, if uncoordinated, dissent and disenchantment with the Irish Party and its affiliates. The fulcrum of his movement was, inevitably, his Cork heartland. Cork historian John A. Murphy has noted that enthusiastic Corkonians accept as a richly deserved compliment the idea that Cork has some claim to be regarded as a microcosm of the whole country.⁷ This also was O'Brien's hope: that a political insurgency nurtured in Cork would spread nationwide. The reasons why it failed to do so will be examined later, but first, it is necessary to look at why Cork proved to be such fertile ground for the AFIL

In some aspects of its development, Cork was indeed quite exceptional with a long folk memory of grievance stretching back to the Plantations and, what Peter Hart describes as 'an overarching sense of identity, a Corkness'.⁸ It had the largest Protestant population outside Ulster and a long tradition of agrarian agitation where resistance manifested itself in secret agrarian societies. In this conflicted and contested land, there was a simmering sense of grievance, and a refusal amongst sections of the population to accept the post-plantation status quo.

The plantations left Cork with a large and relatively affluent Protestant community living close to a much larger and more impoverished Catholic population. The so-called 'Protestant Frontier' stretching from the Caha Mountains along a string of

⁵ O'Mahony and Delanty, *Rethinking Irish History*, p. 87.

⁶ Garvin, *Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*, p. 94.

⁷ J. A. Murphy, 'Cork: Anatomy and Essence' in Flanagan and Buttimer (Eds.) *Cork History & Society*, pp. 1-14.

⁸ P. Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies: Violence and Community in Cork 1916-1923* (Oxford, 1999), p.42

settlements from Bantry to Baltimore and Bandon consolidated the English presence, but with an underlying and ever-present sense of insecurity.⁹ As Lionel Fleming, a member of a West Cork landed family observed in a comment that reflected both arrogance and anxiety, ‘Nothing counted for about three miles on any side of us because there were no Protestants until then’.¹⁰ However, Cork also had a thriving Protestant commercial and professional class and unionists were active in opposition to Home Rule, especially in the 1880s, through organisations like the Primrose League in which women played a prominent role, for example, acting as League convenors in Mitchelstown and Bandon.¹¹ It gives some indication of the political decline of Protestants that following the Local Government act of 1898, which gave the vote to the majority of the electorate, unionists in Cork took only five of fifty-six seats in the local elections of 1899, in comparison to previous elections where they had held up to one third of the seats.¹² This loss of political power ran in tandem with land reform, and even before the Wyndham land act of 1903 successive Liberal and Conservative governments had set the direction of travel concerning land purchase. There was an acceptance that radical change was coming and the last act of the Land War was about to be played out.

When it came after 1903 the sheer scale of the transfer of land over the following decade led to a further Protestant decline. Between 1901 and 1911 the census returns record a fall in the native Protestant population in Cork of 17%, which Barry Keogh argues was primarily caused by economic emigration. Some of those who left came from the professional and business classes, but many landowners also decided to leave. In 1884 there were 123 major landowners in Cork, only two of these were Catholic. By 1911 this figure was reduced to fifty-two Protestant landowners.¹³ The 1911 census for Cork city and county shows a Protestant

⁹ B. Keane, ‘Ethnic cleansing? Protestant decline in West Cork between 1911 and 1926’ in *History Ireland* (vol. 20, 2012), pp. 35-8.

¹⁰ I. d’Alton, Ian ‘Keeping Faith: An Evocation of the Cork Protestant Character, 1820-1920’ in *Cork History & Society*, p. 770.

¹¹ M. Luddy, ‘Women and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Ireland’ in *The Irish Women's History Reader*, A. Hayes, D. Urquhart (eds.) (London, 2001), p. 34.

¹² *Cork Examiner*, 6 and 18 January 1899.

¹³ B. Keogh, *Statistical analysis of the makeup and decline of the Protestant population in County Cork 1911-1926*,

https://www.academia.edu/1823229/Statistical_decline_of_the_Protestant_Population_in_County_Cork_1911-1926 (19 April 2018).

population of just over 35,000, 64% of which were Church of Ireland and 20% Church of England (mostly military, naval and administrative personnel).¹⁴ Protestants still owned many of the bigger businesses and professional positions in local government. However, Cork was a commercially more heterogeneous region because of a strong tradition of Catholic trade associated with exports, provisioning and allied industries and even as early as the 1820s industrial ownership in Cork city was equally divided between Catholics and Protestants.¹⁵

The diverse Protestant culture of Cork also produced Feargus O'Connor, the Chartist leader who had a large estate in Fort Robert in West Cork, an area which, in the 1820s was described as being in a state of 'miniature civil war' in a conflict between Whiteboys and local landowners, with O'Connor himself playing a leading role in organising the insurgents.¹⁶ But Cork also saw the survival of some of the great Catholic Gaelic families like the Jacobite-supporting Nagles (the maternal family of Edmund Burke, and of William O'Brien who also claimed kinship), whose lands in the Blackwater valley were described as being like 'an island of Catholic hegemony in a sea of Protestant ascendancy'.¹⁷ Cork, in particular, was different to other parts of Ireland because of its strong tradition of heterodox nationalism.¹⁸ These were communities, such as Sliabh Luachra on the North Cork-Kerry border, with a strong, self-confident Gaelic culture and a sturdy sense of independence the origins of which were traced in Daniel Corkery's *The Hidden Ireland*.¹⁹

Cork maintained its reputation for rebellion, from Whiteboy campaigns which took on a notably more political tone both before and after the 1798 rebellion with attacks

¹⁴ Census of Ireland 1911.

¹⁵ A. Bielenberg, 'The Industrial Elite in Ireland from the Industrial revolution to the First World War', in F. Lane (ed.) *Politics, Society and the Middle Class in Modern Ireland* (London, 2010), p. 61.

¹⁶ D. Read and E. Glasgow, *Feargus O'Connor* (London, 1961), p. 24

¹⁷ K. O'Donnell, 'The Image of a Relationship in Blood: Parliament na mBan and Burke's Jacobite Politics', in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, vol. 15 (2000), p. 101.

¹⁸ T. Garvin, *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland, 1858-1928* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 51-2.

¹⁹ *The Hidden Ireland* (Kindle Edition), by the Cork writer and academic Daniel Corkery, is an account of the survival of Gaelic culture in Munster under the penal laws of the eighteenth century. First published in 1924, *Hidden Ireland* was an influential text used to underpin an Irish-Ireland version of nationalist history. It has since been the subject of several critical studies, most notably, L. M. Cullen, 'The Hidden Ireland: Re-Assessment of a Concept' in *Studia Hibernica* (no. 9, 1969), pp. 7-47.

on ‘tithe farmers’;²⁰ the Rockite movement of the 1820s which ‘constituted one of the most extensive and serious rural disturbances in Ireland before the Famine’;²¹ and in the 1880s there were bitter Land League battles in which William O’Brien played a prominent role. Cork also became a centre of Fenian activity with up to four thousand sworn members of the secret society in the late 1860s.²² In addition to campaigns of agrarian agitation during the Land War and Plan of Campaign, north Cork – which was to become the epicentre of AFIL support – had long been synonymous with the struggle for better conditions for the rural working class and especially landless agricultural labourers. This tradition of vigorous agitation put the labourers at odds with the land reformers including the Land League and later the UIL, whose campaign for land purchase did not benefit landless labourers. The ubiquitous republican activist Liam de Róiste chronicled the progress of a small but hyperactive separatist movement in Cork from the turn of the century to the War of Independence.²³ Many cultural nationalists within this group, including de Róiste, joined Sinn Féin after 1907, but, in general, their social and political perspectives were conservative, and the national question came first, as de Róiste disapprovingly noted of the Cork labour movement, ‘Bread and butter is the cry of the labour men and damn nationality’.²⁴

It is one of the ironies of the AFIL story that a movement whose *raison d’être* was conciliation with unionists and Protestants should have sprung from such conflicted territory with a history of sectarian tensions stretching back to the plantations. In its political development, especially its strong strain of independent opposition to the Irish party, Cork was quite exceptional.

²⁰ J. G. Patterson, ‘Educated Whiteboyism’: The Cork Tithe War, 1798–9, in *18th-19th Century Social Perspectives*, Issue 4, vol. 12 (Winter 2004), pp. 25-9.

²¹ S. Katsuta, ‘The Rockite Movement in County Cork in the Early 1820s’, *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 33, no. 131 (May 2003), p. 278

O’Brien, *Irish Revolution* (2 May 2018), p. 2.

²² Murphy, ‘Organised Labour’, p. 471.

²³ L. de Róiste, *Diaries, 1898-1918* (Witness Statement 1698), Irish Bureau of Military History (BMH).

²⁴ de Róiste diaries, 23 January 1908 (BMH, WS 1698).

The AFIL drew its most fervent support from the working class districts on the north side of Cork city, amongst deracinated workers who had migrated from rural areas, and who received little representation or support from mainstream nationalism. As Maura Murphy notes, they were also ignored by the Cork labour movement who, for years before the AFIL appeared, 'excluded the neediest of the working class – the unskilled general labourer, the female outworker and the despised country-born immigrant tradesman'.²⁵ These areas contained the city's manufacturing base and had, throughout the nineteenth century, been a centre for working class dissent. This potential radicalism, however, found no means of expression. Conservative craft unions dominated organised labour and attempts to establish the First International in 1870, Davitt's Irish Democratic Labour Federation in 1890, the Fabian Society in 1890, and later James Connolly's Irish Republican Socialist Party, were all crushed by opposition from the trades and clerical opprobrium.²⁶ A Fabian organiser noted the difficulty in raising the political awareness of the Cork artisans and concluded that Cork tradesmen were 'far from fit subjects for a Fabian society – scratch them, and you find a conservative of the crudest type'.²⁷

For unskilled workers, economic marginalisation ran in tandem with political disenfranchisement and, although the 1884 Reform Act had extended the franchise so that by 1891 68.1% of adult males in Cork were eligible to vote, many found it difficult to exert this right. These included those on poor relief, servants living with employers and sons living with parents, and there was also an eighteen-month qualifying period for householders, occupiers and lodgers which made registration difficult for those whose economic circumstances were precarious.²⁸ The extension of the franchise in 1898 put the Irish party and the UIL firmly in control of local

²⁵ Murphy, 'Organised Labour', p. 45. While seventy per cent of skilled workers in Cork were unionised, this fell to thirty per cent for unskilled and semi-skilled workers (M. Cronin, 'Work and Workers in Cork City and County 1800-1900' in *Cork History & Society*, p. 745).

²⁶ J. B. O'Brien, 'Population, Politics and Society in Cork, 1780-1900' in *Cork History & Society*, p. 717.

²⁷ Quoted in O'Brien, 'Population, Politics and Society', p. 713.

²⁸ B. M. Walker, 'The Irish Electorate, 1868-1915', in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 18, no. 71 (March 1973), pp. 365-7.

government in Cork city and county. However, the unskilled and poor again found that once elections were over, their grievances went mostly unheeded by a middle-class and conservative nationalist leadership.

The tenements in the flat of the city known as the Marsh, and the lanes around Shandon Street and Blackpool to the north and Barrack Street to the south had some appalling housing conditions. Although there had been a considerable improvement, and the number of families living in slum accommodation had been reduced from 72% in 1841 to 12.5% of households by 1900,²⁹ endemic poverty was still widespread. Research by a local priest, Fr A.M. Mac Sweeney, estimated that over a third of the population of Cork city 'were in a chronic state of want'.³⁰ The republican activist and academic Alfred J. Rahilly claimed that the better off turned a blind eye 'to stifle their consciences by a protective kind of ignorance' of the social problems which plagued the city and county.³¹ Neither poverty nor conflict between skilled and unskilled workers were, of course, confined to Cork. In Dublin, a third of families lived in one-bedroom accommodation, and the city had the worst slums in the United Kingdom.

While it is not possible here to explore in depth the labyrinth of Cork local politics in the post-Parnellite 1890s, we can glimpse the nature of the fault lines which were instrumental in the rise of the AFIL through the early career of the staunch O'Brienite, and later AFIL MP, Eugene Crean. He was a carpenter by trade from the south side of Cork city who became involved in nationalist politics and trade unionism and was elected as a town councillor and president of the United Trades Association (UTA) in 1886 and acted as a crucial advocate for the trades on the council. With Michael Davitt, he launched the ill-starred Irish Democratic Trade and Labour Federation in Cork in 1890.³² Following the Parnell split, anti-Parnellites launched the Cork National Committee with Crean in a leading role, and Parnellites in the city revived the defunct National League. The UTA also split down the middle

²⁹ *Censuses of Ireland, City of Cork 1841-1901*.

³⁰ A.M. Mac Sweeney, 'A Study of Poverty in Cork' (unpublished M.A. thesis, UCC, 1915).

³¹ A. J Rahilly, 'The Social Problem in Cork', *An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 6, no. 22 (June 1917), p. 177.

³² *Cork Examiner*, 21 January 1890.

with different unions and societies taking different sides.³³ Crean's Carpenters' Society supported Parnell and therefore withdrew their support for Crean who was subsequently forced to stand down as President of the UTA.³⁴ However, he continued to represent the trades' interests in the town council, and in 1892 was elected to parliament for Queens County in the 1892 general election for the anti-Parnellite Irish National Federation.

Crean represented a nexus between nationalism and labour, with the emphasis on nationalism, which began to disintegrate following Parnell's downfall.³⁵ Parnell had active and robust support from trade unions between 1880 to 1891 with massive popular demonstrations, marching bands and fiery speeches, and the skilled artisans of the city and county were the backbone of his support.³⁶ The oft-stated belief was that Parnellism, Home Rule, and the improvement of the working class would march hand in hand to the sunny uplands of prosperity and fair play for all in a free, self-governing Ireland. The Parnell split exposed class divisions, which came to the surface following the disintegration of the fragile coalition that was the nationalist movement in 1890. As Maura Murphy notes, the frustrations at what many in the UTA felt was Parnell's arrogance in his dealings with them and his refusal to champion their grievances, erupted.³⁷ As Myles Dungan argues, Parnell was adept at adopting a veneer of radicalism which belied his social conservatism but allowed him to hold his disparate movement together (his devoted disciple William O'Brien adopted an identical strategic persona).³⁸ Parnell however, harboured an instinctive hostility to organised labour and attacked Davitt's launch of the Irish Democratic Labour Federation in uncompromising terms, 'I don't approve of your labour organisation in the South of Ireland; it will lead to mischief and can do no good [...]'.³⁹

³³ Because the cleavage was so bitter, the Trades Council in 1892 decided to ban political discussions (*Cork Examiner*, 16 January 1891).

³⁴ In the St Patrick's Day Parade in Cork in 1891 the following trades supported Parnell: coopers, carpenters, cabinet makers, pork butchers, builders' labourers, brewery workmen, and dock labourers of Passage West (*Cork Examiner*, 18 March 1891).

³⁵ Patrick Maume also suggests that Crean was anti-Semitic although that did not appear to affect his close relationship with William O'Brien whose wife was Jewish (Maume, *Long Gestation*, p. 52).

³⁶ M. Murphy 'Parnellism and Workers: The Experience of Cork and Limerick', in *Politics and the Irish Working Class*, pp. 140-1.

³⁷ Murphy, 'Organised Labour', pp. 416-8.

³⁸ M. Dungan, *Mr Parnell's Irish Rottweiler: Censorship and the United Ireland Newspaper 1881-1891* (Dublin, 2014).

What is trades-unionism but a landlordism of labour I would not tolerate, if I were at the head of a government, such bodies as trades-unions. They are opposed to individual liberty and should be kept down, as Bismarck keeps them under in Germany'.³⁹

In the last year of his life, Parnell embraced labour and the cause of landless labourers. Davitt spoke of his 'deathbed repentance' and mocked his failure to support the campaign for the eight-hour working day with a scabrous piece of doggerel:

Eight hours work and eight hours play,
Eight hours in the company of Kitty O'Shea.⁴⁰

Following the split, the town council in Cork voted in support of Parnell, but with a substantial minority of twenty against.⁴¹ However, by the time of the by-election caused by Parnell's death, sentiments had changed and John Redmond, who stood as the Parnellite candidate, was soundly defeated by Martin Flavin, the anti-Parnellite, with 62% of the vote.⁴² The same divide was almost replicated in the general election the following year when William O'Brien and Maurice Healy, standing as anti-Parnellites, took the two Cork city seats with sixty-one per cent of the vote. The other Cork seats were all taken by anti-Parnellites. The AFIL, that most Parnellite of parties, founded almost twenty years after Parnell's death, paradoxically had five of its eight MPs elected as anti-Parnellites in 1892: William O'Brien (Cork City), Timothy Healy (Louth North), Maurice Healy (Cork City), James Gilhooly (Cork West) and Eugene Crean (Queens County).⁴³ This result, of course, did not necessarily mean that they rejected everything that Parnell had stood for (although

³⁹ Quoted in M. Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland* (London, 1904), (archive.org) (9 May 2018), p. 636.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Callanan, *Parnell Split*, p. 294.

⁴¹ *Cork Examiner*, 17 December 1890.

⁴² B. M. Walker (Ed.), *Parliamentary Elections Results in Ireland, 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978), p. 143.

⁴³ Walker, *Election Results 1801-1922*, pp. 145-8.

Tim Healy's wilder rhetoric might suggest that he had). That other AFIL stalwart D.D. Sheehan was a staunch Parnellite but did not enter Parliament until 1901.⁴⁴

The Parnell split revealed alienation and divisions in working class nationalist communities in Cork city similar to the bitter conflict between the AFIL and the Irish party and its affiliates which erupted twenty years later. Hostilities erupted during the by-election caused by Parnell's death in November 1891. There were pitched battles between Parnellites and anti-Parnellites in the streets of Blackpool, a working class enclave on the north side of the city, much of which was strongly anti-Parnellite. Rival brass bands led processions through Cork city and, as John Borgonovo notes, 'served as shock troops, often spearheading mob assaults on rival crowds'.⁴⁵ Anti-Parnellites attacked the Parnellite Butter Exchange Band, and there was fighting with shovel handles and tree branches and repeated police baton charges. Opponents pelted William O'Brien and James Gilhooly with stones and bricks, and Eugene Crean was injured while leading an anti-Parnellite procession. Both the North and South Infirmaries were inundated with casualties, and there was even talk of setting up a temporary medical station in Blackpool.⁴⁶

This can seem like a bewildering conflict. Before the Parnell split the nationalist movement had, ostensibly, been united, but now seemed to want to crack each other's heads with alacrity. These opposing factions came from working class communities who were promised much by nationalist politicians at election time. Redmond declared his support for the eight-hour day and other labour reforms.⁴⁷ Likewise, the anti-Parnellites candidate Martin Flavin declared his priority 'was the betterment of the working class'.⁴⁸ The anti-Parnellites ran a more populist campaign than the Parnellites focusing on Flavin, the native-born son, against the interloper John Redmond. William O'Brien declared, 'Men have come among you,

⁴⁴ In joining the anti-Parnellites, the deciding factor for O'Brien was Timothy Healy's ambitions to lead the anti-Parnellites which O'Brien thought would be disastrous for Irish nationalism. (Callanan, *The Parnell Split*, p. 145).

⁴⁵ J. Borgonovo, 'Politics as Leisure: Brass Bands in Cork, 1845-1918' in L. Lane and W. Murphy (eds.) *Leisure and the Irish in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 23-40.

⁴⁶ *Cork Examiner*, 5 November 1891

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4 November 1891.

men who are strangers to Cork – runaways from their own County Wexford, and placemen drummed out of Dublin Castle'.⁴⁹ Both sides claimed a patriotic mandate and made frequent references to the 'hillside men', with the marching Parnellites giving rousing renditions of 'The Boys of Wexford' and the anti-Parnellites 'Who Dares to Speak of '98'.⁵⁰ John Dillon invoked his, and by implication, Flavin's nationalist lineage and spoke of, 'standing side by side with the gallant remnant of '66 and '67'.⁵¹ The clergy, which had played such a decisive role in Parnell's downfall, was, with some exceptions, unashamedly partisan in the subsequent split. Bishop O'Callaghan of Cork proclaimed, 'In Cork [city], there is much division, the mob is for Parnell, and the priests were insulted and hooted loudly in the street. The country and country towns have taken the opposite side and so have all the priests except one, and he has lately retraced his steps and made a public apology'.⁵²

The *Cork Examiner* noted that some of the protagonists were part of the old clans of York Street and Quarry Lane in Blackpool where there had 'long existed an animosity between these localities'.⁵³ York Street was Parnellite and Quarry Lane anti-Parnellite, and long-festering enmities now found a new and political form. However, a closer look indicates some economic and social differences. The 1901 census (the nearest available to 1891) shows that the majority of adult males in Quarry Lane were employed in unskilled labour: as coal porters, builders' labourers, quarry labourers and car men, with a single family of French polishers representing the trades.⁵⁴ As Adrian Pimley notes, these workers were often too precarious to organise, often hired by the day.⁵⁵ Most of the adults were also born in county Cork, part of that in-migration, driven by dire rural poverty, that caused such resentment amongst those born in the city and who considered these migrants as interlopers who brought down wages and living standards. By contrast, York Street was populated

⁴⁹ Ibid, 28 October 1891.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 2 November 1891.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Quoted in M. Tierney, *Croke of Cashel: The life of Archbishop Thomas Croke, 1823-1902* (London, 1976), p. 127. The Bishop's comments may have been influenced by a rumour that spread rapidly in Cork that a local priest, Father McGrath, had been assaulted by a Parnellite mob. This claim proved to be untrue as Father McGrath later confirmed (*Cork Examiner*, 2 November 1891).

⁵³ *Cork Examiner*, 2 November 1891.

⁵⁴ Census of Ireland 1901.

⁵⁵ A. Pimley, 'The Working class Movement and the Irish Revolution, 1896-1923' in D.G. Boyce (ed) *The Revolution in Ireland 1879 - 1923* (London, 1988), p. 193

by shopkeepers, hackney car drivers, cattle dealers and accountants. Most of these residents had been born in the city and occupied a higher social status than their neighbours in Quarry Lane, and would presumably, have taken exception to being described by Bishop O'Callaghan as 'a Parnellite mob'. As most were tradesmen, they also had more economic and political leverage through the UTA which had taken an active role in questioning and lobbying both candidates on their policies towards labour. In contrast, many unskilled workers were not unionised or were members of relatively weak unions, and consequently, their means of exerting economic or political power was constrained.

Some of these tensions erupted in the months preceding the Parnell split when there was a wave of strikes by semi-skilled and unskilled workers in Cork, which included pork butchers, foundry workers, millers, builders' labourers, dock workers, carters, and railwaymen. These strikes were precipitated by the rise of the 'new unionism': British-based amalgamated unions who organised workers not represented by craft unions. Also, the South of Ireland Labour Union, which was independent and non-amalgamated, orchestrated action by low-paid unskilled workers, an early iteration of James Larkin's attempts to form 'One Big Union'.⁵⁶ Of these strikes, only the pork butchers were successful, mainly because they had the support of the UTA.⁵⁷ Although there is no direct evidence to link the strikes with the turmoil and violence triggered by the Parnell split, the sense of anger and frustration following the collapse of these disputes and the refusal of the craft unions and the UTA to support striking workers, very likely contributed to the political conflict.

The conflict between different elements of the working class in Cork city during the 1890s and 1900s indicates an attempt by an alienated minority to coalesce around a political project which might offer representation and improvements in working and living conditions. It also shows a nascent class consciousness, even if that was only defined by hostility to a more privileged section of the working class and a sense of exclusion from a hegemonic system which denied them recognition. The old Cork

⁵⁶ Murphy, *Organised Labour in Cork City*, pp. 293-300.

⁵⁷ *Cork Examiner*, 8 March 1890.

idiom 'Tuppence halfpenny looking down on tuppence' could not have found a more fitting example than the conflict between York Street and Quarry Lane.

Working people who divided into opposing sides in the Parnell split, and repeated the process twenty years later following the AFIL- UIL demarcation, were not, in all likelihood, much exercised by the nuances or dynamics of the Parnell split or the later O'Brienite-Redmondite cleavage. However, what these conflicts indicate were distorted manifestations of a class conflict that was obfuscated by the narrow parameters of a conservative political consensus, where labour interests were filtered through the ever-present national question. In 1910 a new generation of unskilled and semi-skilled workers felt as alienated and disenfranchised as had the previous one. In Marxist terms, the denial of a means of expressing fundamental issues leads to a cycle of false consciousness with workers at each other's throats and inveigled into supporting political forces that are inimical to their interests and where the true nature of class relations is obscured. As Ron Eyerman argues: 'The difference between the working class and the bourgeoisie, in this regard, is that the latter benefits from this mystification and the former suffers from it.'⁵⁸

This democratic vacuum in which many alienated and disenfranchised Cork workers languished, was briefly filled by the rise of a politicised labour movement in the years that followed, facilitated by the sundering of the Irish party. In the first local elections under the new Local Government act in 1899, which had significantly widened the franchise,⁵⁹ Labour candidates stood in Cork city for the first time and took nine of fifty-six seats. The nationalist vote was equally split between Parnellites and anti-Parnellites who took eighteen seats each. Labour polled well in the North-West, and West wards and the anti-Parnellites were also most active in the North-East and North-West wards, areas which ten years later provided strong support for the AFIL⁶⁰ Labour's close relationship with the UTA was reflected in its political representatives, and in the 1902 local elections, thirty-three Labour candidates were

⁵⁸ R. Eyerman, 'False Consciousness and Ideology in Marxist Theory' in *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 24, no. 1/2 (1981), pp. 43-56.

⁵⁹ The act widened the franchise to give the vote to most men and women in local elections (subject to certain qualifications and restrictions) and established county, borough, rural and urban councils. It brought an end to unionist domination of local government.

⁶⁰ *Cork Constitution*, 18 January 1899.

members of skilled unions indicating that, once again, the interests of unskilled workers were unrepresented.⁶¹ Timidity also undermined Labour's standing in pursuing labour demands and avoiding confrontation, in addition to its desperate need for 'respectability', and the question of whether the national question should be pre-eminent. The acceptance speech of Eugene Crean, elected as the Labour Mayor of Cork in 1899, encapsulated the limitations of the labour movement. Crean accepted the mayoralty, 'As a Nationalist first and a Labour representative afterwards', he had been 'a friend to the labourers [...] but had never encouraged them to any strike', if strikes had taken place, they had been organised without his knowledge or consultation.⁶² For Crean and the other Labour councillors, 'politics needed to be kept out of the council', and any hint of confrontation or radicalism was to be avoided like the plague.⁶³ Little wonder that many working class people looked elsewhere for representation and inspiration.

The reunification of the Irish party and the rise of the UIL was a pivotal moment for Irish nationalism. In the national cause, a patina of unity was imposed, and divisions were forced underground and obfuscated. Far from the 'clean sweep' that William O'Brien and other critics of the party hoped for, no less than forty-nine of seventy-six MPs returned in the general election of 1900 were of the old guard. As Philip Bull argues, this inchoate attempt to modernise led to a 'deadening effect on the whole nationalist movement'.⁶⁴ However, the fractures in nationalism ran deeper than the parliamentary party and in Cork, the old fault lines that presaged the rise of the AFIL in later years were already present. The UIL was rapidly transformed from a radical grassroots organisation willing to challenge strong farmers and powerful graziers, to one which increasingly reflected and represented their interests. As John O'Donovan notes, in the newly-elected local councils in Cork there was a conflict between councillors, most of whom represented farming and commercial interests who paid the rates which funded councils, and those who would benefit from local

⁶¹ S. McQuay-Reddick, 'Political and Industrial Labour in Cork 1899-1914' (unpublished M.A. thesis, UCC, 1984), p. 63.

⁶² *Cork Examiner*, 24 January 1899.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ P. Bull, 'The United Irish League and the Reunion of the Irish Parliamentary Party, 1898-1900', in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. XXVI, no. 101 (May 1988), p. 77.

government initiatives such as subsidised housing and direct labour schemes.⁶⁵ The Irish Land and Labour Association (ILLA), representing farm labourers, was willing to bring this conflict into the open. It was most active in Cork, Limerick and Tipperary and affiliated to the UIL, and demanded that councils should provide labourers' cottages and direct labour schemes for road and other local government projects.⁶⁶

In Cork city, the same underlying tensions which had erupted into violence in 1891 can be seen in the attempt to establish the UIL. A branch was launched in July 1900 by Redmond and O'Brien, but two months later there was open conflict between 'labour-nationalists' like Eugene Crean and D.F. Kiely of the UTA, and the UIL. Kiely complained that workers in the city had found it impossible to join the UIL. A delegate of the Builders' Labourers Union demanded that at least one Cork candidate in the forthcoming general election should be a Labour man and the meeting descended into a melee between different factions.⁶⁷ The UIL branch was eventually established, but the organisation effectively split following William O'Brien's resignation in 1903, laying the foundations six years later for the launch of the AFIL. However, labour did not benefit from these divisions and its relatively strong showing in the 1899 local elections proved to be its high-water mark for many years. Attempts to establish an independent voice for labour and to distance itself from the suffocating grasp of nationalism could not survive the hegemonic grip of a revived Irish party and its affiliates.

Although some of the faces may have changed, the first local elections which the AFIL contested for Cork Corporation in January 1911 were equally as bitter as those after the Parnell split and in 1902, although there were some disorienting changes. The Butter Exchange Band, which had led Redmondite processions in 1891, was now strongly O'Brienite (Barrack Street Band now provided the musical support for Redmondites), and Quarry Lane now had its own O'Brienite-supporting band. The

⁶⁵ J. O'Donovan, 'The United Irish League in Cork 1900-1909: Resistance and Counter-Resistance (academia.edu) (23 September 2018).

⁶⁶ See, for example, ILLA meeting in Skibbereen which condemned the newly elected urban district council for refusing to build eighteen labourers' cottages (*Southern Star*, 2 September 1899).

⁶⁷ *Cork Examiner*, 22 September 1900.

AFIL drew its support from both sides of the old divide as many Parnellites became disenchanted with the Home Rule movement under Redmond. The O'Brienite party polled well in the two Cork city wards where labour was most active in 1899: in the North-West ward (where the AFIL took all six seats) and the West ward. The AFIL also polled well both in the previous anti-Parnellite wards of North-East, but also the North-Centre ward where Parnellites had swept the board in 1899.⁶⁸

The nationalist movement did not split along class lines following Parnell's downfall (as Michael Davitt had earlier predicted), and the anxiety felt by many conservative nationalists that the Parnell split would release pent-up class tensions, did not come to pass on a national level. Radicalism never managed to overcome the Home Rule movement's innate conservatism which was reinforced by land purchase as a new class of tenant-proprietors began to emerge. Although Davitt joined the anti-Parnellites and maintained a powerful position in the nationalism movement his radical influence was minimal primarily because he lacked both parliamentary support and a grassroots movement. In the end the ideological undercurrents of the split descended into factionalism. Tim Healy consolidated clerical support using a crude chauvinism which accused Parnellites of being an anti-nationalist and effete clique, in league with landlords, Fenian revolutionaries and a debased underclass which put the Home Rule movement in jeopardy. As Frank Callanan notes, he, 'legitimated the status of the nationalist tenantry as against those above and below it in Irish society'.⁶⁹ In disgust with the factionalism and discord, William O'Brien staged one of his periodic withdrawals from political life and resigned his parliamentary seat in 1895.

There is no silver thread linking the Parnell split to the rise of the AFIL. However, as M.J. Kelly argues: 'Fundamentally the split exposed the fragility of the Parnellite hegemony; it released pent-up energy that had been restrained by the belief that the Home Rule party offered the best chance of extending Ireland's self-government.'⁷⁰ The fracturing of the nationalist movement in the 1890s led to a sense of disenchantment, not only amongst advanced nationalists but also by the poor and

⁶⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 18 January 1911.

⁶⁹ Callanan, *Healy*, p. 397.

⁷⁰ M.J. Kelly, *The Fenian Ideal and Irish Nationalism 1882-1916* (New York, 2004), p. 47.

unskilled who had vainly hoped that Parnellism would lead not only to Home Rule but also to social reform and improvements for the working class. The internal contradictions and limitations of both the mainstream nationalist and labour movements prevented the emergence of such radical sentiments which might have challenged the conservative consensus. It was this vacuum which the O'Brienite dissidents, and later, the AFIL, filled.

iii

'The desire to acquire land', Parnell stated, 'is everywhere one of the strongest instincts of human nature and that instinct is never stronger [...] than in a country such as Ireland, where land is limited, and those who desire to acquire it are numerous.'⁷¹ Up to the first decade of the twentieth century, land was the *leitmotif* of Ireland's relationship with Britain. For Marxists, the inequities of Irish land tenure was England's Achilles' Heel. Moreover, land, for Catholic nationalists, evoked primordial passions that one day what had been stolen from them would be taken back; as Laurence Ginnell reminded the ascendancy, 'nemesis-like the bitterly wronged descendants of the hunted farmers are going to affect re-distribution'.⁷² However, Parnell's view that resolving the land question would bring about reconciliation and hasten Home Rule was not shared by a significant part of his movement and the Dillonite wing believed self-government would only be achieved by continuing struggle. The reunification of the Irish parliamentary party in 1900 – driven primarily by the need to incorporate the rampant UIL – attempted to paper over the cracks of this fissure without tackling the fundamental differences or asking whether it was possible for two such opposing views to co-exist. This was another fault line from which the AFIL drew its inspiration and support.

By the turn of the century, many landlords accepted that change was on the way and most welcomed the prospect of an extension of land purchase as the only means of staving off financial ruin. Lord Bandon, for example, one of the largest landowners in Cork, took out three mortgages to service his debts amounting to £83,000, in

⁷¹ Quoted in F.S.L. Lyons 'The Political Ideas of Parnell' in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (December, 1973), p. 760.

⁷² Quoted in Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, p. 148.

addition to a £90,000 mortgage he had secured to pay off earlier encumbrances.⁷³ All but the most reactionary elements of the British political establishment accepted that a final settlement of the Irish land problem was necessary. For, as Andrew Gailey notes, the spectre that haunted British conservatives was not Home Rule, but the fear of socialism and the possibility that the disenchantment of the Irish rural working class and the instability inherent in the system of land tenure could destabilise the good governance of the kingdom and usher in this dreadful prospect.⁷⁴ However, there were those who would not benefit from land reform and the new dispensation of tenant-proprietorship, and would not willingly accept their exclusion. North Cork, especially an area bounded by Kanturk and Newmarket, was the epicentre of the struggle for better conditions for landless agricultural labourers, that forgotten class who were often ignored in the Land War and who did not benefit from land reform.⁷⁵ This region also became a stronghold of the AFIL and the struggle for the betterment of farm labourers was integral to the O'Brienite political insurgency.

If the plight of farm labourers was all but ignored by mainstream nationalism, so too was the position of women in rural communities whose economic status underwent a significant deterioration with the advent of farm modernisation. Between 1891 to 1911 the number of men in rural areas with designated jobs remained constant at 64% of the male population. In contrast, the role of rural females in designated occupations fell from 23% to 15%. Mechanisation and changes in farming methods caused this decline; for example, the development of cooperative creameries changed a predominantly female occupation of home dairying to a male-dominated industrial process. The decline in paid female employment witnessed a concomitant increase in unpaid housework, which left women less independent and more

⁷³ W.R. Forsythe, 'The Decline of the Landed Estates 1815-1914' (unpublished Ph.D thesis UCC, 2005), pp. 164-6.

⁷⁴ A. Gailey, *Ireland and the Death of Kindness: The Experience of Constructive Unionism, 1890-1905* (Cork, 1987), p. 314.

⁷⁵ Bradley, *Farm Labourers*; P.G. Lane, 'The Land and Labour Association 1894-1914' in *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, vol. 98 (1993), pp. 90-106; Fintan Lane, 'P. F. Johnson, Nationalism, and Irish Rural Labourers', 1869-82 in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 33, no. 130 (November, 2002), pp. 191-208.

vulnerable.⁷⁶ However, this was an economic and social phenomenon, even more so than the plight of farm labourers, that was beyond the parameters of political dialogue, even for groups like the ILLA who demanded improvements for male workers.

The inherent contradictions and obfuscated class conflict within the Home Rule movement, which resulted in the rise of the AFIL, can be glimpsed in the attempt to frustrate D. D. Sheehan's candidature in the 1901 by-election in mid-Cork. He had argued forcefully that land purchase did not benefit landless labourers or the thirty per cent of tenant farmers who had less than thirty acres. His formidable energies and organising skills had been focused on building up the ILLA, and he was not even a member of the UIL when he decided to stand.⁷⁷ He faced vehement opposition from the party establishment who saw his agitation on behalf of farm labourers as divisive. At a stormy selection meeting, Joseph Devlin, representing the National Directory of the UIL, unsuccessfully attempted to have ILLA branches barred from the proceedings.⁷⁸ Devlin was overruled, Sheehan was selected and went on to become the youngest, and one of the most independent MPs to take the Irish party pledge. He recalled 'except where Labour questions and the general interests of my constituents were concerned, I stood more or less aloof from the active labours of the Party. I was in the position of a looker-on and a critic.'⁷⁹

In the two years before the Wyndham land act of 1903, a renewed campaign of agitation for compulsory land purchase took priority over rural class conflict. William O'Brien and John Redmond launched what would prove to be the last of the great land agitations. The campaign also illustrated the dramatic transformation of William O'Brien, one of the most formidable leaders of the land struggle of his generation, to the apostle of conciliation only a few months later. O'Brien claimed that, like his hero and mentor Parnell, he had always been a strong advocate of conciliation, although Paul Bew notes that in the years before the Land Conference

⁷⁶ J. Bourke, 'Working Women: The Domestic Labour Market in Rural Ireland, 1890-1914', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. XXI:3 (Winter 1991), pp. 479-499.

⁷⁷ Lane, 'Land and Labour Association', pp. 90-106.

⁷⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 11 May 1901.

⁷⁹ Sheehan, *Ireland Since Parnell*, Chapter XII.

he was mostly silent on this issue.⁸⁰ As he began to campaign for a new agitation in 1901, his rhetoric harked back to the old days of the Land War, and he talked of his disgust with that ‘miserable twaddle of conciliation with the Landlord enemies’.⁸¹ In launching the campaign in Westport in September 1901, O’Brien railed against ‘landlords, landgrabbers and graziers’, a triptych of villainy guaranteed to rouse nationalist fervour. He called for a campaign of boycotting of those who did not support the abolition of landlordism, ‘Every landlord who refused I would treat him in the same as the landgrabber in the thousand ways that the people have the power to do it’.⁸²

Although O’Brien played little part in the campaign due to ill-health, it spread quickly around the country forcing landlords to take collective action in the face of boycotting and intimidation. The Cork Defence Union, for example, claimed that nineteen farms were managed by caretakers employed by the Union and reported widespread boycotting and intimidation all over the county: cattle, which had been sold at auction, were returned to their boycotted owners, and a caretaker’s donkey was attacked and his dog killed and thrown into a well from which the family drew their drinking water.⁸³ Police reports in Cork spoke of a campaign of intimidation which the forces of law and order could not deal with.⁸⁴ In the summer of 1902, O’Brien called for universal boycotting, and he and Redmond shared platforms and made inflammatory speeches. At a UIL convention in Cork O’Brien chided local nationalists for their lack of action and reminded them that there were ‘over 250 evicted farms but only three political prisoners in the County Gaol’. He proposed to reverse these figures and went on to tell landlords that unless they were willing to accept a fair price for their property, then they should ‘bundle themselves out of the country and let them go to that hotter region which may be more congenial to their Cromwellian hearts’.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, pp. 17-18.

⁸¹ *Western People*, 7 September 1901.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Cork Examiner*, 16 December 1901.

⁸⁴ Inspector General’s Report: CO/904/74 January 1902, pp. 286-7.

⁸⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 26 July 1902.

The backdrop to the land agitation in 1901-2 was very different from that of the Land League's and the Plan of Campaign. By 1900 there was a general acceptance by landlords and a broad spectrum of political opinion, both in Ireland and Westminster, that land reform had not worked and was the cause of continuing political and social unrest, and therefore a new land act was needed which would settle the Irish land question. A new reforming Irish Secretary, George Wyndham, was sympathetic to this view but found his way blocked by the Treasury. Wyndham's failed attempt to introduce a Land bill early in 1902 exacerbated a general sense of frustration and malaise and was dismissed out of hand by Redmond.⁸⁶ The campaign launched by O'Brien and Redmond was therefore designed to break this logjam using a combination of agitation by the UIL and parliamentary pressure by the party. The campaign had the added benefits for nationalists of demonstrating the effectiveness of a united movement and increasing support for the UIL. It forced Wyndham, against his wishes, to proclaim large parts of the country, including Cork city and county where jury trials were suspended, and two Crown-appointed resident magistrates handed down 144 convictions for disorder.⁸⁷

However, the campaign was never widely supported in the parliamentary party and in August 1902 Redmond, Dillon and T.P. O'Connor warned O'Brien that he could no longer count on the country to support widespread agrarian agitation and that it was damaging public support for the nationalist movement.⁸⁸ One of the great ironies of this period is that within a year the roles of these protagonists were reversed with O'Brien transformed into the foremost nationalist advocate for conciliation between landlords and unionists and Dillon, with the acquiescence of the nationalist leadership, demanding more agitation.

⁸⁶ Redmond to O'Brien, 12 May 1902 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AM45).

⁸⁷ F. Campbell, 'Irish Popular Politics and the Making of the Wyndham land act, 1901-1903' in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Dec., 2002), p. 769.

⁸⁸ Warwick-Haller, *William O'Brien*, p. 218; Philip Bull, 'The Significance of the Nationalist Response to the Irish land act of 1903' in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 28, no. 111 (May 1993), p. 287.

The credit for the Wyndham land act is frequently attributed to constructive unionism, the attempt to 'kill Home Rule with kindness'. What is overlooked however is that the UIL campaign, the most intense since the Land War in the early 1880s, put the government under pressure and strengthened Wyndham's hand in advocating for a more comprehensive land purchase bill. This was also taken up by some unionists, for example, the Kerry landlord Lindsay Talbot-Crosbie wrote to the *Freeman's Journal* calling for a conference on the land question.⁸⁹ This was met with a stinging rebuke from O'Brien in the *Irish People* who wrote: 'Mr Crosbie's round table was not even produced at the Landowners' Convention, lest its legs should be used on the head of the innocent constructor'.⁹⁰ However, on 3rd September 1902 a letter from John Shawe-Taylor, a virtually unknown landlord from County Galway and nephew of Lady Gregory, appeared in the newspapers calling for a land conference. What made it different was that it proved to have the backing of the Irish Secretary, George Wyndham.

Both O'Brien and Redmond were initially sceptical. Redmond wrote to O'Brien, 'Of course, S-T's suggestion only made me laugh'.⁹¹ Shawe-Taylor was persistent, however, and attempted to make contact with O'Brien through the *Irish People*. The editor, Tim McCarthy, wrote to O'Brien, 'Capt. Shawe-Taylor called here yesterday to see you. He seems an earnest, honest young fellow, but perhaps a bit innocent for the sea dangers he is trying to make reasonable. His case seems to be: "We don't see one another; we don't understand one another, and while we thus divert ourselves Ireland goes down"'.⁹² However, Wyndham saw in the letter an opportunity to break the logjam, and the permission he gave to Shawe-Taylor to disseminate his opinions gave the initiative a degree of importance which it would not otherwise have managed to achieve.⁹³ On 12th September Shawe-Taylor wrote directly to O'Brien

⁸⁹ *Freeman's Journal*, 14 June 1902.

⁹⁰ *Irish People*, 6 September 1902.

⁹¹ Redmond to O'Brien, 6 September 1902 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AM138).

⁹² McCarthy to O'Brien, *ibid.*

⁹³ Gailey, *Death of Kindness*, p. 190.

with information that made his proposal a serious proposition for nationalists. He said that Wyndham had told him that:

Now was the time for a Conference before Parliament as it strengthens his hand in squeezing the Treasury.

That he believed Parliament would do a big thing now if they saw any prospect of an agreement.

That British credit was unlimited.⁹⁴

O'Brien was still sceptical but thought that, even if the conference never took place, it would put pressure on landlords.⁹⁵ Supporters of land reform were boosted the following month by the appointment of Sir Anthony MacDonnell as Irish under-secretary. His background was in Indian administration and although he had developed an acute sympathy for the plight of tenants and landless labourers (both Indian and Irish), and because he believed that agrarian unrest led to political upheaval, he was in favour of devolving powers to an Irish administration.⁹⁶ He was also sympathetic to the formation of a 'moderate but progressive party', but did not underestimate the opposition that such an initiative would face.⁹⁷

The momentum for a Land Conference grew in the later months of 1902 and, although rejected by the executive of the Landowners' Convention, a proposal to support it was endorsed in a later poll of 4,000 landlords, 1706 responded of whom 1128 voted favour of a conference.⁹⁸ The Land Conference was convened at the Mansion House in Dublin under the chairmanship of Lord Dunraven, with Shawe-Taylor as secretary. In addition to Dunraven, the landlord delegates were The Earl of Mayo, William Hutchinson-Poe and Sir Nugent Everard. The tenants' representatives were John Redmond, William O'Brien, T.P. Harrington (the Lord Mayor of Dublin), and the Ulster unionist MP and campaigner for tenants' rights, T.W. Russell.

⁹⁴ Shawe-Taylor to O'Brien, 12 September 1902 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AM148).

⁹⁵ Warwick-Haller, *William O'Brien*, p. 223.

⁹⁶ Gailey, *Death of Kindness*, p. 187.

⁹⁷ MacDonald to Alice Stopford Green, 1st September 1902, (NLI, Alice Stopford Green Papers, 15,089/4).

⁹⁸ Dunraven, *Past Times and Pastimes*, (<http://archive.org/details/pasttimespastime02dunr>) (12 April 2017), p. 9.

For those used to the glacial pace of Irish reform, events moved with astonishing speed. The conference sat for only six days: from 20th December 1902 to 3rd January 1903 and produced its report on January 4th. Although held up – not least by O’Brien – as the model for conciliation: ‘Conference plus Business’, the Land Conference came close to collapse on Christmas Eve when Shawe-Taylor, acting on Dunraven’s orders, privately approached Harrington with an amended version of what had been provisionally agreed at the Conference in relation to landlords’ incomes. Harrington wrote to O’Brien ‘Our Chairman is one of the most unmanageable men I have met in my time’.⁹⁹ The following day O’Brien wrote to Russell claiming that Dunraven had ruined his Christmas.¹⁰⁰ However, the crisis was averted when Harrington, following a further communication with Shawe-Taylor, told O’Brien that Dunraven, ‘does not want to play any trick and is as anxious to go as far as he can to disarm criticism on his side.’¹⁰¹ The conference quickly came to a successful conclusion with eighteen recommendations which included establishing a fair selling price with the inducement of a Treasury bonus to landlords, the ending of the dual-ownership system in favour of tenant purchase, and special treatment for congested districts and evicted tenants. O’Brien was euphoric; in a meeting in Claremorris on 6th January 1903 he said that the conference report was historic, because, ‘It proved that on a question that divided Irishmen most bitterly and had baffled Englishmen for ages, it was possible for the most pronounced representatives of both the hostile classes in Ireland to meet together to thrash the matter out without one discourteous word, and arrive at a conclusion which would do justice to both sides and give Ireland a new era of prosperity.’¹⁰²

Wyndham, based almost entirely on the report, introduced a Land bill in March that was so complex that Lord Hamilton, the Secretary of State for India, noted that ‘nobody but Gorge Wyndham understands it’.¹⁰³ This did not impede its progress through parliament, however, and the bill was passed into law by August. The 1903 Land act was controversial. Nationalist critics claimed it was over-generous to

⁹⁹ Harrington to O’Brien, 24 December 1902 (UCC, William O’Brien Papers, AM205).

¹⁰⁰ O’Brien, to Russell 25 December 1902 (UCC, William O’Brien Papers, AM208).

¹⁰¹ Harrington to O’Brien, 26th December 1902 (UCC, William O’Brien Papers, AM210).

¹⁰² Quoted in Warwick-Haller, *William O’Brien*, p. 229.

¹⁰³ Gailey, *Death of Kindness*, p. 192.

landlords and its financial provisions were inadequate in the face of its success. However, it proved to be the single most radical piece of social reform since the seventeenth century, which effectively put an end to landlordism. By 1914 more than nine million acres of land had been transferred to tenants.

The Irish party gave its immediate support to the Land Conference report (although both John Dillon and Michael Davitt were absent from the meeting) and the UIL also endorsed it. Criticism from Davitt, who favoured land nationalisation, was expected, but the most trenchant and influential criticism came from Dillon who had been O'Brien's oldest political friend and comrade-in-arms, and this made it altogether more bitter and personal. Following the Land Conference, he became increasingly hostile to the land purchase proposals and the more emollient tone some of his colleagues in the nationalist leadership had adopted towards landlords and unionists.¹⁰⁴ The final rupture came in a speech in Swinford, County Mayo in August 1903 when he launched an uncompromising attack on conciliation.¹⁰⁵ For Dillon, land was integral to the national question. As Philip Bull has argued 'it gave the nationalist case a moral legitimacy based not just on political theory or cultural orientation, but on tradition and customary rights'.¹⁰⁶ To decouple land from the struggle for Home Rule, Dillon argued, would be to shatter that legitimacy and destroy the fragile edifice of constitutional nationalism that Parnell had fashioned twenty years before; a dangerous predicament at a time when competing versions of nationalism were emerging. Dillon's anxiety was understandable for, as Ernest Gellner, a critical thinker in theories of nationalism, has argued, it is not nations that produce nationalists but the other way round: 'the central mistake committed by the friends and enemies of nationalism is the supposition that it is somehow *natural*.'¹⁰⁷

It was Dillon's firmly held belief that the only reason that landlords had come to the conference table was that they had been forced to by the kind of agrarian agitation that he and O'Brien had organised during the Land War. However, as Alvin Jackson

¹⁰⁴ *Freeman's Journal*, 26 April 1903; Parliamentary debates (Hansard), fourth series, House of Commons, 4 May 1903 (vol. 121, London, 1300-13).

¹⁰⁵ *Western People*, 29 August 1903.

¹⁰⁶ Bull, *Land, Politics and Nationalism*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁷ E. Gellner, *Thought and Change* (Chicago, 1965), pp. 150-1.

notes, Dillon was either unaware of, or ignored, divisions within unionism which the Land Conference had highlighted, and which could have been beneficial to nationalism.¹⁰⁸ Dillon also had an instinctive suspicion of political initiatives which undermined the primacy of the Irish party. As he made clear to Redmond: 'I, as you know, have all along been opposed to the policy of allowing the initiative in - and the direction of - large Irish questions to be taken out of the hands of the Irish Party and handed over to Conferences summoned by outsiders.'¹⁰⁹ O'Brien later conceded that his hubris and failure to include Dillon in the discussions might have contributed to Dillon's rejection of the land conference: 'I did not pay sufficient attention to the influence upon human nature at its best of the unlucky fatalities which excluded a veteran Nationalist leader not only from the Land Conference but from Ireland during its deliberations.'¹¹⁰ Recognising the differences that had opened between them, he wrote to Dillon in the friendliest of terms calling him 'My Dear John':

I am afraid that differing as we do upon questions of National policy, nothing could be gained but discussions which could lead to nothing except creating differences as to our point of view. The situation has been rendered unfortunately more difficult by the *Freeman* agitation, but we have only to do our best.¹¹¹

However, the tide was beginning to turn against O'Brien, driven by a relentless campaign in the *Freeman's Journal* in which its editor Thomas Sexton dissected the financial inadequacies of the Land Conference proposals and the Land bill and its supposed bias against tenants. O'Brien appealed to Redmond as support began to drain away. However, despite being a signatory to the Land Conference report, in addition to his extensive correspondence with Wyndham regarding the minutiae of the Land bill, Redmond declined to publicly condemn Dillon and Davitt and distance himself from the *Freeman's* campaign. O'Brien was dismayed by what he considered Redmond's duplicity, 'one bold pronouncement would be sufficient to

¹⁰⁸ Jackson, *Home Rule*, p. 109.

¹⁰⁹ Dillon to Redmond, 2nd October 1903 (NLI, John Redmond Papers, 15,182/6).

¹¹⁰ O'Brien, *Olive Branch* (18 June 2016), p. 247.

¹¹¹ O'Brien to Dillon, 29 February 1903 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8557/3).

steady the country and to strengthen the trembling knees within the party. However, Mr Redmond hesitated more than ever'.¹¹²

It is not difficult to imagine Redmond's dilemma faced with either supporting O'Brien or facing down Dillon. To publicly rebuke Dillon and alienate the *Freeman's Journal* would have risked opening a deadly conflict within the Home Rule movement, and as Dillon's biographer F.S.L Lyons has noted, he would have traded the reliable, dependable and usually loyal Dillon, for the mercurial and unpredictable O'Brien.¹¹³ Although Redmond hailed the Land act as 'the most substantial victory gained for centuries by the Irish race for the reconquest of the soil of Ireland by the people',¹¹⁴ the unity of the party was a higher priority than support for O'Brien and conciliation. He would have been aware, as David Fitzpatrick has argued, that Irish party unity during the Parnell era was an aberration, and its natural state was a loose and unstable coalition of influential individuals, interests and factions with the ever-present threat of another split.¹¹⁵ Moreover, if the issue of land reform was difficult, a conciliatory strategy towards unionism was even more incendiary. In April 1903 the Land Conference report was endorsed by a National Convention of the UIL, and in September, the National Directory supported the land act and adopted what became known as the 'conciliation policy'. This strategy accepted that the Land act had changed the political landscape and that landlords were no longer the enemy, and that there were shared interests between landlords, especially smaller ones, and their former tenants who had purchased land. Although this became the official policy of the nationalist movement, the *de facto* position was that the Dillonite view was now in the ascendant. However, as Philip Bull argues, Redmond and Dillon agreed not to challenge conciliation openly but to allow it to wither on the vine.¹¹⁶

Redmond's failure to support O'Brien and the democratically agreed policies of the party and the UIL, and the continuing attacks by Dillon and Davitt, in addition to the

¹¹² O'Brien, *Olive Branch* (18 July 2016), p. 293.

¹¹³ Lyons, *Dillon*, p. 240.

¹¹⁴ Cited in D. Gwynn, *The Life of John Redmond* (New York, 1971), p. 102.

¹¹⁵ Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands*, p. 185.

¹¹⁶ Bull, *Land, Politics and Nationalism*, pp. 30-8.

relentless campaign against him in the *Freeman's Journal*, eventually took its toll and O'Brien resigned both his seat in Cork and closed his paper the *Irish People*. Lawrence Ginnell, a leading figure in the UIL spoke for many in the anti-conciliation wing of the Home Rule movement when he wrote to Redmond that '[O'Brien's] policy has broken down absolutely, not because it was in conflict with "Tom Sexton the Bastard" but because he was in conflict with the country and commonsense'.¹¹⁷ O'Brien's allies tried to persuade him to change his mind. Dunraven wrote that his resignation 'at this juncture is a national disaster [...] I abstain from any public expression of my feelings as it is probable that the views of a "landlord" would only prejudice the case'.¹¹⁸ William Lunden, MP for East Limerick asked O'Brien 'In the name of God what are you thinking of doing [...]. Davitt and Sexton through envy and jealousy at not being in that Land Conference have brought about this state of affairs. Are we not able for them? Reconsider yourself in God's name.'¹¹⁹ But O'Brien's mind was made up. He wrote to one of his few allies in the west of Ireland, John O'Donnell, the MP for South Mayo, 'The natural inclination of a friend will be to think my actions hasty but after a little time it will be seen that there was absolutely no alternative except to plunge the country in the split which those behind the *Freeman* have been deliberately paving the way for'.¹²⁰ Redmond made some efforts to entice O'Brien back to the fold:

Is there any way in which we could again close up our ranks by inducing you to rejoin the Party? I assure you I feel the position keenly and am fully alive to its dangers [...] I need not say that this note comes from myself alone.¹²¹

However, following O'Brien's resignation his antipathy to his former comrades hardened, 'nothing would induce me to touch the party again with a forty-foot pole. I quite agree that the prospect for the country is deplorable; the greatest chance we ever had has been madly destroyed, and the wreckers have nothing to put in its place'.¹²² But O'Brien also laid the blame on members of the land conference, 'Truth

¹¹⁷ Ginnell to Redmond, 29 November 1903 (NLI, John Redmond Papers 15,191).

¹¹⁸ Dunraven to O'Brien, 9 November 1903 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/2).

¹¹⁹ Lunden to O'Brien, 7 November 1903 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AN82).

¹²⁰ O'Brien to O'Donnell, 6 November 1903 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AN81).

¹²¹ Redmond to O'Brien, 23rd March 1904, (NLI, John Redmond Papers 15,212/12, emphasis in the original document).

¹²² O'Brien to O'Donnell, 6 February 1904 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AN116).

to tell I do not think that the members of the Land Conference either on your side or our own, have shown sufficient moral courage against stupidity and prejudice on both sides'.¹²³

However, O'Brien's resignation gave heart to Dunraven and the other progressive unionists who supported the Land Conference. They saw the conflict within nationalism as opening a space for further conciliation, possibly even a centre party. As ever, Dunraven was aware that too close an alliance held dangers for O'Brien, 'There are difficulties; the construction of any kind of platform; the danger of the taint of landlordism sticking to your skirts'.¹²⁴

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Following his resignation in November 1903 O'Brien withdrew to his retreat in Clew Bay. In self-pitying tones he wrote to his friend, the Franciscan friar Father Kavanagh, 'no man will ever again be got to take the responsibility I took until he gets some guarantee from the country that he will not be struck down again in the first hour of difficulty by faithless colleagues'.¹²⁵ However, even his friends and supporters were now proving to be faithless, and colleagues like William Lunden MP (Limerick East), and Thomas J. Condon MP (Tipperary South), who had assured him of their support in fulsome terms, quickly changed their loyalties to suit the shifting dynamics of power within the party.¹²⁶ In the parliamentary party only the Cork MPs Eugene Crean, D.D. Sheehan and James Gilhooley, and the Mayo MP and secretary of the UIL John O'Donnell remained steadfast in their loyalty. He also had allies on Cork Corporation and Cork County Council and in Cork and Limerick UIL branches. But his support had slipped away, most notably in the provincial press. As Paul Bew's analysis indicates, practically all provincial newspapers, except for the *Connaught Telegraph*, quickly turned against him and supported Redmond.¹²⁷ However, O'Brien could not be content with self-imposed exile on the

¹²³ O'Brien, to Dunraven, 29 December 1903 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/4).

¹²⁴ Dunraven to O'Brien, 26 July 1904 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/3).

¹²⁵ O'Brien to Fr. Kavanagh, 13 February 1904 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AN120/2).

¹²⁶ Maume, *Long Gestation*, p. 70.

¹²⁷ Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, pp. 113-4.

coast of Mayo, and when his supporters nominated him, without his permission, for the seat in Cork he had vacated, he eventually agreed to stand and was re-elected, unpledged and unopposed, in August 1904.

In the aftermath of O'Brien's split with the Irish party, the UIL in Cork effectively split into Redmondite and O'Brienite factions with Sheehan's Land and Labour Association firmly in the O'Brien camp.¹²⁸ This demarcation transcended the old divisions of the Parnell split with many old Parnellites, such as the Lord Mayor of Cork Augustine Roche, on O'Brien's side. There was, however, no stomach for a direct challenge to the party leadership as Tim Healy noted, 'I think the ruck of even alleged Williamites would not now tolerate any intrigue to unslip Redmond, who will now I think, gradually consolidate his position'.¹²⁹ Redmond made overtures to O'Brien through the former MP Stephen O'Mara who enclosed a letter from the leader proposing a round table conference, 'of you John Redmond, John Dillon and anybody else who would be essential'.¹³⁰ O'Brien rebuffed this initiative, and the apostle of conference plus business wrote 'it is one of those proposals that look well but are quite unworkable. The differences of principle are too deep'.¹³¹

On the same day of his reply to Redmond's proposal, O'Brien's supporters attempted to force the UIL National Directory, by way of a resolution from Cork delegates, to endorse the pro-conciliation position it had taken eleven months before which had been undermined by O'Brien's sudden departure and Redmond's failure to confront the Dillon-Davitt wing of the party. Dillon proposed an amendment which condemned the failure of landlords and the government to ensure a fair purchase price for tenants and called for a new campaign of 'vigorous agitation'.¹³² The resolution was defeated fifty votes to twelve and Dillon's amendment was carried. Six delegates immediately resigned from the National Directory. They included: Eugene Crean MP, John O'Donnell MP, Edward Barry MP, James Gilhooly MP, Edward Higgins and Father Clancy. (O'Donnell was also deposed as

¹²⁸ John O'Donovan, 'William O'Brien and the United Irish league in Cork 1900-1910', (M.Phil. thesis, UCC, 2011), p. 105.

¹²⁹ Healy to Maurice Healy Snr., 8 April 1904 (U.C.D., Healy Transcripts, P6/A/43).

¹³⁰ O'Mara to O'Brien, 9 August 1904 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AN136).

¹³¹ O'Brien to O'Mara, 10 August 1904 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AN137).

¹³² *Cork Examiner*, 11 August 1904.

secretary of the UIL and replaced by Joseph Devlin).¹³³ It seemed that the future direction of the Irish party was set: no conciliation, a continuation of rural agitation against landlords where land purchase prices were deemed to be too high (this campaign had begun in the spring of 1904), and a narrow focus on Home Rule.

Philip Bull has convincingly argued that the commonly held view, which locates the decline of the Irish party between 1910 to 1916, usually thought to have been precipitated by the Great War and the Easter Rising is wrong. The rot, he claims, had set in far earlier - between 1898 to 1903, in the period that led up to the Wyndham Land act,¹³⁴ a view also taken by Paul Bew.¹³⁵ However, Fergus Campbell's detailed research on the Home Rule movement's response to the Land act concludes that Redmond did not abandon conciliation and only supported the Dillonite position in the face of landlord intransigence on land prices.¹³⁶ Undoubtedly there was enormous pressure on Redmond and other leading Parnellites relating to the problems inherent in the Land act and the refusal of some landlords to sell their land, and by the end of 1903, even Lord Dunraven was forced to express frustration at the unreasonable demands of landlords, ¹³⁷ this was a view that O'Brien shared, 'The demands of the landlords in general if they were to be final ones, were either insanely grasping or shared a determination to defeat the act.'¹³⁸

However, Campbell's argument presupposes that the Dillonite opposition to the land act was based on pragmatic grounds; in other words, if the provisions of the act had been different and landlords less intransigent, then the Dillonite wing would have accepted land purchase and conciliation. The evidence, however, indicates that the hostility of Dillon, Davitt, the *Freeman's Journal* and the other 'agrarian radicals', was ideological and not pragmatic. Dillon initially welcomed the Land bill, 'I must confess that when I came home, I sometimes asked myself whether, like a historic character, I had not been asleep for a century, and I wondered whether we had not

¹³³ *Irish Daily Independent*, 11 August 1904.

¹³⁴ P. Bull, 'The United Irish League and the Reunion of the Irish Parliamentary Party, 1898-1900', in *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. XXVI, No. 101 (May 1988), pp. 51-78.

¹³⁵ Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, pp. 96-121.

¹³⁶ Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, pp. 42-84.

¹³⁷ Dunraven to O'Brien, 12 November 1903 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/2).

¹³⁸ O'Brien, to Dunraven, 29 December 1903 NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/2).

reached the year 2000'.¹³⁹ However, his views became increasingly hostile, based in part on the inadequacies of the act itself, but also on the altered trajectory on which land purchase was beginning to take the nationalist movement.

For the Dillonite wing, the Wyndham Land act, conciliation and the potential decline of the Home Rule movement as a result of these policies, became inextricably linked and had to be resisted at all costs. The movement, however, was unresponsive to the changing political realities at a time when Irish nationalism was in a state of flux, and it found itself out of step with the emerging spirit of the times. For example, as Senia Pašeta has shown, by the start of the twentieth century the extension of education to the Catholic middle classes was producing a self-confident and dynamic elite, many of whom saw themselves as the future governing class in a Home Rule Ireland.¹⁴⁰ A moderate constitutional nationalist party with a policy of reconciliation with unionism would have been the natural home for this aspirant group. But the course that the nationalist movement had set was not to the taste of many, especially aspiring young nationalists like Tom Kettle and the Young Ireland branch of the UIL, and the old Parnellite wing of the party although they were unwilling to openly challenge the leadership.¹⁴¹

O'Brien nurtured this alienation in his Cork heartland and also expended his formidable energy on building up his local working class base. In doing so, outwardly at least, he put aside any reservations he had about the labour movement, telling his supporters that labour must now be at the forefront of politics. He attended an ILLA convention in Macroom where he arrived by special train and talked of 'raising the conscience of the country to the unanswerable claims of the labourers'.¹⁴² Although O'Brien's principal focus was the land question, he had also supported campaigns to improve the working and living conditions of farm labourers, although he had never campaigned for this cause as vigorously as he had for land reform. He had been hostile to labour organisations representing the

¹³⁹ Parliamentary debates (Hansard), fourth series, House of Commons, 4 May 1903 (vol. 1221, London, 1311).

¹⁴⁰ Senia Pašeta, *Before the Revolution: Nationalism, Social Change and Ireland's Catholic Elite, 1879-1922* (Cork, 1999), p. 148.

¹⁴¹ Garvin, *Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*, p. 94.

¹⁴² *Southern Star*, 29 October 1904.

labourers' cause, a position also held by other prominent nationalists who feared that this could damage the unity of the Home Rule movement.¹⁴³ In 1891 he spoke of nationalism's failure to improve the lot of farm labourers, 'I am sorry to say that all has not been done for them that we could have done' but promised this would change.¹⁴⁴ Thirteen years later, following a period during which the Home Rule movement had paid little more than lip service to the betterment of the rural poor, O'Brien, when he needed to co-opt the ILLA and the rural working class to his political insurgency, declared, 'the saving of the labourers is now the business, and the first business, of the Irish Party'.¹⁴⁵ The class tensions at the heart of O'Brien's nascent political insurgency can be seen in his letters to Lord Dunraven who had a large estate in Limerick, and worried that too much *largesse*, especially proposals to provide a cottage and plot of land to every labourer, might act as a disincentive, 'The farmers desire abundant and consequently cheap labour [...] if the labourer becomes absolute owner of his house and acre what reason have you to suppose that he will continue to work as a labourer or that his labour will be available when required.'¹⁴⁶

This hostility to the alleviation of poverty through state-funded initiatives and also to organised labour, was widespread in the Home Rule movement, in part because some of its wealthier supporters evinced, as had Lord Dunraven, a fear that the betterment of the working class would result in higher wages, taxes and rates, which was in direct conflict with their interests. It was also closely related to what Marianne Elliot calls the 'sanctification of poverty and endurance' in the Catholic poor which was prevalent in Irish Catholicism.¹⁴⁷ The idea that material want, if borne stoically and uncomplainingly, was noble in itself and would bring its own spiritual rewards, had deep and influential roots in Catholic Ireland where 'the

¹⁴³ See, for example, *United Ireland* 13 January, 5 February, 12 May 1894.

¹⁴⁴ *Cork Examiner*, 2 November 1891.

¹⁴⁵ *Southern Star*, 17 December 1904.

¹⁴⁶ Dunraven to O'Brien, 10 December 1904 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/5). The previous year Dunraven had demonstrated, albeit reluctantly, a more progressive attitude when he was instrumental in the establishment of the first direct labour scheme in the country under the control of Limerick County Council employing local men on road construction and repair (Michael Spillane, *The 4th Earl of Dunraven, 1841-1926: A Study of his Contribution to the Emerging Ireland at the beginning of the 20th Century* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Limerick, 2003), pp. 64-76).

¹⁴⁷ M. Elliott, *When God Took Sides: Religion and Identity in Ireland – Unfinished History* (Oxford, 2009), p. 187.

assertion of the self was treated with suspicion, suppressed as a sin of pride'.¹⁴⁸ In consolidating its pre-eminent position in nationalist Ireland, the Church fiercely opposed the forces of modernisation, including trade unionism and state welfare policies, which would undermine its authority. The interests of conservative nationalism and the Church were therefore aligned in forcing a moral exceptionalism on the Irish Catholic poor which would shield them from the supposed degradation of the modern world. This is evident in the novels of William O'Brien's childhood friend and lifelong confidant, Canon Sheehan, and also in the writings of his contemporary Father Peter O'Leary, whose influential memoir *Mo Scéal Féin* (My Story) encapsulates, as does Canon Sheehan's writing, a suspicion of materialism, alien influences, and the city. This mentality was framed in an authoritarian perspective which divided the deserving from the undeserving poor which would become influential in post-independence Ireland. For example, William O'Brien, in a discussion relating to the allocation of plots of land to farm labourers, advised that only workers who were 'particularly meretricious [...] and had demonstrated lives of sobriety, industry and intelligence' should be eligible for more substantial holdings.¹⁴⁹ It is difficult not to concur with Sally Warwick-Haller's premise¹⁵⁰ that, following his return to public life in 1904, O'Brien's enthusiasm for labour issues and his embrace of the ILLA was a means to an end in re-establishing his political base, a position also taken by two scholars who have led research in the field of agricultural labour.¹⁵¹ The transactional nature of O'Brien's priorities is evident in his response to Dunraven:

The effect on Ireland [of solving the labourers' question] would be profound. I know of nothing that would completely spike the guns of the enemies of conciliation [...] On the labourers' question, even if men do not agree to every detail of any suggested settlement such a pronouncement would make everything possible in the way of rehabilitating the conference spirit.¹⁵²

Redmond, in part because of O'Brien's campaigning, was forced to take a more sympathetic tone to the rural poor and at a conference in Drogheda admitted that

¹⁴⁸ O'Mahony and Delanty, *Rethinking Irish History*, p. 68.

¹⁴⁹ *Cork Examiner*, 12 August 1908.

¹⁵⁰ Warwick-Haller, *William O'Brien*, p. 256.

¹⁵¹ Bradley, *Farm Labourers*, pp. 28-31; Lane, 'Land and Labour', pp. 99-103.

¹⁵² O'Brien, to Dunraven, 22 December 1904 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/5).

labourers 'had benefitted least from the labours of the Irish party during the last twenty-five years'.¹⁵³

O'Brien and Sheehan launched an Advisory Committee to facilitate land purchase and to promote and support prospective buyers. He later claimed that this contributed to Cork having the highest number of tenant purchases in the country: 16,000 at a total cost of almost £8,000,000. O'Brien proudly compared this to Mayo, which John Dillon represented in parliament, which had only 774 tenant purchases at a total cost of £181,000.¹⁵⁴ UIL branches around Cork affiliated to the Advisory Committee with varying degrees of enthusiasm depending on their loyalty to either O'Brien or Redmond. The West Cork divisional executive of the UIL which was strongly O'Brienite, affiliated six delegates and the chairman claimed that the UIL 'had sunk into impotence'.¹⁵⁵ In the municipal elections in Cork city in January 1905 the O'Brienite wing of the UIL and Labour put forward a joint platform on which thirteen candidates were elected.¹⁵⁶ O'Brien, Sheehan and Crean also became involved in a bitter and violent eviction in Watergrasshill near Cork city where dozens of people were injured after police baton-charged protestors.¹⁵⁷

The strength of O'Brien's embryonic organisation in Cork can be glimpsed in a rally held in his honour in Carrigaline in September 1905 where he was given a rapturous reception and garlanded with flowers. At the time O'Brien was still an independent nationalist MP and *persona non grata* with the Irish party because of his frequent attacks on the leadership. Yet this vast open-air meeting, led by two pipe bands, was held under the joint auspices of the UIL, the official grassroots organisation of the Home Rule movement, and the ILLA, and was attended by some of the most prominent nationalists in the city and county including the MPs Augustine Roche, Eugene Crean and D.D. Sheehan, the leader of Cork County Council and delegates from over twenty UIL branches, GAA clubs, evicted tenants associations and local marching bands. O'Brien's speech was a reiteration of his accusations of betrayal

¹⁵³ *Southern Star*, 19 November 1904.

¹⁵⁴ *Irish People*, 26th November 1908; O'Brien, *Olive Branch* (13 October 2016), pp. 376-7.

¹⁵⁵ *Southern Star*, 12 November 1904.

¹⁵⁶ *Cork Examiner*, 17 and 18 January. 1905

¹⁵⁷ *Cork Examiner*, 22 October 1905.

against the Irish party leadership. He then proposed several resolutions which again were designed to place him on the side of the urban working class, farm labourers and evicted tenants and to distance his nascent movement from the Irish party.¹⁵⁸ Here then, in Cork, was the embryonic AFIL, five years before its eventual launch, presenting itself as the champion of the poor and dispossessed and those alienated from the Remondite Home Rule movement. O'Brien and his supporters were able to represent, and foster, a political insurgency by those who demanded change (in Cork from a plutocratic and self-satisfied nationalism dominated by business and the professions); and others who reacted against change (for example unionists who, although not sympathetic to the recent changes which gave more political and economic power to nationalists, wanted to ensure that they had a stake in the society that was beginning to take form). The O'Brienites were therefore able to act as a lightning rod for a diverse range of discontents, particularly within constitutional nationalism, and offer a blank canvas onto which both aspirations and disaffections could be projected.

O'Brien stood again as an independent nationalist in the 1906 general election. He was questioned by a delegation from the Cork United Trades and Labour Council (C.U.T.L.C.), formerly the United Trades Association. Like many conservative nationalists, he was anxious to express his admiration for the working class of the towns and cities and claimed now that the land question was in the process of being settled it was time for the grievances of the urban workers to be addressed, although he made no specific promises.¹⁵⁹ While O'Brien's embrace of urban labour and agricultural workers allowed him to run populist campaigns demanding improvements for the ordinary people, the class tensions within nationalism were never far from the surface. In demanding a better deal for farm labourers, for example, he was also anxious not to alienate the new class of tenant-proprietors and cautioned his labour audience not to make demands that 'would mean war on the farmer or a crushing burden on the ratepayer'.¹⁶⁰ A glimpse of the underlying resentment relating to land purchase can also be gleaned from CUTLC protestations that the farmers were responsible for labour problems in the city leading to further

¹⁵⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 11th September 1905.

¹⁵⁹ *Cork Examiner*, 13 January 1906.

¹⁶⁰ *Southern Star*, 17 December 1904.

economic hardship for hard-pressed workers. Alderman Kelleher told the council that the farmers were ‘active obstructers to appointments or comfortable homes for the workers with the results that they migrated to the towns and swelled the labour market there’.¹⁶¹

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Although Southern unionists had lost political and economic power, they still exercised significant political influence amongst the British governing classes where their family connections were intricate and deep. They were, as Patrick Buckland has observed ‘a ruling elite with the confidence of generations of governing’.¹⁶² Most Southern unionists were opposed to Irish Home Rule, and they managed to tap into natural feelings of antipathy to devolution amongst English conservatives who saw it as the first step in the dissolution of the Empire. However, they exercised their influence subtly and were often appalled at what they regarded as the prejudice and intolerance of Ulster unionists. Progressive unionists, who had coalesced around the land conference, were in the minority but clear about what they had to do, as Talbot Crosbie wrote to O’Brien, ‘I consider that our business is to convert the unionists’.¹⁶³ At the time of the Land Conference, Dunraven was unable to articulate his opinions on Home Rule publicly, but by 1908 he felt confident enough to spell it out, ‘The words ‘Home Rule’ have no terror for me because its character depends on its definition. A system of devolution of duties and responsibilities by the Imperial Parliament to a subordinate Irish assembly would essentially be a ‘Home Rule’ scheme in that it would enable the Irish people to govern themselves according to their own ideas’.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, following the 1903 Land act, progressive unionism had powerful allies, not least of which was the undersecretary of state for Ireland Sir Anthony MacDonnell. In an appendix to his memoir *Past Times and Pastimes*, Dunraven includes a memo from MacDonnell:

At the beginning of 1904, a conversation took place between Mr Wyndham, Lord Dunraven, and myself on Irish Politics. Lord Dunraven was particularly interested in the creation of a moderate Irish Party of which he had at the time

¹⁶¹ *Cork Examiner*, 20 January 1906.

¹⁶² P.J. Buckland, ‘Irish Unionism and the New Ireland’, in Boyce (ed.) *Revolution in Ireland*, p. 86.

¹⁶³ Talbot-Crosbie to O’Brien, 9 August 1904 (UCC, William O’Brien Papers, AN138).

¹⁶⁴ *Irish People*, 7 November 1908.

hopes from the temperament of a section of Irish Unionists and of the Nationalist wing which drew its inspiration from Mr William O'Brien.¹⁶⁵

Although MacDonnell and Wyndham decided that the time was not right to advance this cause, MacDonnell retained the hope that there could be a political space for a moderate centre party. The Kerry landlord and O'Brien supporter Lindsay Talbot-Crosbie thought there were grounds for optimism, 'I hope that there is on both sides a large body of moderate opinion ready to advance common objects by conciliation and combination.'¹⁶⁶ Wyndham intimated in private that he would support devolution and Shawe-Taylor wrote to O'Brien in August 1904 to inform him that an Irish Reform Association was to be launched. Its immediate objectives would be a settlement of the university question, and the possibility of self-government in Ireland, 'Our object will be not to interfere in any way with any existing national organisation but to bond together Irishmen, who belonging to what I hope soon to the vanished landlord class, are sincerely anxious to play their part in the social material and national life of the country.'¹⁶⁷ Following the publication of the Reform Association manifesto, O'Brien wrote to Talbot-Crosbie, 'The self-government portion of the Manifesto is, considering all the difficulties, quite satisfactory as the preliminary declaration of a body of unionist gentlemen.'¹⁶⁸ However, the body was small: the Reform Association never attracted more than thirty landlords, and Wyndham quickly and publicly disowned the manifesto under pressure from Balfour and Ulster unionists.

Redmond's positive first reaction to the Reform Association manifesto, 'With these men with us Home Rule may come at any moment',¹⁶⁹ was, given his history as a Parnellite who had consistently supported conciliation, perhaps more instinctive and honest than his later position. The manifesto, of course, did not propose Home Rule but a much more modest proposal for a financial council and a legislative body to look at Irish bills. Dillon did not share Redmond's enthusiasm for the manifesto, as

¹⁶⁵ Dunraven, The Earl of Dunraven, *Past Times and Pastimes*, Vol II,

<https://archive.org/details/pasttimespastime02dunr/page/n9> (12 October 2016), p. 190.

¹⁶⁶ Talbot-Crosbie to O'Brien, 28 April 1904 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AN140).

¹⁶⁷ Shawe-Taylor to O'Brien, 1 August 1904 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AN132).

¹⁶⁸ O'Brien to Talbot-Crosbie, 1st September 1904, (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AN142).

¹⁶⁹ Quoted in Gwynn, *Redmond*, P. 106.

F.S.L. Lyons has observed 'he distrusted its parentage and disliked its contents.'¹⁷⁰ However, as Philip Bull notes, having made that assessment, Dillon and his allies failed to develop an alternative policy once the 1903 Land act had effectively decoupled the land and national questions.¹⁷¹ O'Brien was clear as to where he thought the blame lay: 'The truth, of course, is that it was not the little Orange gang but the *Freeman* and the Dillonites who destroyed Sir Anthony MacDonnell'.¹⁷²

Although O'Brien continued to nurture his network in Cork based around the ILLA, it was not a broad-based political movement, and its limitations led him to consider his re-entry to the party. One possible hurdle was an allegation made by Wyndham that he and Dunraven had plotted to launch a centre party. He was anxious to dispel this rumour and wrote to Redmond, 'Obviously if Mr Wyndham "was deliberately plotting to destroy the Irish Party and to create a Centre Party in its place" he must have been plotting with some member, or members of the Irish party or the "plot" was too farcical to mention.'¹⁷³ A deal between Irish party and O'Brienite candidates was brokered by George Crosbie, proprietor of the *Cork Examiner*, for the 1906 General Election. However, this did little to heal the rift, and relations between O'Brien and the leadership of the party became even more poisonous, exacerbated by O'Brien's vitriolic polemics in the *Irish People*, which he resurrected in September 1905. One of the more notable paradoxes of O'Brien's character was that although he had developed an almost messianic belief in conciliation and the view that virtually any problem could be solved if opposing parties would only sit around a table and honestly discuss the issues, his thin-skinned nature often drove him to behaviour and rhetoric which were far removed from the conciliatory ideal. (Davitt spoke of O'Brien's ability 'to keep silence and efface himself in thirty columns and 30,000 words').¹⁷⁴ Dillon, often the target of O'Brien's vitriol wrote:

Sometimes I do think his mind must be unhinged. I find it so difficult to recognise the William O'Brien I knew for twenty-five years in the writer of these monstrous diatribes or to find any trace of my old friend in this wilderness of baseless dreams [...] To think of such a personality, so amazing

¹⁷⁰ Lyons, *Dillon*, p. 274.

¹⁷¹ Bull, *Land, Politics and Nationalism*, p. 42.

¹⁷² O'Brien to McAuliffe, 5 March 1905 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AN26).

¹⁷³ O'Brien to Redmond, 18 July 1905 (NLI, John Redmond Papers, 15,212/12).

¹⁷⁴ Quoted J.V. O'Brien, *William O'Brien*, p. 160.

and so unfailing a source of political energy and influence, all gone to rack and ruin'.¹⁷⁵

Following O'Brien's return to parliament, the party leadership felt that he and his allies could be a threat to unity. Dillon wrote: 'I think O'Brien is cooking up a rather dangerous movement in the South'.¹⁷⁶ O'Brien cautioned his allies against a confrontation with the party. He wrote to Eugene Crean, 'If I may be allowed to suggest it, the course of action of yourself and any other friends in the party seems to be perfectly simple – viz. to hold your own opinion, but to recognise that in the face of the attitude of the Directory and the Party that you ought not to give public expression to these feelings, and in silence await further developments. In that way, you will be absolutely impregnable'.¹⁷⁷ John O'Donnell was ordered by Devlin not to call any UIL meetings without permission,¹⁷⁸ and then both he and Sheehan were expelled from the party. Several branches of the ILLA proposed that a conference should be held between O'Brien and his opponents, but this attempted reconciliation was rejected, when Dillon warned Redmond 'any toleration of his [O'Brien's] proposals of Conference would, of course, be fatal to the party. The only possible way to make peace with him is to show we can get along without him'.¹⁷⁹

However, O'Brien was in the process of forging another alliance in the form of a *rapprochement* with his old enemy, Timothy Healy, a politician who, according to his biographer, 'had minted the coin of modern chauvinistic nationalism'.¹⁸⁰ Their mutual hostility went back to Healy's repudiation of Parnell, his subsequent split with the anti-Parnellites, and O'Brien's successful campaign to have him ejected from the party in 1900.¹⁸¹ O'Brien's view of Healy at the time was uncompromising. 'The presence of Mr Healy in the Irish party[...]would be like the presence of a poisoned bullet in the body of a man. The first remedy would be to extract the bullet.'¹⁸² Their temperaments had little in common. O'Brien was emotional and

¹⁷⁵ Dillon to Blake, 3 April 1904 (NLI, Blake Papers, microfilm 4683 (514)).

¹⁷⁶ Dillon to Redmond, 23 August 1905 (NLI, John Redmond papers, 15,812/7).

¹⁷⁷ O'Brien to Crean, 4 February 1905 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AO13).

¹⁷⁸ O'Donnell to O'Brien, 25 January 1905 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AO6).

¹⁷⁹ Dillon to Redmond, 2 August 1906 (NLI, John Redmond Papers, 15,182/12).

¹⁸⁰ Callanan, *Healy*, p. 41.

¹⁸¹ J.V. O'Brien, *William O'Brien*, p. 127.

¹⁸² Quoted in Callanan. *Healy*, p. 441.

unpredictable, ruled by his heart rather than his head, and more at home on the stump in Cork or Mayo than in Dublin or London. Healy, on the other hand, relished the drama and intrigue of parliament and cosmopolitan London. His forensic skills in the Commons and at the bar were legendary; but his wit and cleverness often outstripped his ambition, leaving him isolated and relatively powerless. He had, however, managed to retain strong clerical backing, something which O'Brien lacked, because, although he was a staunch Catholic, the Church viewed him with suspicion because of his unpredictability and reputation as an agitator. O'Brien wished to secure Healy's clerical support, and he also hoped that William Martin Murphy (a member of Healy's 'Bantry Gang') and his *Irish Independent* might extend patronage to his cause. Murphy, however, was also deeply suspicious of O'Brien, and the *Independent*, although critical of the Irish party, did not throw its support behind him.¹⁸³ Moreton Frewen, a friend of Dunraven, facilitated the beginnings of a more cordial relationship between Healy and O'Brien. Healy told his father that 'William O'Brien now hails me in the lobby as if we were born cloudless chums. Rum, Rum, Rum (not alcoholic) is our motto.'¹⁸⁴ The prospect of an O'Brien-Healy alignment greatly troubled Dillon who urged Redmond to take action as, he argued, O'Brien carried little weight alone, but together they were formidable.¹⁸⁵ Healy's views of Dillon were as vitriolic as O'Brien's, 'Dillon is, and always was, and ever will be, a trouble to his country. This perfectly honest ass has done more to harm Ireland than all the traitors that have been deliberately hurting her during the period of his experience'.¹⁸⁶

The Irish Chief Secretary Augustine Birrell's Irish Council bill tested the newly-forged O'Brien-Healy *rapprochement*. The bill proposed an Irish Council of eighty-two elected and twenty-four nominated members, but the Council would control only eight of the forty-five departments of government. Its limitations were

¹⁸³ John Herlihy (Editor *Irish People*) to O'Brien, 27 June 1905 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AP54); William Martin Murphy to O'Brien, 21 January 1908 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers AQ18).

¹⁸⁴ Healy to Maurice Healy Snr., 17 May 1906 (UCD, *Healy Transcripts*, P6/A/46).

¹⁸⁵ Dillon to Redmond, 8 December 1905 (NLI, Redmond Papers, 15,182/8).

¹⁸⁶ Healy to O'Brien, 10 November 1907 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/2). Healy also deplored the calibre of Irish party MPs: 'You grieve for Ireland because the humblest Labour MP is superior to them and they have no shred of sense or even capacity for mischief, should warfare be needed at any stage'. (Healy to Maurice Healy Snr., 17 May 1906 (U.C.D., *Healy Transcripts*, P6/A/46)).

emphasised to placate unionist fears. Campbell-Bannerman described it as ‘a little, modest, shy, humble effort to give administrative powers to the Irish people’.¹⁸⁷ O’Brien immediately welcomed it, taking the ‘Home Rule by instalments’ view, that any amount of devolution was better than none. He also believed that any opportunity, however modest, for nationalists and unionists to work together should be welcomed.¹⁸⁸ Birrell believed that he had Irish party support for the Bill, and Redmond initially welcomed it in fulsome terms, indicating that the bill would be ‘no bar, but a help and a further advance, to complete Home Rule’.¹⁸⁹ Dillon described the bill ‘as a great instrument to complete the emancipation of the country’. However, his private opinion was somewhat different to his public endorsement when he wrote to Redmond, ‘If it was not for the criminal conduct of O’Brien in offering encouragement to MacDonnell & Co in the name of ‘rebel’ Cork they would never have the indecency to formulate such a scheme’.¹⁹⁰ Healy immediately rejected the bill, and in a riposte to O’Brien’s argument noted ‘Half a loaf is half a loaf of bread – wholesome nourishment – but this bill, in my judgement, is a whole dose of poison’.¹⁹¹ Public opinion soon followed Healy’s view, and Redmond was forced to change course and denounced the bill at a national convention in May 1907.

Following the breakdown of negotiations in 1907 over his re-admission to the party, O’Brien began to promote the notion of a progressive centre party (he had earlier sued the *Freeman’s Journal* for libel when the paper alleged that he had conspired with Dunraven and members of the Reform Association to set up such a party). With his blessing, Captain Shawe-Taylor made approaches to Sinn Féin with a view to including them in this proposed national movement. O’Brien wrote to Dunraven ‘I am glad to say that Capt. Shawe-Taylor’s mission has been completely successful. The Sinn Féiners jumped at the idea’.¹⁹² However, the notion of a coalition of progressive landlords, disillusioned Home Rulers, and advanced nationalists was

¹⁸⁷ Quoted in C. Townshend, ‘British Policy in Ireland, 1906-1921’ in Boyce (ed), *Revolution in Ireland*, p. 177.

¹⁸⁸ O’Brien, *Olive Branch*, pp. 400-27.

¹⁸⁹ *Irish Times*, 22 May 1907.

¹⁹⁰ Dillon to Redmond, 2 January 1907 (NLI, John Redmond Papers, 15182/2).

¹⁹¹ Quoted in Callanan. *Healy*, p. 455.

¹⁹² O’Brien to Dunraven, 28 December 1907 (NLI, William O’Brien Papers, 8554/9).

always illusory and doomed to failure. O'Brien could not accept Sinn Féin's abstentionism but he retained the admiration of prominent Sinn Féiners, and this was not to be his last overture to them.

Redmond, however, was now willing to consider O'Brien's return to the party. As he wrote to Dillon, if they refused to allow O'Brien and his allies back into the party, 'it would be extremely bad and many of our best friends would think us in the wrong[...]. If a bitter fight goes on, I foresee very serious results, and for myself, I am about sick of it.'¹⁹³ In January 1908 O'Brien, Healy, D.D. Sheehan, John O'Donnell, Augustine Roche, and Sir Thomas Esmonde were re-admitted to the party.¹⁹⁴ However, O'Brien's conflict with the leadership again erupted as a result of Birrell's Land bill of 1909, which the Irish party leadership supported. The bill proposed help for congested districts by allowing provision for compulsory land purchase. However, it also had the potential to curtail voluntary land purchase by reducing the bonus paid to landlords and substituting government stock for cash. O'Brien saw this as an attack on the 1903 Wyndham act in which he had played such a central role. He claimed 'that the Act had been designed to save the Treasury of the richest country in the world from a present liability which could not exceed £100,000 a year.'¹⁹⁵ O'Brien tried to get support from Dunraven and other sympathetic landlords for a conference but found little enthusiasm;¹⁹⁶ also, a proposal denouncing the bill was defeated at a meeting of the parliamentary party by forty-two to fifteen.¹⁹⁷ Despite O'Brien's dire warnings, the 1909 Land Act did not destroy land purchase, and in Cork, it continued unabated. By 1908 (under the 1903 act) 3,478 holdings, 181,263 acres, had changed hands at the cost of £1,720,676. By

¹⁹³ Redmond to Dillon, 16 November 1907 (NLI, Redmond Papers, 15,182/15).

¹⁹⁴ Following his re-admittance to the Party, O'Brien recalls that he approached Dillon in the House of Commons library and extended his hand to Dillon saying 'Dillon, I hope there is no reason why we should not shake hands and have done with it'. Dillon shook his hand 'and responded with a frigid word or two', but there was no *rapprochement*. (O'Brien, *Olive Branch* (14 June 2016), p. 432).

¹⁹⁵ *Irish People*, 10 October 1908.

¹⁹⁶ O'Brien to Dunraven 4 January 1908 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AR51); Dunraven to O'Brien, 14 January 1908 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AR51). O'Brien frequently complained of Dunraven's indolence and lack of commitment 'We are quite at one as to the future. All he [Dunraven] lacks is energy', (O'Brien to Sophie O'Brien, 11 December 1908, UCC, William O'Brien papers, BH).

¹⁹⁷ J.V. O'Brien, *William O'Brien*, p. 187.

1913 14,017 holdings had been sold, a total of 695,750 acres at a value of £6,345,302.¹⁹⁸

The Home Rule movement convened a National Convention to debate the Birrell bill on February 9th 1909. Given the increasing influence of Devlin and the AOH, which abhorred O'Brien's conciliatory policies towards unionists, and the passions engendered by cattle driving over the previous few years, this was always likely to be a stormy occasion. O'Brien recognised the extent of the opposition he faced, 'I have made my mind up to attend the convention. It will be a very forlorn hope indeed, but the rage of the *Freeman* finding I intend to turn up is the best proof that the bold course it seems is the wisest'.¹⁹⁹ He later claimed that special trains filled with 'Molly Maguires' from Belfast and cattle drivers from Longford arrived in Dublin on the day of the convention, and in the Mansion House the stewards had orders 'not to let anyone with a Cork accent near the platform.' He asserted that the convention had been taken over by a secret society – the AOH - whose Grand Master (Devlin) sat to one side of Redmond and its Grand Chaplain on the other.²⁰⁰ More sober accounts also describe scenes of unprecedented aggression and intimidation.²⁰¹ O'Brien was howled down when he tried to speak with anti-Semitic taunts relating to his wife Sophie - 'down with the Jewess and her moneybags.'²⁰² O'Brien's ally Eugene Crean was physically assaulted on the platform within feet of Redmond and Dillon. Moreover, it was not only the O'Brienites who received rough treatment: Laurence Ginnell, Frank Cruise-O'Brien and Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, all of whom opposed the party leadership on several issues, were also shouted down and abused.

The so-called 'Baton Convention' was the final straw for O'Brien, and he resigned from the party for the last time and withdrew to his Cork heartland.

¹⁹⁸ Forsyth, *Landed Estates*, p. 249.

¹⁹⁹ O'Brien to Dunraven, 4th January 1909, UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AR4.

²⁰⁰ O'Brien also alleged that the Belfast AOH men were armed with revolvers and that the Grand Chaplain instructed his stewards by making secret hand signals (O'Brien, *Olive Branch*, (13 June 2016), p. 445).

²⁰¹ *Irish Times*, 10th February 1909.

²⁰² Maume, *Long Gestation*, p. 99

CHAPTER TWO

'And thence we came forth to see again the stars': The Rise of the All For Ireland League 1909-1910

William O'Brien had returned to the Irish party in the hope of rallying its dormant Parnellite wing to a more inclusive form of nationalism which would include full-throated support for conciliation and a rejection of the Birrell land bill. However, the grip of the Dillonite anti-conciliation wing of the party was too strong and opposition too diffuse. The Home Rule movement had no incentive to change. Its position as the primary nationalist political force was, in 1909, unassailable. Opposition from advanced nationalists did not pose a threat and its roots in the nationalist community, through its affiliates, were wide and deep. The party's support for the Birrell bill, which curtailed the opportunities for tenants to purchase their land, indicated its confidence that it could maintain its hegemony even though it alienated some of its supporters.

In launching a political insurgency against this formidable enemy, William O'Brien faced significant difficulties. This included opposition from most of the Catholic hierarchy and clergy; the majority of the national and local press; the logistical and financial resources of the Irish party, the UIL and the AOH; and crucially, the reluctance of most nationalists to break the bonds of communal solidarity in supporting a party that advocated conciliation with what many nationalists considered to be an ancestral enemy. The Irish party, due to Lloyd George's budget crisis, was also about to find itself in its most advantageous position in two decades. Although O'Brien's political judgement was frequently questioned, his resolve and courage were never in doubt and, against all odds and advice, he decided to launch the AFIL.

Following the debacle of the so-called 'Baton Convention', O'Brien left the party for the last time. He was a man of tireless energy but questionable judgement and, following his resignation, he immediately decided to launch the AFIL which had

existed in embryonic form in Cork since 1904. He claimed he had two principal constituencies in mind when launching the AFIL: the nationalist young men and women of Ireland alienated by Redmond's pusillanimity, and a unionist minority whom he hoped would come to see that the AFIL would 'ensure them an identity of their material interests and opportunities with those of their Nationalist brother Irishmen in the future government of their common country'.¹ O'Brien wrote to his old ally Lord Dunraven: 'The moment is ripe for starting an all for Ireland association on conciliation lines. Dublin is most friendly, but I am quite convinced that the best start could be made in Cork where the feeling is now universally with us.'²

O'Brien was sure the AFIL would be an immediate success based on his personal support and the partial collapse of the UIL. In Cork, he had a large personal following and at least three loyal MPs, D.D. Sheehan, James Gilhooly and Eugene Crean. He also had a proxy grassroots organisation in the ILLA which had survived several attempts by the Irish party and the UIL to weaken Sheehan's control (the organisation had split in 1905 with Sheehan controlling most of the branches in Cork, and another Redmonite Land and Labour League, led by J.J. O'Shee was established in East Cork and other Munster counties).³ He also hoped to capitalise on the growing nationalist disillusionment with the Liberal government which was crystallising around opposition to Lloyd George's budget proposals and Redmond's failure to make any progress towards Home Rule. Also, there were a considerable number of tenants who had not benefited from land purchase who blamed Redmond and the Irish party for this.⁴ As Bew notes, O'Brien might also have hoped to retain the support of the fifteen MPs, who had supported his pro-conciliation motion in the parliamentary party in April 1908.⁵

O'Brien was brimming with confidence and enthusiasm. He wrote to the old Parnellite Pierce O'Mahony, 'Our inaugural meeting in Cork will be a historic event. I am confident that we shall have Lord Mac Donnell, Lord Dunraven, Lord

¹ O'Brien, *Olive Branch*, (13 July 2016), p. 472.

² O'Brien to Dunraven, 22 February 1909 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/10).

³ Lane, 'Land and Labour', p. 99.

⁴ P. J. Cosgrove, 'The Wyndham Land Act, 1903: The Final Solution to the Irish Land Question' (unpublished PhD thesis, Maynooth University, 2008), pp. 278-353.

⁵ Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, pp. 195-6.

Castletown and Lindsay Crawford.’⁶ However, the support that O'Brien was hoping for was not forthcoming. Firstly, Lord MacDonnell, although supportive of O'Brien's initiative, felt that, as a Liberal peer, he could not openly support the AFIL when O'Brien had so recently and vociferously attacked the Birrell Land bill. ‘I could hardly appear on a platform to denounce it [the Birrell bill] and retain my status as a Liberal peer’.⁷ O'Brien attempted to persuade MacDonnell – to no avail - to attend by claiming that land reform would not be on the agenda of the inaugural meeting.⁸

O'Brien had, at least, hoped that he could count on his old ally from the 1902 Land Conference, Lord Dunraven, to act as a bridgehead to progressive unionism and to provide financial support for a new daily newspaper which he planned to launch. However, Dunraven was less than enthusiastic about the AFIL's political platform, and his priority was now the re-establishment of land purchase, not politics or Home Rule. He told O'Brien that landlords would support the main principles of the Land Conference, ‘But for a general moderate policy including moderate and progressive Home Rule, I am very doubtful’. Dunraven said he would be abroad for the inaugural meeting of the AFIL and felt that he did not want to openly support the AFIL, preferring now the role of *eminence grise*, although he promised financial support for O'Brien's newspaper but doubted that he would be able to raise £3000 or £4000 and he thought at least £10,000 was needed.⁹ O'Brien's other hope for a conduit to unionism was Lindsay Crawford, an advocate of a more democratic form of unionism. However, he also demurred, claiming political and financial problems prevented him from appearing on the AFIL platform ‘until the position develops’.¹⁰ Pierce O'Mahony offered a caustic opinion on O'Brien's erstwhile allies:

‘Personally I think MacDonnell dangerous, Castletown an ass without any backbone and Dunraven a man of vanity’.¹¹ In addition to these disappointments, the new party faced clerical hostility as the Catholic Church saw O'Brien and his new movement as divisive at a time when it was consolidating its hegemony over nationalist Ireland. The party also faced unremitting hostility from the nationalist

⁶ O'Brien to O'Mahony, 23 March 1909 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AR20).

⁷ MacDonnell to O'Brien, 1 March 1909 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AR17).

⁸ O'Brien to MacDonnell, 3 March 1909 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AR21).

⁹ Dunraven to O'Brien, 24 February 1909 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/10).

¹⁰ Crawford to O'Brien, 7 March 1909 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AR25).

¹¹ O'Mahony to O'Brien, 9 March 1909 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AR24)..

press which portrayed the AFIL as a divisive force and even newspapers opposed to Redmond like the *Irish Independent* and the *Irish Times* were lukewarm in their support.

Faced with these difficulties a less headstrong politician than O'Brien might have postponed the launch. However, he and his supporters held two meetings in March to launch the new party with an official inaugural meeting planned in April.¹² The 'provisional committee' convened its first meeting in Cork city on March 19th. The second, a public meeting, was held on March 21st in D.D. Sheehan's Kanturk stronghold in North Cork. In addition to O'Brien, four other MPs addressed the meeting: Eugene Crean, James Gilhooly, D.D. Sheehan and the Mayo South MP John O'Donnell. Tim Healy, although supportive of the aims of the AFIL, felt that he could not openly affiliate to a movement which appeared to have such little support outside of O'Brien's heartland and which faced such clerical hostility.¹³ O'Brien's inaugural address ranged across his familiar themes: the duplicity of the Irish party leadership and their support for the Birrell Land bill; the budget which would damage the economic interests of ordinary nationalists; and the takeover of the Home Rule movement by 'the Mollies' (the AOH). He located the AFIL in a long tradition of progressive nationalist movements, 'The All for Ireland League would bring back the soul and principles of Thomas Davis, it would cleanse Irish political life of the foul vapours of Molly Maguires; it would raise a common platform on which all sons of Ireland could be united. There would be no more Tammany Hall tricks, squalid lobby intrigues[...]'¹⁴

The *Southern Star* subsequently published a lengthy report on the Cork city meeting with an accompanying comment from John Dillon in which he stated that he did not think 'the people of Ireland would tolerate the idea of the new organisation'.¹⁵ The *Cork Examiner*, who reported the launch of the AFIL also published a letter from Redmond condemning the new party.¹⁶ On 23rd March

¹² O'Brien to Castletown, 9 March 1909 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AR27).

¹³ Callanan, *Healy*, p. 465.

¹⁴ *Irish Independent*, 22 March 1909.

¹⁵ *Southern Star* 20 March 1909.

¹⁶ *Cork Examiner* 20 March 1909.

Redmond convened a meeting of Irish party MPs which voted fifty to nil on a resolution that membership of the AFIL was incompatible with Irish party membership. The MPs who attended the AFIL launch were not present, but O'Brien's old ally Augustine Roche, MP for Cork city, voted for the resolution.¹⁷ O'Brien could at least count on four MPs, but this fell far short of the fifteen who supported his pro-conciliation motion the previous year and therefore he failed in his aspiration of harnessing the dissent which festered in the ranks of the Irish party.

Even those used to O'Brien's erratic career and unpredictable behaviour were taken aback when, only a few days after launching the AFIL, he announced that due to ill health, he was resigning his seat, closing his newspaper the *Irish People*, and going abroad to recover.¹⁸ In a letter to Lord Dunraven some months later he listed his ailments: he had to endure surgery on his leg; he had a large cyst on his shoulder which had to be excised; and he also suffered from phlebitis, neuritis and rheumatic gout.¹⁹ In addition, although there are no indications that he suffered from mental instability, it seems likely that O'Brien may have been both psychologically and emotionally exhausted for he drove himself relentlessly. In addition he was thin-skinned: quick to take offence and slow to forgive and the 'Baton Convention' a few weeks before his resignation must have been a deeply disturbing experience. Tim Healy however, had little sympathy and wrote that O'Brien: 'never consulted me about starting his League, nor apparently anyone else, no more than he did when resigning [...] no one could rely on such an unstable character or go tiger-hunting with him again'.²⁰ Dunraven sent his regrets to O'Brien but said that he thought it was a mistake to launch a new organisation at that time.²¹ The newly launched AFIL struggled to cope and, with O'Brien *hors de combat* in Italy, entered a state of suspended animation. Sheehan claimed that O'Brien's 'last injunction to us was that

¹⁷ *Irish Independent* 24 March 1909.

¹⁸ D.D. Sheehan was so distraught at the loss of O'Brien that he took to writing bad verse: 'The world is black to me today/There is no sunshine in the sky/No ray of hope - not even one ray/I sigh and moan, moan and sigh.' (*Cork Weekly Chronicle*, 31 March 1909).

¹⁹ O'Brien to Dunraven, 5 November 1909 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/10).

²⁰ Quoted in Callanan, *Healy*, p. 45.

²¹ Dunraven to O'Brien, 31 March 1909 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/10. Dunraven to O'Brien).

we should do nothing unnecessarily to draw down the wrath of “the bosses” [the Irish party leadership] upon us’, and, although the AFIL MPs were not expelled from the party ‘in all other ways we were treated as political pariahs and outcasts’²² O’Brien used his sojourn in Tuscany to write his bitter polemic *An Olive Branch for Ireland and Its History*. He prefaced his account of the emergence of the All For Ireland League with Dante’s cry as he emerges from the pit: ‘*e quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle*’ (‘and thence we came forth to see again the stars’). O’Brien may have been influenced by the Italian setting in which he wrote an *Olive Branch*. However, this was undoubtedly also a metaphor for the AFIL²³

Even though the AFIL was in a state of limbo the nationalist community in Cork was still split along Redmondite and O’Brienite lines (the *Cork Examiner* began to call the dormant AFIL ‘Healyites’ although Tim Healy’s position in relation to the AFIL was still ambivalent). The divisions were painfully obvious when a nationalist convention to select a candidate for O’Brien’s seat ended in disarray on 19th April.²⁴ The following day an Irish party delegation, led by Augustine Roche, approached the proprietor of the *Cork Examiner* George Crosbie who agreed to stand as the party’s candidate. Maurice Healy, brother of Tim, decided to stand as an independent nationalist (he had, ironically, lost the seat to O’Brien nine years before). Healy comfortably beat Crosbie by a margin of 14%, which reflected the level of support in the city for O’Brien and the AFIL. Healy took the Irish party pledge but was refused admittance to the party following his election. The O’Brienite MPs John O’Donnell, D.D. Sheehan, Eugene Crean and James Gilhooley (who all remained members of the Irish party) and Maurice Healy formed a loose dissident bloc. The position of Tim Healy was, as ever, ambivalent. He could not be described at this stage as a supporter of either O’Brien or the AFIL but his excoriating attacks on the budget had alienated the mainstream of the party, and he found natural allies with his brother and the

²² Sheehan, *Ireland Since Parnell*, Chapter XVIII.

²³ O’Brien’s somewhat febrile state of mind may also have been caused by his painful recovery from surgery on his leg where the wound ‘had to be kept open by the gentle process of torture known to the surgeon as ‘packing’’. (O’Brien, *Olive Branch* (15 June 2016), p .457).

²⁴ *Cork Examiner*, 20 April 1909.

other O'Brien supporters.²⁵ Healy's parliamentary assaults and the unpopularity of the budget in Ireland forced the Irish party leadership into the convoluted and contradictory position of supporting the Liberal government, condemning the budget but arguing that such a situation would never have arisen if Ireland had Home Rule.²⁶

The election also split the Cork labour movement with some trade unionists recalling that Maurice Healy, a solicitor, had represented the local tram company in a recent dispute and others citing Crosbie's *Cork Examiner's* hostility to striking trade unionists.²⁷ Even amongst those who supported Healy, there were those who said they did so in the absence of a more authentic labour candidate.²⁸ The return of a Liberal government in 1906 saw the removal of many constraints on unions and labour activity including the Trades Dispute Act (1906), which legitimised peaceful picketing. In 1908 James Larkin, then an organiser for the National Union of Dock Labourers (N.U.D.L.), recruited workers in Cork and organised a dock strike, which led to clashes with strike-breakers brought in from England but managed to achieve a favourable arbitrated settlement in December 1908.²⁹ This new militancy amongst unskilled workers led to tensions with the craft unions, which culminated in a split in the trades council the following year. By then Larkin had been expelled from the NUDL and established the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (I.T.G.W.U.), Ireland's first 'One Big Union'.

The first big test for the ITGWU came in June 1909 when its members in Cork refused to work with dockworkers from the British-based Workers Union of Great Britain and Ireland. Thousands of workers in the city were locked out, and non-union labour was again brought in from England. In one of the first

²⁵ For example, *Parliamentary debates* (Hansard), fifth series, *House of Commons*, 9 July 1909 (vol. 5, London, 871-4); 3 September 1909 (vol. 10, 765-9).

²⁶ Lyons, *Dillon*, p. 310.

²⁷ An analysis of the *Examiner's* reporting of this and later labour disputes does not indicate direct attacks or overt hostility towards strikers. However, there is a more subtle bias, of 'reasonable' employers and police, in comparison to the irresponsible behaviour of the strikers.

²⁸ McQuay-Reddick, 'Political and Industrial Labour in Cork', p. 140.

²⁹ P. Beresford-Ellis, *A History of the Irish Working Class* (London, 1996), p. 181.

examples of an organised response to Larkin's militant labour tactics, Cork businesses organised themselves into the Cork Employers Federation, whose chairman, Sir Alfred Dobbin, employed uncompromising tactics which foreshadowed the lock-out in Dublin four years later. Employers threatened to sack any worker who supported other strikers, who would then be blacklisted by other Federation members.³⁰ There were widespread disturbances between the strikers, the strike-breakers, the Workers Union and police who baton-charged the striking workers.³¹ However, with few resources or strike pay available, the dispute ended in defeat for the strikers within a month and led to the collapse of the ITGWU in Cork.³²

The 1909 Cork lock-out left a bitter aftertaste for many local trade unionists and exacerbated the existing divisions that militated against the emergence of an active labour movement. In the aftermath of the lock-out, the typographical union broke away and formed a rival trades council the Cork District Trades Council (C.D.T.C.) which was dominated by Redmondite-supporting craft unions.³³ The remaining unions, representing mostly semi-skilled and unskilled workers, reformed as the Cork United Trades and Labour Council (C.U.T.L.C.) which was broadly sympathetic to the AFIL. While many on the left were suspicious of O'Brien's attempts to present himself as a champion of the working class, the split within the labour movement would prove to be another of those cleavages which the AFIL was able to exploit. O'Brien and the AFIL were, as was the Irish party, adept at obfuscating class tensions.

The AFIL, rudderless and adrift since O'Brien's departure, pleaded with him to return. Shortly before the Lords' rejection of the budget, and with a general election looming, Alderman J.L. Forde, who assumed a leadership role in the AFIL, wrote to O'Brien in Italy asking him to come back to Cork, arguing that, 'the League party are already fighting between themselves', and that it was possible that Sir Edward Fitzgerald, the unpopular former Lord Mayor of Cork,

³⁰ *Cork Examiner*, 19 June 1909.

³¹ *Ibid*, 17 and 18 June 1909.

³² *Irish Independent*, 14 July 1909.

³³ *Ibid*, 13 August 1909.

would 'force himself to the front and get nominated and will not alone get beaten but will bring Maurice Healy down with him.'³⁴ However, O'Brien was reluctant to return to active politics saying that he had neither the physical strength nor resources to lead the movement; nothing, he said, would induce him to return to parliament.³⁵ He did, however, offer to come back to Cork and support a candidate for his old seat.

In contrast to his optimistic public statements about the prospects for the AFIL, privately he was pessimistic that it could become a national party, 'outside a few Southern counties, the wretched country would, as usual, be blindfolded wherever a vilely dishonest press chose to lead them.'³⁶ He was only too aware of the fissiparous nature of opposition to the Irish party outside of Cork, and his assessment would prove to be prescient. However, O'Brien's resolve to stay out of the fray soon crumbled and he claimed that he had to stand to prevent his allies from being annihilated in the polls.³⁷ His assessment in all probability was correct. Without O'Brien's leadership, his stature as an iconic nationalist, and his financial support for election campaigns and a newspaper, the embryonic AFIL would have been stillborn. In the end, he suggested that a higher power influenced his decision to return to active politics, 'Like every other critical step of my life, it was settled by some inscrutable destiny as to which my own plans or desires counted for nought.'³⁸ He returned to Cork at the end of 1909 to lead a political insurgency against his old allies in the Home Rule movement.

ii

At the beginning of the election campaign in January 1910, the AFIL did not exist as a functioning political party and the O'Brienite MPs, except for Maurice Healy, were notionally at least, still pledge-bound members of the Irish party. However, led by

³⁴ Forde to O'Brien, 22 November 1909 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AR34).

³⁵ In a letter to Dunraven, he listed his ailments: in addition to surgery on his leg, he had a large cyst on his shoulder, which had to be excised, and he also suffered from phlebitis, neuritis and rheumatic gout. (O'Brien to Dunraven, 5 November 1909 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/10).

³⁶ O'Brien to Forde, 28 November 1909 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AR35).

³⁷ O'Brien, *Irish Revolution* (9 September 2016), p. 63.

³⁸ O'Brien, *Olive Tree* (18 June 2016), p. 464.

Tim Healy, they consistently opposed the party's support for the budget and were effectively *persona non grata* and, as a result, Tim Healy, D.D. Sheehan, Eugene Crean and John O'Donnell all faced Irish party candidates in contested elections. Although the O'Brienites did not have a party, they could, at least, count on the support of Sheehan's ILLA, which, on paper at least, had a large organisation mostly based in North and West Cork. J.V. O'Brien suggests that when AFIL branches were established they were coterminous with ILLA branches and the latter acted as a proxy for the former.³⁹ There is little doubt that Sheehan's ILLA had a close affinity to the AFIL but a close examination of press reports for both organisations in a sample period from June to December 1910 does not reveal any organic links and no significant sharing of membership.⁴⁰ Padraig G. Lane also notes that the ILLA strength was greatly overstated and between January and March 1910 its membership fell away and a recruitment campaign in its Cork heartland was necessary to keep a viable organisation in place.⁴¹ This raised tensions within the organisation, and at one branch in Ahiohill the chairman told the meeting that regular business had been neglected because members had been busy starting ILLA branches, implying that political considerations had superseded the organisation's primary function of representing the interests of farm labourers.⁴² The ILLA was a notoriously fractious organisation which suffered from the machinations of nationalist political intrigue aimed at harnessing the atavistic sentiments which agrarian struggles could evoke. It had already split in 1906, and in January 1910, precipitated by the O'Brienite insurgency and Sheehan's blatant politicisation of the organisation, his ILLA was again riven when a faction led by P.J. Bradley broke away and formed a rival County Cork Land and Labour Association (C.C.L.L.A.), mostly based in the east of the county. The split took place amidst riotous scenes when a group of labourers led by Sheen ejected Bradley and his supporters from a meeting of the Cork county committee of the ILLA.⁴³

³⁹ J.V. O'Brien, *William O'Brien*, p.198.

⁴⁰ For this period a search of the following newspapers was made for AFIL and ILLA branches in Cork: *Cork Examiner*, *Skibbereen Eagle*, *Southern Star*, *Munster Express*. Press reports, in general, gave full lists of members at AFIL branch meetings but not for the ILLA which usually only included officers and speakers. A comprehensive comparison of both organisation's membership was therefore not possible.

⁴¹ Lane, *Land and Labour*, p. 98.

⁴² *Skibbereen Eagle*, 24 September 1910.

⁴³ *Cork Examiner*, 3 January 1910.

O'Brien did not overstate the claim that he and his allies faced overwhelming opposition in the form of the Irish party, the UIL, the AOH, most of the national and local newspapers, and clerical disapproval. Sheehan claimed, 'that our constituencies were swarming with paid organisers and men and money galore were pouring in from outside, so that our downfall and defeat should be made an absolute certainty'.⁴⁴ The allegation that outside organisers were brought from outside Cork is given some credence by the decline of the UIL over the previous few years. This was an organisation built on rural class conflict, which had, as John Dillon feared, lost its central role and sense of purpose now that many tenant farmers had become proprietors.⁴⁵ Cork, in common with the rest of the country, had seen a catastrophic collapse in UIL membership and the number of branches in Cork city and county dropped from 109 in 1905 to 17 in 1909.⁴⁶ However, as a result of the O'Brienite insurgency there was a determined effort by the national leadership to build support and reconstitute moribund branches and, by 1911, the total number of Cork branches stood at 52.⁴⁷ It suited O'Brien however, to assert that he was facing a powerful and implacable enemy in the Irish party, the UIL and AOH whom he claimed, were subverting the democratic process by intimidation and bribery.⁴⁸ It is difficult to assess the veracity of his claim and the 1883 Corrupt and Illegal Practices act was meant to prevent such practices, although the willingness of the police and local authorities to take action must be open to doubt.

The two general elections of 1910 were the last to be contested under the Third Reform act of 1884, which brought electoral rules in Ireland into line with the rest of the United Kingdom and extended voting rights to most adult males.⁴⁹ Crucially, in the case of the 1910 elections in Cork, it gave the vote to small farmers and lodgers (excluding those on poor relief, servants living with employers and sons living with

⁴⁴ Sheehan, *Ireland Since Parnell*, Chapter XVIII.

⁴⁵ Maume, *Long Gestation*, p. 5.

⁴⁶ Minute Book of UIL National Directory meetings, (NLI, 190418, 708)

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ O'Brien, *Olive Tree* (20 June 2016), p. 467.

⁴⁹ Women were allowed to vote in local elections after 1898 but would have to await the Fourth Reform Act of 1918 for the vote in parliamentary elections.

parents).⁵⁰ The 1911 census shows that Cork had the highest number of lodgers registered to vote in the country at 18.1%, three times more than the second highest in Belfast.⁵¹ This can be attributed to the highly politicised culture of Cork where each vote was sought and fought over, and there was pressure from the ILLA and the UIL to increase voter registration.⁵²

Irish elections had the reputation of being robust, sometimes chaotic and frequently violent.⁵³ As Tom Garvin notes, 'elections were occasions of very great popular excitement, as the campaigns and the polling days roused deep political passions and were treated as a kind of extended holiday'.⁵⁴ Mobs were often hired for purposes of intimidation and bribery, clerical interference, bullying and economic threats were widespread. The results of elections were frequently disputed and often contested by petition. During the general election campaign of January 1910, there were disturbances throughout the country, notably in constituencies where fellow nationalists challenged Irish party candidates.

In John O'Donnell's Mayo South constituency police had to prevent a large crowd opposed to O'Donnell, who was supported by local priests, from attacking a Catholic Church in Claremorris and stealing the collection boxes. The following day a building attached to the church was destroyed by fire and statues of the Virgin, and the Sacred Heart were smashed. On the same day, the home of a prominent supporter of O'Donnell was burnt in an arson attack.⁵⁵ In Westmeath North the independent nationalist Lawrence Ginnell was accused of training gangs of 'English hooligans' armed with sticks who attacked and intimidated the supporters of the Irish party candidate John McKenna, 'women are insulted and decent people jostled', and one of Ginnell's supporters attempted to disrupt a meeting by 'holding

⁵⁰ Walker, 'The Irish Electorate', pp. 59-406.

⁵¹ 1911 Census of Ireland.

⁵² For example, a letter read out at a UIL branch meeting allegedly from D.D. Sheehan to AFIL branches with instructions on improving voter registration to the AFIL's advantage, (*Southern Star*, 13 August 1910).

⁵³ See for example T. K. Hoppen, *Elections, Politics, and Society in Ireland, 1832-1885* (Oxford, 1984).

⁵⁴ Garvin, *Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*, p. 58.

⁵⁵ *Connacht Telegraph*, 29 January 1910.

up a pig to Mr McKenna whilst he speaks'.⁵⁶ In East Kerry supporters of the independent Eugene O'Sullivan clashed with police and there were baton charges in Killarney.⁵⁷ He was unseated six months later following a petition related to his conduct during the polling where he was alleged to have arrived outside a polling booth in Killarney with an 'armed mob' and a brass band who played outside from morning to evening. Inside the polling booth in Longfield, he had no less than six personation agents who intimidated voters by their presence.⁵⁸ In Monaghan, disturbances broke out at several of the independent nationalist candidate John McKean's rallies and UIL supporters were hit by sods of earth and stones, and two priests had to intervene to restore order.⁵⁹ In Tim Healy's Louth constituency there were police baton charges and some of his meetings were disrupted with UIL supporters singing the old Fenian ballad 'God Save Ireland', an allusion to Irish party taunts that Healy had allied himself with unionists.⁶⁰

However, it was Cork that witnessed the most severe and sustained levels of violence and disturbances which lasted not only during the January elections but throughout 1910 and into the December general election. There had been disturbances during Cork elections in the past but nothing of the scale of disorder and violence in Cork city and county triggered by the January election. Even before the campaign started the sitting Irish party MP for North Cork James Flynn, decided not to stand after he was set upon by supporters of the O'Brienite candidate Patrick Guiney.⁶¹ Guiney also led a group from the ILLA who, claiming they had been prevented from attending an Irish party selection conference for the North-East constituency, broke down the door and disrupted the meeting.⁶² As soon as the election campaign commenced disorder broke out across several constituencies, especially in the North and West of the county. In Kanturk, police had to disperse rioters with rifle butts; the police report states that the rioters were armed with sticks

⁵⁶ *Westmeath Examiner*, 20 January 1910.

⁵⁷ *Kerry Sentinel*, 22 January 1910.

⁵⁸ *The Kerryman*, June 25 1910.

⁵⁹ *Irish Independent*, 7 and 17 January 1910.

⁶⁰ *Irish Independent*, 17 January 1910. 'God Save Ireland' was written by T.D. Sullivan to commemorate the Manchester Martyrs. Ironically, Sullivan was married to Healy's aunt, and Tim Healy had lived with them in Dublin as a young man (Callanan, *Healy*, p. 4).

⁶¹ *Cork Weekly News*, 1 January 1910.

⁶² *Cork Examiner*, 1 January 1910.

and revolvers and that, ‘they were mostly half-mad with drink and excitement’.⁶³ On that occasion, the *Irish Independent* alleged that the supporters of Michael Barry, the Irish party candidate, were armed with revolvers, which they discharged into the air.⁶⁴ On the same day, O’Brienite supporters pelted an Irish party delegation with turnips and drove them out of the town of Durrus.⁶⁵ There were also running battles between supporters of the Irish party candidate William Fallon and O’Brienites in Ballinagree and Ballinamorrishive.⁶⁶ In Newmarket, police reported that James Sweeney, who had been cheering for O’Brien, was shot in the hand.⁶⁷ In Bantry, O’Brienites pelted the Irish party candidate with eggs, and there were serious disturbances in the town between large groups of opposing supporters. And in Ballydehob two Irish party MPs ‘Dandy Dick’ Hazleton and William Duffy had lime thrown in their faces.⁶⁸

The election campaign was replete with rhetorical excesses from both sides, but an analysis of O’Brien’s speeches throughout the election campaign does not indicate any support or direct encouragement for attacks, intimidation or aggression against rival supporters or candidates.⁶⁹ Neither, however, was there any condemnation or calls for moderation from O’Brien to his supporters. An objective analysis of the disturbances is impossible given the partisanship of newspaper reports, most of which were antagonistic to the O’Brienites, and memoirs and personal accounts by those involved must, inevitably, be treated with caution. Equally police records give only a partial picture with the role of the police inevitably presented as being impartial and proportionate. On balance, however, there is a strong case, especially in North and West Cork, and in at least some of the disturbances in Cork city, of seeing the O’Brienites as being the aggressors. For example in Kanturk on January 29th, in Ballydehob on 19th January, in Cork city on May 22nd, and in Bantry on August 14th the O’Brienites seem to have precipitated the conflicts. This is not to suggest that UIL supporters were blameless and the attacks on the homes of

⁶³ CO 904/80 *CI Monthly Report for Cork East Riding* January 1910.

⁶⁴ *Irish Independent*, 31 January 1910; *Cork Examiner* 31st January 1910.

⁶⁵ *Irish Independent*, 31 January 1910.

⁶⁶ *Skibbereen Eagle*, 22 January 1910.

⁶⁷ CO 904/80 *CI Monthly Report for Cork East Riding*, January 1910.

⁶⁸ *Skibbereen Eagle*, 29 January 1910.

⁶⁹ Analysis of O’Brien’s speeches: 1 - 31 January 1910, *Cork Examiner*, *Irish Independent*, *Skibbereen Eagle*, *Southern Star*.

O'Brienite supporters on the north side of Cork city had the sinister echo of sectarian violence in Ulster. The disturbances, however, allowed the enemies of O'Brien to reinforce the narrative that the AFIL was a divisive force. As Edward Barry the Irish party MP for South Cork told a UIL meeting in Clonakilty, the AFIL was, 'a League to set man against man, labourer against farmer, son against son, brother against brother, and father against son'.⁷⁰ O'Brien claimed that he stood for the three Cs: Conference, Conciliation and Consent. However, the prominent Redmondite J.J. Horgan claimed that instead O'Brien 'had sown Conflict, Confusion and Contention'.⁷¹ The O'Brienites were variously portrayed as either troublemakers, traitors to the national cause, or the dupes of the landed classes who had not long before lorded their power over the common people of Ireland.

O'Brien knew the power of a sympathetic newspaper at this time and soon after his return to Cork at the end of 1909 he funded a campaign sheet, the *Cork Accent* (an allusion to his claim that at the 'Baton Convention' Devlin had ordered that no one with a Cork accent should be allowed near the platform); and six months later he launched the *Cork Free Press*. This went some way to countering the influence of the *Cork Examiner* which had a much larger circulation. Both the AFIL and the Irish party ran populist campaigns in both elections of 1910. The AFIL presented itself as the party of the people against a corrupt elite in the form of the Irish party and AOH leadership, but also tapped into concerns about jobbery and dishonesty.⁷² For example, in a tub-thumping speech in West Cork, Patrick Murphy, the O'Brienite President of the Cork United Trades Labour Council, attacked Lloyd George's 'People's Budget' because of the taxes which he claimed had been imposed on Ireland. He castigated the Irish party as 'aristocrats who while retaining their seats in Parliament, were motoring around the world wearing kid gloves and top hats'. In contrast, he presented the AFIL as the party of the labouring classes and declared that he was proud to call himself a labourer and in a shameless elision of class interests claimed, 'There is no class so dear to me as labourers and their employers, the farmers who dealt honestly and fairly with their employees'.⁷³ He sought to

⁷⁰ *Southern Star* June 4 1910.

⁷¹ Horgan, *Parnell to Pearse*, p. 184

⁷² McConnell, 'Jobbing with Tory and Liberal', pp. 105-131.

⁷³ *Skibbereen Eagle*, 12 November 1910.

portray the dissident MPs as the inheritors of a labour-nationalist tradition and claimed O'Brienite credit for all labour advancements including the Labourers' acts.⁷⁴ A recurring theme was the corruption of the Redmondites. O'Brien, for example, compared the Irish party's reputation for place-hunting to the infamous treachery of Sadlier and Keogh of the Independent Irish Party in the 1850s, and later that year he went on to denounce nationalist MPs as being at the vanguard of a 'wave of corruption and selfishness[...]'⁷⁵

Three issues dominated AFIL speeches: the duplicitous behaviour of the Irish party leadership, especially in attempting to sabotage land purchase; the betrayal of the Parnellite vision through a takeover of the Home Rule movement by a sinister secret society, the AOH; and Irish party support for the budget. Although the *raison d'être* of the AFIL was conciliation, this was not emphasised during the campaign because of the difficulty of fitting this into a populist narrative, although some prominent O'Brienites attempted to position the AFIL in a pantheon of Irish patriots stretching back to the United Irishmen who had attempted to bring Catholics and Protestants together. However, O'Brien and the other AFIL candidates did not flinch from drawing on their nationalist credentials. Patrick Murphy contrasted the old Fenian MP for West Cork, James Gilhooly's privations 'lying on the stone cold floor of his prison cell' to his opponent, an effete barrister who had been foisted on the constituency by the Irish party.⁷⁶

The Irish party, in contrast, attempted to portray the AFIL as factionalists - the dupes and proxies of the landed classes. Following the January election the *Cork Examiner* claimed that O'Brien was elected with the votes of 'the Orangemen, the Tories, the landlords, the bailiffs, the rent-warmers and all the rest of the anti-Irish Irishmen', in addition to 'disreputable people' voting for the O'Brienites (an old trope that was also directed against Parnellites in the 1890s).⁷⁷ Augustine Roche, the Irish party MP for Cork City and an old Parnellite and former ally of O'Brien, accused him of forgetting his nationalist roots and toadying to unionists, elected with the help 'of

⁷⁴ *Southern Star*, 29 January 1910.

⁷⁵ *Freeman's Journal*, 16 December 1910.

⁷⁶ *Southern Star*, 29 January 1910.

⁷⁷ *Cork Examiner*, January 20 1910.

Orange dogs creeping from their holes'.⁷⁸ A Cork priest, Father Treacy, speaking at an Irish party election meeting, scorned O'Brien's policy of conciliation quoting from a speech he made in 1895, 'All I can say is this: if there was any reason that could bring Lord Lansdowne or any of the other understrappers on the same side as I am, I would retire forever from Irish politics.'⁷⁹

The O'Brienite candidates mainly focused their attacks on the Irish party support for the Liberal budget, which, they claimed, would impoverish an already over-taxed Ireland. Eugene Crean claimed their duty was 'to kill the budget which meant £2 million extra tax that would come most directly on the farmers. Men who had purchased their land'.⁸⁰ This left the O'Brienites open to the accusation that they favoured strong farmers and opposed Liberal social policies which would benefit their most impoverished supporters. O'Brien's response, which he developed over the following years, was to claim that his objection was not to welfare policies *per se*, but their imposition on Ireland by the British state. The following year, O'Brien, welcomed the National Insurance bill as 'a great humanitarian scheme, which would 'bring a ray of hope and cheer into every humble home.'⁸¹ However, he later opposed it on the basis that there was no guarantee that the people of Ireland would benefit from the National Insurance contributions raised and the money would be better spent on other policies such as better housing for the poor.⁸² O'Brien declared 'We used to hear the Tory cry about killing Home Rule with kindness – Mr Lloyd George has killed it with pensions.'⁸³ Despite O'Brien's claims that it was the British government's imposition of welfare reforms on Ireland he opposed and not the reforms themselves, Lloyd George's policies were despised by the AFILs most prominent supporters such as Tim Healy, Lord Dunraven and Moreton Frewan who saw them as the thin edge of a socialist wedge.

The majority of the clergy supported the Irish party. D.D. Sheehan complained that he 'had to fight almost single-handedly, having against me two canons of Church

⁷⁸ *Cork Free Press*, 18 March 1911.

⁷⁹ *Irish Independent*, 3 December 1910.

⁸⁰ *Skibbereen Eagle*, 22 January 1910.

⁸¹ *Cork Free Press*, 5 March 1911.

⁸² *Ibid*, 1 June 1911.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 5 June 1911.

and almost every Catholic clergymen in my constituency'.⁸⁴ A sympathetic cleric noted, 'I hear that Cork priests are not (unfortunately) politicians, but that they were against the new League on the grounds that it would mean contested elections, strife and actual fighting.'⁸⁵ O'Brien had some prominent clerical support, notably Canon Wigmore from Mallow and Father Barratt from Enniskeane, who, in addition to three other prominent parish priests, attended the launch of the AFIL. The novelist Canon Sheehan, a friend and ally of O'Brien from his schooldays and a parish priest in the North Cork town of Doneraile, was also a strong supporter. However, clerical, and especially episcopal hostility from the Catholic Church had some advantages for a movement which hoped to attract liberal Protestant unionists and those alienated by the confessional direction which the Irish party took after 1903, most visibly through its close association with the AOH. The opposition of the church was not something that the O'Brienites were willing to accept passively and, in a society where Catholic clergy were revered, their reaction to blatant political partisanship by some priests was remarkable and shocking to many. At a UIL meeting in a hotel in Macroom, the Irish party candidate William Fallon was supported by twenty priests. D.D. Sheehan arrived with a large number of supporters, and they tried to force entry into the hotel, and some of the priests were roughly handled and abused, eggs were thrown, and there was widespread fighting.⁸⁶ A meeting outside the Lough parish church in Cork to support the Irish party candidate Augustine Roche was addressed by the parish priest Canon Fleming who was booed and jeered by a hostile crowd who attempted to rush the wagonette on which he was speaking. Stones were thrown, and the police drew batons and drove them back.⁸⁷

Pro-Redmond newspapers predicted the annihilation of the O'Brienites, but the results of the January 1910 general election were a memorable victory for the O'Brienites in Cork, where they took six of the nine seats. This remarkable feat can be attributed to the establishment of a grassroots organisation which drew personnel and campaigning experience from both the UIL and the ILLA and was able to mobilise the majority of nationalist voters and at least a minority of unionists. In

⁸⁴ Sheehan, *Ireland Since Parnell*, Chapter XVIII.

⁸⁵ Fr. Dawson to Canon Sheehan, 31 March 1909 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8557/3).

⁸⁶ *Skibbereen Eagle*, 8 January 1910.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 15 January 1910.

addition, William O'Brien ploughed significant financial resources into the campaign as well as funding the *Cork Accent*. He professed to be overwhelmed by the result and, in a remarkable leap of logic, proclaimed that across the country nationalist opponents of the Irish party had gained more votes than the official candidates: 'Wherever the ballot-boxes were allowed to tell the people's inmost thoughts, the exploiters of 'majority rule' were themselves left in the minority by the country. Only 44,865 votes all told were given for the official candidates, while 45,547 were given for the men against whom the campaign of extermination had been planned'.⁸⁸

Both Paul Bew and Patrick Maume have examined these claims in some detail and, as Bew notes, O'Brien included every MP in his list 'who had exhibited even the slightest sign of heterodoxy';⁸⁹ this included two MPs, 'Farmer' Hogan and J.P. Nanetti who had voted against his pro-conciliation motion in 1908. The dissident nationalist MPs who had not affiliated to the O'Brienites represented a spectrum of positions both in their opposition to the Irish party and their affinity with O'Brien. Outside of the AFIL, heterodox nationalism had little coherence. Lawrence Ginnell, for example, had described the Wyndham land act as 'the Landlord Relief act' and opposed O'Brien's policy of conciliation.⁹⁰ While Eugene O'Sullivan (Kerry East), John McKean (Monaghan South), E. Arthur Ryan (Waterford West), and dissident unionists like T.W. Russell and T.H. Sloan in Ulster, were sympathetic but did not join the AFIL or make the kind of public declaration of allegiance which could allow them to be counted within the ranks of the new party. At least some of them may have done so if the AFIL had gained stronger support outside of Cork and begun to pose an existential threat to the Irish party. However, this was the conundrum that the AFIL faced: it quickly became identified with O'Brien and with Cork to the detriment of its aspiration to become a national movement. O'Brien was aware of the accusations that the AFIL was a Cork phenomenon, and his attempt to obfuscate the election results was a deliberate attempt to present all parliamentary

⁸⁸ O'Brien, *Olive Branch* (13 June 2016), p. 469.

⁸⁹ Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, pp. 194-199; Maume, *Long Gestation*, pp. 104-112.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Michael Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party: Provincial Ireland 1910-1916* (Oxford, 2008), p. 118.

opposition to the Irish party leadership, both within the party and outside, as support for the AFIL.

The O'Brienites took six of the seven seats it contested in Cork; the party had decided not to contest South, and East Cork and Irish party candidates were returned there unopposed. In addition to O'Brien's seats in Cork City and Cork North-East, the other O'Brienite MPs were: Patrick Guiney (Cork North), D.D. Sheehan (Mid-Cork); James Gilhooley (Cork West), and Eugene Crean (Cork South-East).

Although the AFIL overwhelmed the Irish Party in Cork, on closer inspection some of the O'Brienite MPs were vulnerable. Maurice Healy and O'Brien polled less in Cork City than the combined votes of the two Irish party candidates and Sir Edward Fitzgerald stood as an independent and cost Maurice Healy his seat. O'Brien stood down in North-East Cork in February 1910, and Maurice Healy took the seat at the subsequent by-election.⁹¹ The other long-established MPs who declared for O'Brien in Cork had solid majorities: D. D Sheehan 17%, Eugene Crean 13%, James Gilhooley 21% and the newly elected MP Patrick Guiney had a majority of 23%.⁹²

Although the AFIL aspired to be a national party and O'Brien claimed every dissenting nationalist as an AFIL supporter, the number of what could be counted as O'Brienite candidates was only nine: six in Cork, Thomas Stack (Kerry North) and John H. Rice (Limerick City) both of whom failed to be elected. Both John O'Donnell (Mayo South) and Tim Healy (Louth North) are often included in the tally of elected AFIL MPs.⁹³ However, although O'Donnell had attended the launch of the AFIL the previous year and stood against the official Irish party candidate Conor O'Kelly, he denied that he had ever violated the Irish party pledge or voted against the party. He promised, if elected, 'to again sign the pledge and keep it in the spirit and letter'.⁹⁴ The position of Tim Healy in Louth North, who won a narrow victory over the official Irish party candidate Richard Hazelton, was more ambiguous. He had not attended the launch of the AFIL in 1909, nor formally

⁹¹ *Cork Examiner*, 21 February 1910.

⁹² Walker, *Parliamentary Election Results 1801-1922*, pp. 172-3.

⁹³ For example, Sally Warwick-Haller includes Tim Healy in the number of AFIL MPs, (Warwick-Haller, *William O'Brien*, p. 258). Alvin Jackson states that the AFIL 'captured eight seats', in which he presumably includes Healy and O'Donnell, (Jackson, *Home Rule*, p. 94).

⁹⁴ *Connacht Telegraph*, 15 January 1910.

endorsed it, and had not relinquished the Irish party pledge. He led a vociferous campaign against the budget and Redmond's support of the Liberal government and was despised by the leadership of the Irish party. However, he was still ambivalent about the AFIL and, even after the general election he was still concerned about the loss of clerical support: 'I have just had a letter from the Cardinal [Logue], who has no belief in the possibility of a *rapprochement* in Ulster and expressed the opinion that the founding of a new organisation would not be approved by public opinion.'⁹⁵ While some Protestant unionists were attracted by O'Brien's conciliationist policies, Ian d'Alton argues that O'Brien's opposition to the budget was even more critical.⁹⁶ The *Irish Independent* reported the appearance of unionist posters which declared:

The Irish Parliamentary Party have [sic] given their consent to a Liberal Government imposing enormous taxation on Ireland. Be wise before it is too late and record your vote in favour of independent nationalists and unionists candidates in the forthcoming elections.⁹⁷

While there was a small number of unionist landlords who had coalesced around the 1902 Land Conference and the Irish Reform Association, the majority of unionists were opposed to Home Rule. A Cork unionist, for example, protested against O'Brien's contention that Irish unionists in the south and west of the country were Home Rulers and said that unionists would be willing to defend the Union with arms if necessary. He contended that they voted for O'Brien because, 'He is engaged in a death struggle with Mr Redmond's gang, whom we want to see reduced to atoms in order that the attacks on the Union may come to an end and that Ireland may enjoy peace.'⁹⁸ Although there is no means of verifying how Protestants in Cork voted, the indications are that they favoured the AFIL. The *Examiner* claimed that 1,600 of the 'Orange and Tory vote' went to O'Brien; ⁹⁹ and Patrick Maume estimates the 'unionist tactical vote' at about a thousand, although he does not indicate how he arrived at that figure.¹⁰⁰ As well as gaining the support of Protestants, O'Brien also had the vote of the small Jewish community in Cork. O'Brien's wife Sophie recalls

⁹⁵ Healy to O'Brien, 18 March 1910 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/3).

⁹⁶ Ian d'Alton, 'Cork Unionism', pp. 157-9.

⁹⁷ *Irish Independent*, 5 January 1910.

⁹⁸ Letter in the *Daily Telegraph* reported in the *Irish Independent*, 10 February 1910.

⁹⁹ *Cork Examiner*, January 20 1910.

¹⁰⁰ Maume, *Long Gestation*, p. 104.

that ‘the Rabbi called on him and told him that his congregation had decided to give their votes to William O’Brien’.¹⁰¹

An intriguing assessment of the split in nationalism came from a confidential report commissioned by the Liberal Chief Whip A.C. Murray, the Master of Elibank, on the relative state of the Irish party and the potential threat of the AFIL. The Liberal government was becoming impatient with what they saw as Irish party posturing in relation to the budget and Redmond’s insistence on a government commitment to constitutional reform. In the report, dated 31st March 1910, the anonymous author states that he interviewed ‘Peer, Priests, Professional Men, Farmers, Traders, Publicans and Police’. He describes Cork as ‘the Mecca of the [AFIL] Movement’ and was fulsome in his admiration for O’Brien: ‘No one but O’Brien could have taken a ‘fond farewell’ of the political stage with such frequency and could have re-appeared ‘once again’ with such unfailing regularity’.¹⁰²

iii

Following what William O’Brien claimed was a famous victory in the January general election he now planned the official launch of the AFIL on the 31st March 1910. Maurice Healy had earlier set the tone, ‘The heather is on fire, and the conflagration we have started in Cork is beginning to spread far and wide and throughout the rest of Ireland.’¹⁰³ As he had with the first launch of the AFIL in 1909, Dunraven warned again that the time was not right to launch a new party.¹⁰⁴ O’Brien ignored his advice and was typically hyperbolic about the need for an immediate launch: ‘The establishment of the All for Ireland League is not a matter

¹⁰¹ S. O’Brien, undated memorandum, (CCCA, Sophie O’Brien Papers, PR 25/7). The majority of the small Jewish community came to Cork in the 1890s and almost exclusively consisted of Ashkenazi Jews from White Russia (now Lithuania). Sophie O’Brien’s family were wealthy Russian Jews who settled in Paris and, although she had converted to Catholicism before her marriage to O’Brien, the Cork Jewish community would have felt some affinity with her, but also, as they had so recently fled oppression, they may also have been drawn to an outsider like O’Brien. (John Crowley, ‘Cork’s Jewish Community’ in John Crowley, Robert Devoy, Denis Linchan and Patrick O’Flanagan (eds.) *Atlas of Cork City* (Cork, 2005), pp. 252-55).

¹⁰² Anonymous letter to A.C. Murray, 31 March 1910 (Lloyd George Papers, House of Lords Library, c/20/2/1).

¹⁰³ *Irish Independent*, 1 January 1910.

¹⁰⁴ Dunraven to O’Brien, 18 March 1910 (NLI, William O’Brien Papers, 8556/11).

of choice but of life or death'.¹⁰⁵ However, he later acknowledged that the party, which aimed to be a national one, suffered a blow even before its official launch.¹⁰⁶

O'Brien asked his old ally John Shawe-Taylor to contact Sinn Féin and explore the possibility of an electoral pact with the AFIL and the approach of a second election in 1910. A previous attempt to forge an alignment in 1908 had not been successful. There was some affinity between the two parties, not least because they both represented the only organised opposition to the Irish party, but also because many Sinn Féin members admired O'Brien's reputation as an agrarian campaigner and agitator.¹⁰⁷ Arthur Griffith was a strong Parnellite and revered O'Brien for his role in defending Parnell and despised those (including Tim Healy) who brought the 'great man' down. Griffith's aim 'to make England take one hand from Ireland's throat and the other out of Ireland's pocket' was a theme also repeated in many AFIL meetings.¹⁰⁸ Another common thread was the betrayal of youth and idealism by the Irish party leadership, and O'Brien and Griffith claimed that it was, respectively, the AFIL or Sinn Féin who offered hope to coming generations. Sinn Féin in 1910 was a very different party to that which emerged from 1917 onwards.¹⁰⁹ It enjoyed some electoral successes in 1907-08 and a couple of high profile defections from the Irish party.¹¹⁰ However, in 1909 it still had only 581 subscribing members, mostly in Dublin.¹¹¹ Even to those who had some sympathy with Sinn Féin, the party presented a somewhat unworldly air. Tom Kettle, the Irish party MP and prominent member of the Young Ireland Branch of the UIL, which had been critical of

¹⁰⁵ Healy to O'Brien, 18 March 1910 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/3).

¹⁰⁶ O'Brien, *Irish Revolution* (29 May 2016), pp. 67-8.

¹⁰⁷ Liam de Roiste noted in his diary: 'Some supporters of Sinn Féin were more favourable to the O'Brien-Healy section than to the Redmondite section. This may have been because the Hibernians' were very intolerant of any form of opposition to their political views; could not brook Sinn Féin. The O'Brienites were not quite so narrow in their attitude (de Róiste diaries, March 1910 (BMH, WS. 1698).

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in R. Cavendish, 'The Foundations of Sinn Féin' in *History Ireland* (Vol. 55, Issue 11, November 2005), p. 67.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Pyne has argued that from 1905 to 1926 there were four Sinn Féins and the manifestation that existed up to 1917 was still in the process of developing a political philosophy and programme which in 1910 was still influenced by Griffiths' dual-monarchy version of independence. (P. Pyne, 'The Politics of Parliamentary Abstentionism: Ireland's Four Sinn Féins' in *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* (vol. 12, no. 2, 1974), pp. 206-27).

¹¹⁰ The most prominent defectors were the Irish party chief whip Sir Thomas Esmonde MP and C.J. Dolan MP.

¹¹¹ Jackson, *Home Rule*, p. 116.

Redmond's leadership, wrote that Sinn Féin, 'Reminds one of nothing so much as that affinity of Goethe's who "carried her nose with a divine tilt as if there had never been a sin committed in the world."¹¹²

It was important for the AFIL to stress its nationalist credentials in the face of accusations that it was a proxy for unionists intent on destroying the Home Rule movement, and at a time when advanced nationalists were advocating a 'purer' form of nationalism. Liam De Roiste's diaries,¹¹³ for example, illustrates how republicans in Cork at the turn of the century contemptuously rejected constitutional politics, and the mettle of several leaders of the Cork IRA can be adumbrated in their progress from aesthetic disdain for the corrupting influence of English culture to revolutionary separatism.¹¹⁴ O'Brien, however, seemed uninterested in these emerging currents in cultural nationalism. Like all nationalist politicians, he paid homage to the Irish language but did not have a great deal of affinity with its advocates or 'Irish-Ireland' enthusiasts in general. Where his politics and Sinn Féin aligned was their disdain for the iniquities of the Home Rule movement. However, O'Brien's need to appeal to unionists in the interests of conciliation and his distinct preference for Balfour's conservatives meant that the AFIL's policy on the national question was often unclear. This confusion was exacerbated by a *laissez-faire* approach to party discipline which resulted in prominent AFIL figures making contradictory claims and statements in contrast to the disciplined and pledge-bound Irish party. However, it was Sinn Féin, with a keener ear to the thrum of cultural nationalism, that began to offer a more convincing analysis of Ireland's relationship to Great Britain and the United Kingdom and a clearer vision of a self-governing Ireland, which ultimately proved to be a more engaging narrative for young idealists.

There was the possibility of an exploration of the shared interest of both organisations, but in a telling vignette, Liam de Roiste recounts a meeting requested by some young Cork Sinn Féin activists with O'Brien who dealt with them in his

¹¹² T.M. Kettle, 'A Note on Sinn Féin in Ireland' in *North American Review*, vol. 182, no. 626 (January 1908), pp. 46-59.

¹¹³ de Róiste diaries, passim (BMH, WS 1698).

¹¹⁴ Tom Garvin estimates that one-sixth of the elite of the pre-independence republican movement came from Cork. (Garvin, *Nationalist Revolutionaries*, p. 51).

usual inimitable style, ‘They [the Sinn Féin delegation] were hardly permitted to say a word. William occupied the whole time. He spoke to them, not they to him’.¹¹⁵ From O’Brien’s perspective, an alliance with Sinn Féin was driven by electoral need, and as J.V. O’Brien notes, ‘his memoirs give no indication of the seething Republican and revolutionary forces coming to the surface[...].’¹¹⁶

Shawe-Taylor and Tim Healy met James Brady, a member of Sinn Féin’s National Executive in December 1909 and discussed a proposal that, *quid pro quo*, O’Brien would fund Sinn Féin candidates in Dublin if they did not oppose the AFIL in Cork.¹¹⁷ The Sinn Féin national executive was split with the IRB faction led by Bulmer Hobson and P.S. O’Hegarty adamantly opposed to any form of electoral pact.¹¹⁸ Although Brady was in favour of Sinn Féin taking seats in Westminster and Griffith was in favour of cooperation with the AFIL, it was the abstentionist policy, which Sinn Féin would not change and O’Brien could not accept, which led to the breakdown of the talks.¹¹⁹ This left O’Brien with no alternative but to launch the party from his Cork hinterland. He was aware of the limitations that this placed on the party:

Without at least the benevolent neutrality of Sinn Féin, a successful start in Dublin was out of the question. Mr. Griffith's decision, in compelling us to transfer the inaugural meeting to Cork, gave the All-for-Ireland movement a certain sectional and provincial aspect, which the implacable foes of "the Cork accent" were not slow to exploit, and did much to increase the timidity of that Irish Protestant minority which a great Metropolitan meeting joyfully commingling Irishmen of all ranks and creeds would have dispelled.¹²⁰

The launch of the AFIL was more notable for those missing from the platform than those present. O'Brien's hopes of attracting prominent political figures such as Lord MacDonnell and Lindsay Crawford were frustrated. The published list of speakers included Lord Dunraven and Tim Healy, both of whom failed to appear. Dunraven's

¹¹⁵ de Róiste diaries, March 1910 (BMH, WS 1698).

¹¹⁶ J.V. O’Brien, *William O’Brien*, p. 247.

¹¹⁷ Callanan. *Healy*, pp. 464-5.

¹¹⁸ B. Feeney, *Sinn Féin: A Hundred Turbulent Years* (Dublin, 2002), p. 53.

¹¹⁹ *Irish Independent*, letter from James Brady, Sinn Féin National Executive Committee, 1 January 1910.

¹²⁰ O’Brien, *Irish Revolution* (12 October 2016), p. 69.

usually avuncular disposition was ruffled, and he complained that his name had been included when he had previously informed O'Brien that he would be unable to attend because of ill health.¹²¹ He did, however, provide an encomium in which he supported the launch of the new party and commended the three central aims set out in the inaugural resolution: achieving self-government within the Empire; reviving land purchase; and opposing excessive and unfair taxation.¹²² John O'Donnell, who had attended the previous AFIL launch in 1909 also failed to appear. The confidential report commissioned by the Master of Elibank notes that although O'Brien funded O'Donnell's election campaign 'his inability to "support" him in London is understood to be responsible for that worthy's rather doubtful attitude just now'.¹²³ This indicated that, despite the rumours of O'Brien's great wealth and boundless generosity, there were limits to his resources which were already stretched by his funding of the AFIL and the January election campaign.¹²⁴

However, there was neither explanation for his absence nor letter of support from Tim Healy, a palpable indication of his unwillingness to publicly align himself with the AFIL. Although he retained some hope of reconciliation with the Irish party leadership after the general election of January 1910, the animus he generated, even from anti-Parnellites like John Dillon, made this an unlikely prospect. Dillon made clear that he thought Healy had put himself beyond the pale, 'Mr Healy had the audacity to say he had observed the pledge to the Party. I would say that the whole public activity of Mr Healy for the last year and a half has been one continual breach of the pledge.'¹²⁵ The leadership of the Irish party and the nationalist press portrayed O'Brien and Healy as a *folie à deux*, reckless with the best opportunity for Home Rule that existed since Parnell and lost no opportunity in pointing out the enmity that had previously existed between them.

¹²¹ Dunraven to O'Brien, 26 March 1910 (NLI, *William O'Brien Papers*, 8556/11).

¹²² *Irish Independent*, 1 April 1910.

¹²³ Letter to A.C. Murray, 31 March 1910 (Lloyd George Papers, House of Lords Library, c/20/2/1, 5).

¹²⁴ The extent of O'Brien's wealth, which came entirely from his wife's fortune, was a frequent barb hurled by his opponents, often framed within anti-Semitic abuse of the kind which was directed at him at the 'Baton Convention'.

¹²⁵ *Irish Independent*, 5 January 1910.

Following the January general election, however, there was more that united O'Brien and Healy than divided them and they provided a formidable opposition to the Irish party's support of the Liberal government. Neither had the instinctive affinity with the Liberals that Dillon and other Irish party leaders felt. For O'Brien, the greatest triumph of his political career, the 1903 Land act, had been facilitated by a Conservative government and a Tory Irish secretary, George Wyndham, whom he revered. Further, the Liberal government which came to power in 1906, showed no enthusiasm for Home Rule until Irish nationalists held the balance of power after the general election of January 1910. For O'Brien, the Liberals most grievous calumny was the Birrell Land act, which he thought was deliberately aimed at undermining land purchase. Moreover, both O'Brien and Healy's conservative instincts were at odds with Liberal social policies. Despite O'Brien's antipathy to the Liberals, however, he and Healy had admirers within the Liberal party, not least because Redmond, although he supported the budget in the end, had alienated elements within the government. The Master of Elibank was full of admiration for Redmond's nationalist opponents, 'I confess I was sadly tempted at one time to finance twenty or thirty candidates in Ireland to assist Healy and O'Brien, and would certainly have done so if the Redmondites had failed us on the budget or the Veto.'¹²⁶ Had he done so it could well have provided a catalyst for dissident nationalists and liberal unionists across the country.

The general election of January 1910 changed the political landscape of the United Kingdom. The Liberals lost their majority and now held 275 seats to the Conservative-Unionists 273 with forty Labour seats. The Irish nationalists - with seventy-one Irish party MPs, six AFIL and five independent nationalists - therefore held the balance of power. However, it immediately presented Redmond and the party leadership with a dilemma: the only way they could achieve constitutional reform and the abolition of the Lords' veto, which in turn would pave the way for Home Rule, was to support the budget. This also left the AFIL in a quandary: how to effectively oppose the Irish party while not also being seen to endanger the best chance of achieving Home Rule in almost twenty years. O'Brien was painfully aware of this dilemma and wrote to his wife Sophie following Asquith's statement on his

¹²⁶ Arthur C. Murray, *Master and Brother: Murrays of Elibank* (London, 1945), p. 48.

proposals to curb the power of the House of Lords:

Under no circumstances could a man occupy a more unenviable position. Anything of a depressing nature I say will go wholly against the grain in Ireland, where Asquith's pronouncement is sure to create a sensation. On the other hand, it would be effacement to remain silent – so that it is one of the cruellest dilemmas of my life.¹²⁷

The budget is frequently described, without qualification, as being deeply unpopular with Irish nationalists.¹²⁸ It was undoubtedly so with Redmond's core supporters which L.P Curtis described as, 'Catholic merchants and shopkeepers, newspaper and hotel proprietors, lawyers and doctors, minor civil servants, clerks, publicans, journalists and commercial agents. Their allies and social analogues in the country were strong farmers, cattle-traders and graziers.'¹²⁹ The budget was also hated by nationalists who had benefited from land purchase. As Paul Bew notes 'the new farmer owners in Cork were less than enthusiastic when called upon to finance the measures of liberal progressivism'.¹³⁰ O'Brien and Redmond, who were both instinctively conservative on social and economic issues, had little affinity with Lloyd George's welfare policies. This sentiment was not universally held in the Home Rule movement, as the leading Irish party MP Tom Kettle observed, 'What social policy did we, the comfortable, offer them [the poor]'.¹³¹ And the voice that was generally absent from this debate was of those who could potentially benefit from the budget such as the poor of the lanes and tenements of Cork, agricultural labourers and small tenant farmers, who may have found more empathy in Lloyd George's budget statement that:

There are hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children in this country now enduring hardships for which the sternest judge would not hold them responsible; hardships entirely due to circumstances over which they have not the slightest command; the fluctuations and changes of trade—even of fashions; ill-health and the premature breakdown or death of the breadwinner.¹³²

¹²⁷ O'Brien to Sophie O'Brien, (undated) (NLI, Michael McDonagh Papers, 11440/3).

¹²⁸ For example Maume, *Long Gestation*, p. 101.

¹²⁹ L. P. Curtis, 'Ireland in 1914' in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A New History of Ireland, Vol. VI, Ireland Under the Union 1870- 1921* (Oxford, 1996), p. 185.

¹³⁰ Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, p. 193.

¹³¹ *The Leader*, 10 July 1909.

¹³² *Parliamentary debates* (Hansard), fifth series, *House of Commons*, 3 December 1910 (vol. 4, London, 481-2).

However, O'Brien was an implacable opponent of the budget. He objected on ideological grounds and also because he thought it would further damage the prospects for land purchase in Ireland.¹³³ Moreover, he saw it as a chance to shine a spotlight on Redmond's support for measures he had elsewhere vehemently opposed:

That Old Age Pension Act [sic] has been referred to very often and thrown in our teeth pretty often, but it was not framed for the sake of Ireland. The representatives of Ireland had no more to do with producing that Act than; they had with producing Bailey's comet.¹³⁴

The budget debate also needs to be considered through another prism, a theme which reverberated not only in the AFIL but also in practically every other variant of Irish nationalism and unionism, the fear of socialism, which to Lord Dunraven was 'the unclean thing'.¹³⁵ O'Brien and Healy frequently referred to the liberal budget as the thin end of a socialist wedge arguing that 'it might pave the way for a socialistic revolution in England'.¹³⁶ Although much of this was electoral rhetoric, there was also a real fear of socialism, which ran in tandem with the enfranchisement of the working class. In Ireland (outside of Ulster), apart from the British state itself, the two great bulwarks against socialism were Irish nationalism and the Catholic Church. Both had effectively contained the rise of radical political movements. The rise of Larkinsim and the organisation and militancy of unskilled labour was a direct challenge to the defences which nationalism and the Church built to protect their interests. The AFIL was as opposed to Larkinism as was the Irish party and the Church but had uneasily aligned itself with unskilled workers and against the more established craft unions. This was an alliance fraught with difficulty and would come under intolerable strain in the years that followed.

Redmond's support for the budget placed the Irish party in a precarious position. Dillon predicted that if they voted against the budget and brought the government

¹³³ O'Brien, *Olive Branch* (12 July 2016), p. 460.

¹³⁴ *Parliamentary debates* (Hansard), fifth series, *House of Commons*, 29 April 1910 (vol. 17, London, 68-74).

¹³⁵ *Irish Independent*, 3 December 1910.

¹³⁶ O'Brien, *Olive Branch* (13 June 2016), p. 460.

down the Conservatives would win the subsequent election with a majority of between 100-200 seats and any hope of achieving constitutional reform and Home Rule would be lost.¹³⁷ Redmond's policy of 'no veto no budget' had general support in nationalist Ireland, but it was a delicate balance and O'Brien and Healy had no qualms about exploiting Redmond's dilemma. O'Brien attacked him in the most tendentious of terms, 'this little ex-House of Commons clerk was growing fat on the pay of England in the days when I was running the risk of penal servitude every day of my life[...]'¹³⁸ In an excoriating attack on Redmond in the Commons during the budget debate Healy, who had by then given up any hope of a *rapprochement* with the leadership, stated, 'I have never known, not merely an Irish Leader, but an Irish Member, cut a sorrier figure than the Member for Waterford did'.¹³⁹ The vehemence of these attacks may have impressed elements within the Liberal party, but many nationalists were appalled. Even Lord MacDonnell, no supporter of Redmond, viewed 'O'Brien's campaign with abhorrence'.¹⁴⁰

In March, O'Brien and Healy met Lloyd George and discussed possible changes which would allow them to vote in favour of the budget. Healy was willing to come to an accommodation with Redmond if Lloyd George's concessions were substantial. Although not ruling out an agreement with Redmond, O'Brien was less than enthusiastic, and he was clear that Redmond would have to make the first move:

If he does so, there could be no difficulty on our part, so far as common action upon the budget and Land Purchase are concerned. However, any suggestion that it is we who should go to Canossa would completely mystify the country as to what happened and cover us with well-merited contempt, without disarming a single opponent.¹⁴¹

At the launch of the AFIL on 31st March O'Brien claimed that Lloyd George had agreed to concessions which were then withdrawn because of Redmond and Dillon's

¹³⁷ Lyons, *Dillon*, p.316.

¹³⁸ *Irish Independent*, 11 May 1910.

¹³⁹ *Parliamentary debates* (Hansard), fifth series, *House of Commons*, 18 April 1910 (vol. 16, London, 1776-83).

¹⁴⁰ MacDonnell to Alice Stopford Green, 29 November 1910 (NLI, A.S. Green Papers, 158089/13).

¹⁴¹ O'Brien to Healy, 19 March 1910 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/3).

opposition.¹⁴² O'Brien and Healy's attacks on the Irish party elicited a caustic response from Redmond who labelled the AFIL MPs 'the friends of the landlords and the enemies of Ireland'.¹⁴³ Joseph Devlin, launched a more scathing attack:

They [the AFIL MPs] are here not in the interests of the farmers, but in the interests of the plutocrats, the reactionaries, and the landlords[...]the honourable Member for Cork City has constituted a Landlord League for Ireland, with a paper financed by the landlords and paid for by the fiscal reformers.¹⁴⁴

The allegation that the AFIL was 'a landlord league' and O'Brien a naïve fool manipulated by powerful unionist interests was frequently thrown at the new party. Whilst it was true that some unionists, who felt disenfranchised by the democratisation of local government, supported the AFIL because it was the only palatable alternative to the Irish party, ironically, from O'Brien's perspective, there was a continuing sense of frustration and disappointment that too few landlords had rallied to his call and support from the ascendancy had been confined to those allies from the Land Conference and the Irish Reform Association. There had been some new converts such as Lord Barrymore, an old adversary of O'Brien's Plan of Campaign battles, and the prominent Cork Protestants Langley Brazier-Creagh and Jasper Wolfe.¹⁴⁵ However, the number of landlords and prominent unionists who supported the AFIL was pitifully small, and the main representative body of the landed classes the, Irish Unionist Alliance failed to express any support for the AFIL. The vast majority of AFIL supporters were Catholic nationalists in the six Cork constituencies where AFIL candidates had been returned and in pockets of support in other parts of Munster.

The six AFIL MPs elected in January 1910 were all Catholic nationalists. James Gilhooly (West Cork) had been an active Fenian and had been imprisoned several

¹⁴² Lloyd George denied making the concessions and accused O'Brien of a gross breach of confidence in disclosing the details of a private meeting (*Cork Examiner*, 4 April 1910).

¹⁴³ *Parliamentary debates* (Hansard), fifth series, *House of Commons*, 18 April 1910 (vol. 16, London, 1763-4).

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, vol. 16, 504.

¹⁴⁵ When O'Brien was taunted with the accusation that his association with Lord Barrymore tainted the AFIL, he replied: 'Remember it is not we who have gone over to Barrymore. It is Barrymore who has come over to us' (*Irish Independent* 29 August 1910).

times during the Land War and the Plan of Campaign. D.D. Sheehan (Mid-Cork) was a long-standing campaigner for the rights of landless labourers and evicted tenants, in frequent conflict both with landlords and the Home Rule movement who found his campaigns to be an embarrassing irritant. Eugene Crean (South-East Cork) was a leading anti-Parnellite and trade unionist. Patrick Guiney (North Cork) had been, like O'Brien and Gilhooly, imprisoned on several occasions during the Land War and, although he had lived in the United States before returning to North Cork for the January 1910 general election, he had maintained strong local links with the Land and Labour Association. Maurice Healy (North-East Cork) had been a close ally of his brother Tim following the Parnell split and had been defeated in 1900 for his Cork seat by William O'Brien in a bitter campaign. He was a member of Tim Healy's 'Bantry Gang' and an expert in land law. None of these MPs could be considered to be dupes of the ascendancy. O'Brien, Gilhooly, Crean, Sheehan and Guiney all had considerable personal followings in Cork and had nurtured close links with the ILLA, the trade union movement and nationalist organisations such as evicted tenants groups, GAA clubs and kinship networks. They knew the warp and weft of their communities and were intimately aware of the political allegiances, alliances, aspirations and frustrations of local people.

The rural areas of North and West Cork, from which they drew their support, were a patchwork of highly politicised communities with histories of Whiteboyism, rural agitation and campaigning stretching back to the eighteenth century and beyond. In some respects, Cork was quite exceptional because, as Tom Garvin has argued, like other areas of Munster, it was less anglicised, and although Protestants still had status and wealth, they had lost political power.¹⁴⁶ This engendered both political self-confidence but also a sense of frustration in nationalists as opportunities and upward mobility was impeded. North Cork relied mostly on dairy farming, which was not reliant on exports to Britain, and this further fostered a sense of self-reliance. Such a society was a tangible manifestation of self-sufficiency and local self-government, in contrast to the somewhat ephemeral vision of Gaelic Ireland portrayed by cultural nationalists. These secure and resilient nationalist communities were the heartland of the AFIL, and the attempt by the Irish party leadership to label

¹⁴⁶ Garvin, *Nationalist Revolutionaries*, pp.51-2.

it as 'the landlord party' was, therefore, a travesty of the truth.

O'Brien launched the *Cork Free Press* as a daily evening newspaper, in June 1910 with John Herlihy, who had also edited the *Irish People*, as editor.¹⁴⁷ Lord Dunraven gave £1000,¹⁴⁸ and Lord Castletown pledged 100 shares of £1 each in the new paper.¹⁴⁹ The League of Federals in New York donated £1000,¹⁵⁰ and there were further contributions from Colonel Hutchinson-Poe and Lady Arnott. O'Brien claimed that the ordinary people of Cork donated £11,800.¹⁵¹ This is almost certainly an exaggeration and, like most of the funding of O'Brien's ventures, the *Cork Free Press* was supported by his wife's fortune. As she states in her memoirs, 'we bore the *Cork Free Press* on our shoulders, it was a big financial burden'.¹⁵²

The *Cork Free Press* made no secret of its partiality or any attempt at objective political journalism; it was first and foremost the mouthpiece of the AFIL which, unsurprisingly, mirrored O'Brien's obsessions, especially in its vitriolic attacks on the 'Mollies', Liberal taxation and the budget. The leading article of the first edition was written, anonymously,¹⁵³ by O'Brien's old friend, the novelist Canon Sheehan and struck a more emollient tone which eschewed party politics and did not mention the AFIL. The article was more essay than editorial, an elegantly written paean to Parnellism, a vision of Catholics and Protestants living in harmony. He invoked a

¹⁴⁷ Herlihy left following a disagreement with O'Brien to be replaced by Hugh Art O'Grady, son of Standish O'Grady, and then by Frank Gallagher who went on to become a republican activist and the first editor of the *Irish Press*. The *Cork Free Press* was, Patrick Maume has argued, a nursery of editors. (P. Maume, 'A Nursery of Editors: The Cork Free Press, 1910-1916', in *History Ireland*, vol. 15, issue 2 (March/April 2007), pp. 42-46).

¹⁴⁸ Dunraven to O'Brien, 30th May 1910 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/11).

¹⁴⁹ Lord Castletown offered £100 'If I can induce the Land Commission to pay me this year[...]I wish from my heart that I could do more, but I am not a rich man and have many pulls on my purse'. (Castletown to O'Brien, 6 February 1910 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AR47), emphasis in the original document).

¹⁵⁰ *Irish Times*, 16 May 1910.

¹⁵¹ O'Brien, *Olive Branch* (20 July 2017), p 471.

¹⁵² Sophie O'Brien, *Recollections of a Long Life*, (CCCA, PR 25/3, 359).

¹⁵³ The provenance of the leading article was made clear in the *Cork Free Press* following Canon Sheehan's death (6 October 1913). In a letter to O'Brien dated May 29th (the year is not given but is most likely to be 1910) Canon Sheehan talks of an enclosed article (given the date this is almost certainly the *Cork Free Press* article) and a ballad. He states, 'As I have no ambition to figure before the footlights of the Irish political theatre, keep the authorship of both private, and let there be no allusion to my name in the paper.' (Canon Sheehan to O'Brien, 29 May (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, 8557/13, emphasis in the original document).

pantheon of Irish patriots: Wolfe Tone, Daniel O'Connell, Thomas Davis, Isaac Butt, the Fenian 'hillsiders' and Parnell, in support of his argument for tolerance and reconciliation, and in condemnation of the narrow and self-serving nationalism which was in the ascendant 'where political expediency has taken the place of political morality'. To alienate and reject Protestants, he argued, was self-defeating because 'Home Rule is absolutely unattainable without the consent of our Protestant fellow-countrymen, and it needs no great forethought to understand how unworkable a Parliament would be without their cooperation'.¹⁵⁴

Following the successful passage of the budget, and with the prospect of Lords reform more likely, the issue of Home Rule moved centre stage for constitutional nationalists. J.V. O'Brien correctly notes that William O'Brien, having focused on the land question for the previous eight years, had not given a great deal of thought to Home Rule other than to argue that once his policy of conciliation had broken down barriers between Catholics and Protestants, then Home Rule would inevitably follow.¹⁵⁵ Given the exigencies of the developing constitutional crisis and the balance of power that Irish nationalists now held, this was a vacuous and unsustainable position. Moreton Frewan (known to his adversaries as 'Mortal Ruin' because of his disastrous financial investments) temporarily filled the vacuum.¹⁵⁶ He was a federalist who saw 'Home Rule for all' as a bulwark against creeping socialism, of which he thought Lloyd George's budget was the precursor. He argued that a federal solution was the only form of self-government that unionists would accept. He claimed that if Redmond rejected this reasonable proposal, then it would

¹⁵⁴ *Cork Free Press*, 11 June 1910. Brendan Clifford of the Aubane Historical Society claims that Canon Sheehan was silenced by his bishop after he wrote this article. However, he provides no evidence for this assertion. (Brendan Clifford, 'Canon Sheehan: *A Turbulent Priest*', Address To A Meeting For The Duhallow Heritage Centre at The James O'Keefe Memorial Institute, Newmarket, Co. Cork on 19th April 1989. *Aubane Historical Society*). John O'Donovan notes that there were rumours that Canon Sheehan was silenced and suggested that a quote from him, 'I think the time is coming when I shall have to say in poetry, all that I want to say', indicates that there may have been some truth in these rumours. John O'Donovan, 'A Different Discipline': Revisiting Canon Sheehan of Doneraile (1852-1913) and the turbulent culture of early twentieth-century Ireland, September 4th, 2013, John O'Donovan, *Turbulent Cork*, (4 April 2017).

¹⁵⁵ J.V. O'Brien, *William O'Brien*, p.198.

¹⁵⁶ Frewan had extensive business interests in Ireland, Britain and the United States, was related through marriage to Winston Churchill, and his niece was the second wife of Sir Edward Carson. He was attracted to the AFIL because of O'Brien and Healy's trenchant opposition to the budget which he also opposed.

cause a split in constitutional nationalism to the benefit of the AFIL¹⁵⁷

The *Cork Free Press* dutifully supported federalism, 'It now appears that her [Ireland's] desires will be gratified and her hopes realised by the adoption of the Federal system.'¹⁵⁸ A clear line of demarcation had therefore opened between the Irish party and the AFIL. O'Brien, who had previously shown little enthusiasm for federalism but now, influenced by Frewan and Dunraven, became a convert, 'personally I am a federalist myself. I can easily imagine a scheme of federation for which I should work with all my might and recommend to the country as the best attainable settlement of our national claims and as one Ireland could accept with honour and with financial security'.¹⁵⁹ It had been his view, at least since 1903, that any form of self-government should be embraced, if only as a first step to Home Rule. Thus, he welcomed both the Irish Reform Association's devolution proposals and the Irish Council bill though both of these fell far short of Home Rule.¹⁶⁰ This view was consistent with the AFIL's position of conciliation, but it was anathema to the dominant Dillonite wing of the Home Rule movement. As Alvin Jackson states: 'For Dillon, feeble, gradualist reform and the insidious diplomacy of ascendancy lordlings threatened to defuse vital political passions and to undermine the traditional goals of the Home Rule party.'¹⁶¹ It was these issues that would help to decide the destinies of the two parties over the following four years.

The AFIL was now firmly established in Cork with the *Cork Free Press* listing twenty-six branches across the city and county and claimed that 'all over the country branches have been set up'.¹⁶² This was, of course, a gross exaggeration as few branches existed outside Cork, although the party made efforts to expand in other

¹⁵⁷ A. J. Ward, 'Frewen's Anglo-American Campaign for Federalism, 1910-21' in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 15, no. 59 (March 1967), p. 268.

¹⁵⁸ *Cork Free Press*, 20 July 1910.

¹⁵⁹ *The Observer*, 23 October 1910.

¹⁶⁰ The Irish Council bill proposed an eighty-two member council which would take control of most of the Irish departments. The bill was dropped following opposition from the UIL, the Irish party and the Roman Catholic Church.

¹⁶¹ Jackson, *Home Rule*, p. 92.

¹⁶² *Cork Free Press*, 11 June 1910. (A police intelligence reported stated that the AFIL had 116 branches around the country but gave no details or supporting evidence, *CI Monthly Report for Cork East Riding*, November 1910, CO 904/81, pp. 16-19, UCC)

parts of Ireland, and a London branch was established in May 1910.¹⁶³ There was an active branch in Limerick, and John Shawe-Taylor addressed a 6,000 strong meeting in Kilmallock.¹⁶⁴ Branches were established in Kerry in July, and in Waterford where it was claimed the AFIL 'was spreading like a prairie fire'.¹⁶⁵ The *Westmeath Examiner* reported that one of five unaffiliated UIL branches in this county was ready to declare for the AFIL, but this came to nothing because of personal animosity between O'Brien and the Westmeath North MP Lawrence Ginnell.¹⁶⁶ O'Brien and Sheehan tried to establish the AFIL in Mayo, a former stronghold which O'Brien had represented in parliament and where he still had a house in Clew Bay. However, Mayo was now solidly in the control of Dillon and the UIL, and they encountered fierce hostility. Sheehan, for example, addressed a meeting in Ballina which the *Western People* claimed was attended by only forty to fifty supporters who were only there because 'they had been paid all the morning in drink to do so', and a large contingent of police had to hold back UIL protestors.¹⁶⁷ At a meeting in Crossmolina a few days later O'Brien was confronted by a 3,000-strong hostile crowd and escorted out of town by armed police. At least one revolver shot was discharged, and O'Brien was struck with a stick, and a prominent local supporter hit on the head with a stone.¹⁶⁸

O'Brien's most steadfast supporter and ally in the past had been Lord Dunraven, and O'Brien hoped that he would play a central role in establishing the AFIL as a non-sectarian party which would guarantee the rights of Protestants and unionists in a self-governing Ireland. However, Dunraven's enthusiasm had been waning over several years, and he made it clear that his interest now lay in re-establishing land purchase. He told O'Brien that he was willing to assist the AFIL in any way he could but did not want to be a spokesman or officer and felt his membership and

¹⁶³ *Irish Times*, 10 May 1910.

¹⁶⁴ *Southern Star*, 17 September 1910.

¹⁶⁵ *Cork Free Press*, 6 September 1910.

¹⁶⁶ *Westmeath Examiner*, 24 September 1910.

¹⁶⁷ *Western People*, 27 August 1910.

¹⁶⁸ *Irish Independent*, 29 August 1910. O'Brien claimed that a fusillade of gunfire was directed at him by a prominent member of the AOH 'who had just been appointed to an important Government job in the neighbourhood' (O'Brien, *Irish Revolution* (12 October 2016), p. 139n).

subscription was sufficient.¹⁶⁹ Although he remained supportive of O'Brien and the AFIL, after 1910 he no longer played an active role.¹⁷⁰

Tim Healy's long-awaited alignment compensated for Dunraven's withdrawal from active involvement with the AFIL. He admitted that he had stood as a pledge-bound Irish party candidate in the January election but claimed that it was Redmond who illegally broke the pledge by refusing to admit O'Brien and the Cork AFIL MPs to the party.¹⁷¹ O'Brien and Healy predicted that the Liberal government would never legislate to curtail the House of Lords' veto powers and that Redmond had wasted a golden opportunity to achieve Home Rule. O'Brien claimed that 'it would be a fatal policy of carrying England for Home Rule dependent on England first plunging into a revolution for the destruction of the whole British constitution to please a handful of English socialists and radicals.'¹⁷² In an interview in the *Cork Free Press*, he stated: 'Half the land of Ireland between 1903 to 1908 – farms of the value of seventy million sterling - were transferred to the new proprietary. After all that England has done since 1903, are we to break the windows at Westminster Abbey, to destroy her House of Lords[...]'¹⁷³ In pursuing this argument O'Brien left himself open to the accusation by his former comrades in the Irish party that he had forgotten how the veto had been used to destroy the second Home Rule bill and that gratitude to England and the windows of Westminster Abbey were of little importance compared to what many believed was a golden opportunity to achieve Home Rule.

Apart from conciliation, the budget, and land, the AFIL's political platform was, at best, inchoate and its appeal to working class supporters was, as with the Irish party, limited to vague promises to the urban and rural working class and rhetorical

¹⁶⁹ Dunraven to O'Brien 11 April 1910 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/11). The chairman of the Limerick branch later confirmed that Dunraven had neither asked to be president of the branch nor had been appointed as such (*Limerick Chronicle*, 28 May 1910).

¹⁷⁰ Spillane, 'Dunraven', p. 103.

¹⁷¹ *Irish Independent*, September 1910; *Irish Times*, 9 September 1910; *Freeman's Journal*, 9 September 1910.

¹⁷² *Irish Independent*, 8 August 1910.

¹⁷³ *Cork Free Press*, 4 October 1910.

excesses relating to the national question. This was unsurprising given the broad spectrum of interests it tried to represent.

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As events moved inexorably towards a second general election in December 1910, the AFIL's position on the two great issues of the day, Home Rule for Ireland and Lords' reform looked increasingly untenable. The AFIL argued that Asquith and Lloyd George had duped Redmond and the Irish party, all for a chimaera as the Liberals would never deliver on Home Rule. O'Brien claimed that the Irish party was going into the election 'as bond slaves of the Liberal party without a single guarantee that Ireland would be saved from the Budget and that they had not the remotest chance of Home Rule being carried into law by a sanguinary Socialist revolution'.¹⁷⁴

In retrospect, this argument that the Liberal government was inherently reluctant to introduce Home Rule had some validity in the closing months of 1910. Asquith did not have the instinctive affinity for Home Rule of Gladstone or Campbell-Bannerman; as Ronan Fanning notes, his attitude to an Irish alliance was like 'a resentful partner in a loveless marriage'.¹⁷⁵ Neither did Lloyd George, whose overtures to Balfour in favour of a coalition left no doubt that he found having to trade Home Rule for his budget an anathema. Nor was there any enthusiasm for Home Rule from Churchill or the imperialist wing of the Liberal cabinet. However, this was a difficult argument for O'Brien and the AFIL to make when Asquith dissolved parliament and announced the second general election of 1910. The majority of nationalists and the nationalist press were persuaded that support for the budget was a necessity, albeit an unpleasant one, in securing Home Rule. The stance taken by the AFIL was all too easily presented as wilful and reckless obstruction and, outside of the O'Brienite Cork heartland, undoubtedly damaged its electoral prospects.

¹⁷⁴ *Irish Independent*, 28 November 1910.

¹⁷⁵ Ronan Fanning, *Fatal Path: British Government and Irish Revolution 1910-1922* (London, 2013), p. 40.

The AFIL organisation did not reflect the eponymous aspiration of its title, but the party managed to contest nineteen seats. O'Brien stood in three constituencies: Cork City, Cork East and Mayo West. While it was not unusual for candidates to stand in more than one constituency, O'Brien's multiple candidacies illustrate both the AFIL's inability to find candidates of suitable stature, but also the amount of financial resources he was willing to devote to his cause. The five other sitting Cork AFIL MPs stood in their constituencies: Maurice Healy in Cork City; D.D. Sheen in Mid-Cork; James Gilhooley in Cork West; Michael Guiney in Cork North and Eugene Crean in Cork South-East. Moreton Frewan stood, unopposed, in Cork North-East. Tim Healy having now forsaken the Irish party pledge, stood as an AFIL candidate in his Louth North constituency. Two Cork seats which had not been opposed in the January election now fielded AFIL candidates: O'Brien in Cork East and John Walsh in Cork South. The following candidates stood for the AFIL outside of Cork.: D.D. Sheehan, Limerick West; Michael Guiney, Kerry East; Maurice Healy junior (son of the Cork MP of the same name), Waterford West; Timothy Cronin, Kerry South; John H. Rice, Limerick City; Hubert O'Connor, Limerick East; Martin O'Dwyer, Tipperary North; and John Cummins in Wexford South. James Brady, who had acrimoniously parted company with Sinn Féin, stood in Dublin Harbour for the AFIL.¹⁷⁶ For the first and only time, the AFIL had a candidate in Ulster, S.H. Moynagh who stood in Armagh South.

Disturbances and outbreaks of violence between the AFIL and Redmondites continued throughout the year. As had happened after the Parnell split, rival brass bands spearheaded the faction fighting. The Quarry Lane Band, named after an area which had been staunchly anti-Parnellite and now strongly O'Brientie, was just one of eight bands which regularly took part in leading political processions which often led to pitched battles.¹⁷⁷ In the months leading up to the December election, police reports record that a large crowd of Irish party supporters attempted to attack an O'Brienite enclave in Blackpool on the north side of the city and over eighty people were injured in widespread fighting. A hay shed belonging to a prominent O'Brien supporter was set alight, a train carrying Willie Redmond and two other Irish party

¹⁷⁶ Brady claimed that a Sinn Féin meeting which repudiated his candidature for the AFIL was rigged against him. (James Brady to O'Brien, 6th December 1910 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AR 801).

¹⁷⁷ Borgonovo, 'Brass Bands in Cork', p. 36.

MPs was attacked in Mallow, and there were injuries from sticks, knuckle dusters and one man was stabbed. At the declaration of the poll in mid-Cork supporters of D.D. Sheehan attacked a public house owned by a Redmonite.¹⁷⁸

The short campaign was opened by O'Brien in Cork who dubiously claimed sole credit for a host of recent victories including the University bill; saving Irish farmers from Canadian cattle imports;¹⁷⁹ evicted tenants conferences; and the labourers' acts of 1906 and 1911 (Patrick Bradley, of the breakaway County Cork Land and Labour Association, claimed that O'Brien and the other AFIL MPs failed to attend a parliamentary session when £1 million was allocated for labourers' cottages).¹⁸⁰ AFIL candidates again attempted to use the Irish party's support for the budget as their first line of attack, especially the effects of extra taxation on the licensed trade. Willie Redmond however, who had been selected to contest a Cork City seat, promised that the 'whiskey tax' would be ameliorated by the incoming Liberal government and tendentiously claimed the only reason it had not been done earlier was that O'Brien had insulted the Chancellor Lloyd George by accusing him of lying.¹⁸¹ Donations to the AFIL by Colonel Hutchinson-Poe and T.A. Brassey, two prominent landowners, were criticised by nationalists. The *Cork Examiner* claimed that Brassey's contribution of £200 proved that Orangemen funded the AFIL.¹⁸² However, O'Brien responded by insisting that he had never taken a shilling from anyone who did not support self-government for Ireland.¹⁸³

A character sketch of O'Brien in the *Daily Express* may have done more for his support in England than Ireland, 'This man of violence is now an apostle of conciliation seeking to find a way out of the Irish morass.'¹⁸⁴ However, Redmond claimed that the Irish party was the real conciliationist party and that the Irish party

¹⁷⁸ CI Monthly Report for Cork East Riding, November 1910, CO 904/81,399, 631; *Skibbereen Eagle*, 3 December 1910; *Irish Independent*, 24 October 1910.

¹⁷⁹ *Irish Independent*, 24 November 1910.

¹⁸⁰ *Cork Examiner*, 12 July 1910.

¹⁸¹ *Irish Independent*, 29 November 1910.

¹⁸² *Cork Examiner*, 2 December 1901. Hutchinson-Poe donated £100 to the AFIL election fund and £100 to the Unionist Association of Ireland both of whom he said 'were fighting the forces of Socialism and Disintegration' (*Cork Free Press*, 5 December 1910).

¹⁸³ *Cork Free Press*, 5 December 1910; *Irish Independent*, 3 December 1910.

¹⁸⁴ Quoted in *Irish Independent*, 1 December 1910.

candidate, Captain Donelan, a Protestant, who was opposed by O'Brien in Cork East, embodied that spirit.¹⁸⁵ The AFIL was also accused of insulting the clergy by congregating outside a church presbytery and shouting insults.¹⁸⁶ However, the strength of the AFIL in its rural Cork heartlands came from those who had not benefited from land purchase such as small tenant farmers,¹⁸⁷ and evicted tenants associations who pledged their loyalty to O'Brien and their champion D.D. Sheehan.¹⁸⁸

The results of the election confirmed the AFIL's hold on Cork. They held all their existing seats, and Maurice Healy won back his seat in Cork City where both he and O'Brien were elected. John Walsh also took Cork South, and Moreton Frewan took Cork North-East. O'Brien failed to defeat the sitting Irish party MP, Captain Donelan, in Cork East. He was personally over-stretched and did not, in this constituency, have the support he enjoyed in other parts of the city and county.¹⁸⁹

The AFIL now had eight of nine seats in Cork, an increase of two from January. Outside Cork, however, the news for the AFIL was dreadful. None of the AFIL candidates was successful, and it was especially galling for O'Brien in Mayo West, a constituency, in which he and Sheehan devoted much time and effort, to be defeated by the Irish party candidate by almost four to one.¹⁹⁰ Worse of all was the loss of Tim Healy's seat in Louth following another acrimonious election which the *Cork Free Press* claimed had been lost 'following a perfect reign of terror organised in the town of Louth [sic]' by Dillon and the Irish Secretary Augustine Birrell.¹⁹¹ The Cork AFIL vote held up well and increased in the Cork city constituencies from 46% to 52%. Sheehan's vote in mid-Cork fell slightly from 58% to 56%, Gilhooly's also fell from 60% to 53% and Crean's vote was unchanged at 56%. The AFIL did not contest Cork

¹⁸⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 5 December 1910.

¹⁸⁶ *Southern Star*, 17 December 1910.

¹⁸⁷ *Cork Free Press*, 1 December 1910.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 5 December 1910.

¹⁸⁹ The result in Cork East was overturned by petition, with Tim Healy as counsel, because the Irish party had overspent. The AFIL did not contest the subsequent by-election because of the strength of Donelan's vote in which he had taken 63% of the vote in the December election.

¹⁹⁰ In a reciprocal rejection, the O'Briens sold their home in Clew Bay, near Westport and settled permanently in Cork.

¹⁹¹ *Cork Free Press*, 10 December 1910.

South in January, and Frewan's and Guiney's seats were both unopposed by the Irish party in December. Where the other votes can be compared to the January elections, John H. Rice's vote in Limerick city dropped from 31% to 21%; and in Limerick East where Hubert O'Connor took 33%, was significantly below the January vote when an independent nationalist, unaffiliated to the AFIL, had managed 48%. Healy's share of the vote in Louth North plummeted by 7% giving Richard Hazelton an easy win, testament to the former's fear that his alignment with O'Brien would bring a loss of electoral and clerical support.¹⁹² The result was overturned on petition, which upheld allegations of bribery and intimidation, and Hazelton was unseated. Healy decided not to contest, and the seat went unopposed to Augustine Roche whom O'Brien and Healy had defeated in Cork city. None of the other AFIL candidates came close to taking a seat.

Following an abortive launch in 1909 and William O'Brien's unexpected resignation and Italian sojourn, the AFIL fought two successful general elections and supplanted the Irish party in Cork. It did so on the back of populist campaigns which portrayed the Redmondites as a corrupt elite and obfuscated the more tendentious elements of its political platform which might have tested its fragile coalition which sought to transcend both class and sectarian divides. However, it failed in its primary objective of establishing itself as a national centre party capable of attracting significant support from both sides of the political divide. Given time, and a period of political stability, the party might well have achieved this goal. However, the AFIL was about to be launched into the most turbulent political waters in generations that would narrow the political space in the centre ground and the opportunities for compromise and conciliation.

¹⁹² Walker, *Parliamentary Election Results, 1801-1922*, pp. 177-82.

CHAPTER THREE

'The Edge of a Volcano': The All for Ireland League in Parliament, 1911-1914

The AFIL was a diffuse and inchoate coalition of working class Catholic nationalists, including trade unionists like Eugene Crean and Land and Labour League campaigner D.D. Sheehan; professional middle class politicians such as the Healy brothers; liberal Protestant unionists like Jasper Wolfe and L.M. Brazier-Creagh; and ascendancy landlords such as Lord Dunraven and Lord Castletown. These core supporters adhered to the AFIL programme, such as it was, with varying degrees of enthusiasm but not necessarily on the same issues. Some unionists, for example, viewed the Parliament act with abject horror, seeing it and the 'People's Budget', as a direct attack on their rights and status. Most nationalists, on the other hand, saw Lords' reform as a necessary corrective to an unjust constitutional system which would never allow self-government for Ireland. During the two general elections of 1910, the AFIL managed to conceal its policies of conciliation in ambiguous bromides. However, in the throes of the Home Rule crisis it was forced to make its position explicit which strained the fragile coalition of support for the AFIL to breaking point, and the opportunities for bi-confessional politics diminished. As R. F. Foster has argued: 'The slate of required qualifications for being Irish was beginning to be redefined[...]but the process was, in a sense, hijacked by a percussive of political upheavals.'¹

i

The AFIL's position was secure in Cork, but the general election of December 1910 destroyed its hopes of being a national party that would attract liberal unionists and nationalists disillusioned with the Home Rule movement. The Irish parliamentary party now found itself in the most influential position since Gladstone. Although there may not have been a 'Union of Hearts' as in the 1880s, Redmond was determined to make the most of the party's 'union of necessity' with the Liberal

¹ Foster 'Varieties of Irishness' in idem *Paddy and Mr Punch*, p. 36.

government.² The Irish party, following the two general elections of 1910, was still a formidable organisation: disciplined and experienced in the dark arts of parliamentary procedure and intrigue, and with deep and extensive roots through its affiliates in the nationalist community from which it received overwhelming support. In David Fitzpatrick's evocative phrase it also exhibited a form of 'political vampirism': the ability to feed off, and eventually control, other popular movements which might have the potential to threaten its pre-eminence.³ The party was also resilient and flexible, for example, as the United Irish League waned the Ancient Order of Hibernians grew in stature and influence under the close tutelage of Joseph Devlin who placed it firmly within the purview of the Irish party.⁴

As the new parliament opened in January 1911, the O'Brienite *Cork Free Press* reported that, whilst it believed there was little prospect that Redmond could deliver Home Rule, the AFIL MPs would maintain an attitude of 'watchful vigilance and they will place no sort of obstacle in the way of fulfilment of Mr Redmond's undertakings'.⁵ This indicated the dilemma that the AFIL faced: how could it oppose the Irish party and seek to build an independent political platform, while not appearing to oppose the achievement of the Irish nationalism's Holy Grail - the achievement of Home Rule? The more immediate dilemma, however, was how the party should respond to the Parliament bill.⁶ The bill laid bare the fissiparous nature of the coalition that was the AFIL. Those unionist supporters from the landed classes, some of whom saw the Lords' veto as their last defence against nationalist-dominated Home Rule, were implacably opposed to the bill, seeing it as another attack on their rights, traditions and the constitution by a radical Liberal government supported by an opportunistic Irish party. However, the majority of AFIL supporters, predominantly Catholic nationalists in Cork, were aware that without a

² The 'Union of Hearts' is a term used to describe the constructive relationship between Gladstone's Liberal Party and Parnell's Irish parliamentary party in the 1880s.

³ Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, p. 101.

⁴ Maume, *Long Gestation*, p. 77.

⁵ *Cork Free Press*, 7 January 1911.

⁶ The Parliament bill of 1911 was introduced to curb the power of the House of Lords veto over bills passed in the House of Commons. The Bill sought to prevent the Lords' obstruction of 'money bills', and it also restricted their ability to delay other legislation to three sessions of parliament. Also, the bill changed the maximum length of time between general elections from seven years to five and provided payment for Members of Parliament.

Parliament act the Lords would consign a third Home Rule bill to the same fate that they had dealt the second Home Rule bill in 1893.⁷

Within the AFIL the most vociferous opponents of the bill were Moreton Frewan, the newly elected MP for North-East Cork and Lord Dunraven, both of whom were ardent federalists and viewed the Lords' veto as an essential bulwark against what they perceived as the creeping socialism of the Liberal government and the rising power of organised labour. O'Brien's reluctance to oppose the bill led Frewan to resign his seat, which Tim Healy took in an unopposed by-election on 15th July 1911.⁸ Although Healy was initially reluctant to take the seat, fearing it would put him under an obligation to O'Brien, their correspondence reveals a constructive relationship which became a crucial stabilising dynamic at the heart of the AFIL. Healy, in spite of O'Brien's seniority, played the role of a steady but, at times, exasperated mentor, providing a countervailing narrative to O'Brien's solipsism. The pragmatic Healy was closer to the hard realities of politics than O'Brien who found it difficult to accept 'the crooked timber of humanity', and whose calls for altruism and self-sacrifice often fell on deaf ears and left many unrequited aspirations.⁹ When O'Brien was tempted to abstain on the Parliament bill, he was eventually persuaded by Healy's *realpolitik*. O'Brien, and the other AFIL MPs voted for the bill, which was enacted in August 1911 and cleared the way for a third Home Rule bill. Although he had managed to maintain credibility with nationalists, O'Brien and the AFIL lost the support of at least some prominent unionist supporters, amongst them

⁷ During a parliamentary debate on the bill, O'Brien had to be physically restrained from attacking the Irish party MP William Lundon who claimed that O'Brien's mother was a relative of the notorious informer Pierce Nagle (T. M. Healy, *Letters and Leaders of my Day*, vol. ii (London, 1928), p. 504).

⁸ Healy caustically wrote to O'Brien: 'He [Frewan] seems very reasonable, but the spread of his mind is too vast for our close-knit parochial demands.' (Healy to O'Brien, 29 June 1911 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/5)).

⁹ Healy's letters were often encouraging: 'We have seen harder time, with fewer hopes, and have surmounted them' (Healy to O'Brien, William O'Brien Papers, NLI, 8556/5, 10 May 1911). He gently chided O'Brien for his terrible handwriting: 'Because one is so pampered by the typewriter now your own mysterious monograms grow past riddling!' (Healy to O'Brien, 14 September 1911, NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/5). He also offered lessons in pragmatism: 'I absolutely agree with the wisdom of what you write, but what is the wisdom of being wise amongst regiments of fools' (Healy to O'Brien, 1 September 1911, NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/5).

Lord Dunraven who wrote to Frewan 'William O'Brien is beat, and the movement is a failure'.¹⁰

The greatest challenge for the AFIL was now the Home Rule bill. Since O'Brien's epiphany following the Land Conference of 1902, his attitude to Home Rule was to welcome any offer of self-government, however small, as he did for the Irish Council bill of 1907, which critics described as offering Ireland the powers of 'a glorified county council'.¹¹ In his view, the experience of nationalists and unionists working together on the mundane business of governance, however limited, would inculcate a sense of shared purpose and cooperation and enable them to develop a *modus vivendi* for the future. Although he underestimated the strength of Carson's support and Ulster militancy, he was more aware than most nationalists that the primary task of the Home Rule movement should be to persuade unionists that self-government could be in their interests. The task he wrote, is to bring about 'a combination of all the elements of the Irish population in a spirit of mutual tolerance and patriotic good-will, such as will guarantee to the Protestant minority of our fellow-countrymen inviolable security for all their rights and liberties, and win the friendship of the entire people of Great Britain'.¹² Apart from O'Brien, there was a curious lacuna of indifference and ignorance at the heart of Irish nationalism which located the origins of Ireland's failure to achieve Home Rule in the British political establishment and not in the opposition of Irish unionism.

O'Brien attempted to influence the pending Home Rule bill in mid-1911 in a letter to *The Times* calling for a round table conference.¹³ This proposal could conceivably, have helped to avoid or resolve many of the problems that led to the Home Rule crisis once the bill was introduced. However, the momentum for the speedy introduction of a Home Rule bill, following the enactment of the Parliament bill was

¹⁰ Quoted in O'Brien, *William O'Brien*, p. 205.

¹¹ Redmond initially welcomed the bill, which offered a very limited level of self-government, but under pressure from the Dillonite wing of the party, performed a rapid *volte-face*.

¹² O'Brien, *Olive Branch* (16 October 2015), p. 271.

¹³ *The Times*, 26 August 1911. In the letter, O'Brien refers to the Parliament act as 'a Cromwellian raid'.

unstoppable. The Conservative party¹⁴ was in disarray and Asquith and Redmond, because of their anxiety to proceed with haste, paid too little attention to the views of unionists and especially Ulster unionists. Ulster militancy opened up divisions in the Conservative party with the former prime minister Lord Salisbury warning ‘I cannot support lawlessness and I shall either disenfranchise myself or vote Liberal[...]rather than encourage armed resistance in Ulster.’¹⁵ The swift dispatch of Balfour at the end of 1911 and the *démarche* of the Conservatives under its new leader Andrew Bonar Law was disconcerting for O'Brien and the AFIL as the direction that the party took in embracing Carsonism, and later accepting partition, was anathema to everything that O'Brien and the AFIL stood for.

As attitudes hardened, it became more difficult for the AFIL to articulate its message of conciliation, mainly as nationalists seemed to possess a tin ear when dealing with unionist concerns. O'Brien could, with justification, point to the fact that not one of the Home Rule bill's forty-eight clauses was devoted to alleviating unionist anxieties. As Paul Bew has argued, John Redmond failed to understand the depth of unionist, and especially Ulster unionist, hostility to Home Rule. Although he made some efforts to deal with unionist concerns by arguing that as soon as Home Rule was granted the Irish party would begin to wither away, this was of little consolation to unionists who were left to wonder what would take its place.¹⁶ For unionists, this did not alter the basic arithmetic of Irish political reality: that Catholic nationalists formed an overwhelming majority in a thirty-two county context. Even years later, O'Brien still held to the view that ‘Southern unionists were almost universally friendly’ and had been prevented from supporting the AFIL by Hibernian threats and the egregious behaviour of the Irish party leadership.¹⁷ This was far from the truth and reflected O'Brien's fantastical extrapolation from his limited network of sympathetic unionists. Southern unionists, represented by the Irish Unionist Alliance, had shown little sympathy or support for the AFIL or Home Rule. In 1912 Lord Midleton organised a meeting to oppose Home Rule in Cork with an estimated

¹⁴ The Conservative party and the Liberal Unionists were amalgamated into one party in 1912, commonly known at the time as the ‘Unionist Party’. In the interests of clarity the term ‘Conservative party’ will be used here.

¹⁵ Quoted in Callanan, *Healy*, p. 582.

¹⁶ Paul Bew, *John Redmond* (Dublin, 1996), p. 32.

¹⁷ O'Brien, *Irish Revolution* (13 October 2016), p. 71.

attendance of 3,000, including many prominent members of the landed classes including the duke of Devonshire and the earls of Bandon, Kerry, Kenmare and Listowel.¹⁸ However, there were also unionists from the commercial and professional classes whose support could have been fostered if nationalists had taken the time and effort to listen to their concerns.¹⁹ Unfortunately, the AFIL, confined to its Cork heartland and unable to mount a serious challenge to the Home Rule movement, did not present a credible alternative, and was therefore not an attractive prospect for potential dissidents.

ii

The third Home Rule Bill was introduced in the House of Commons in April 1912. O'Brien gave the bill a cautious welcome and acknowledged the concerns of unionists which had been raised by Sir Edward Carson who spoke just before him. O'Brien argued that 'we are bound not to leave altogether out of account the feelings of fifteen or twenty millions of Irish Nationalists who are scattered all over'. O'Brien wanted full fiscal autonomy, but he argued, that Ireland should not have to pay for Liberal social policies and he demanded that the Imperial parliament should make full provision for the National Insurance act.²⁰

O'Brien and Healy's interventions focused on the financial elements of the bill. Having been intimately involved in both the first and second Home Rule bills, they were well aware of the importance of the funding of Home Rule. O'Brien warned Asquith that 'finance will either make or mar the bill', a surprising elevation of money over a resolute unionist refusal to accept all-Ireland Home Rule under any circumstances. He adopted the extraordinary tactic of denying that there was an Irish deficit, (estimated at over £1 million per annum) between benefits received and taxes collected, mostly accounted for by land purchase and old age pensions. O'Brien claimed that the Treasury was guilty of inventing a deficit by tricks 'more worthy of the bookkeeping of a fraudulent company than of the financial honour of a

¹⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 22 April 1912.

¹⁹ d'Alton, 'Cork Unionism', pp. 143-61.

²⁰ *Parliamentary debates* (Hansard), fifth series, *House of Commons*, 9 July 1909 (vol. 36, London, 1468-76).

great Empire'.²¹ In November 1912 he and Tim Healy put down amendments proposing full fiscal autonomy and a revision of the financial provisions of Home Rule after a temporary five-year period. To his chagrin, the amendments were not even discussed before the debate was guillotined.²²

Neither the AFIL nor the Home Rule movement was prepared for the depth and ferocity of Ulster unionist opposition, what O'Brien called 'Carson and his dour army of Ulster bigots'.²³ Tim Healy, who claimed a superior knowledge of Ulster through his contacts there, took the threat seriously, although in terms which were hardly couched in the language of conciliation, 'The Orangemen have not the quickness of perception of trained politicians. Most of their voters are yokels, stirred by bands playing "Boyne Water" who want war, like the die-hards, at any price.'²⁴ John Dillon, in a familiar nationalist trope, accused Ulster unionists of bluff and compared them to a drunken man outside a public house who pleads with the on-looking crowd, 'Will none of you hold me back before I go and kill that fellow across the street.'²⁵ However, as Ulster resistance hardened with the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force (U.V.F.) in 1913, in addition to Bonar Law's support for militancy, an opt-out for Ulster became first a possibility and then an inevitability.

O'Brien and the AFIL were now moving towards a disconcerting *terra incognita*. His affinity with the Tories was under strain as Bonar Law seemed willing to risk stoking sectarian conflict by support for an armed insurgency. At the end of 1912, Carson accepted the inevitability of a Home Rule bill by putting down an amendment proposing a nine-county opt-out for the whole of Ulster. The amendment was defeated, but ominously seventy-seven Liberal MPs abstained, indicating that the idea of a separate Ulster option was gaining significant cross-

²¹ O'Brien, *Irish Revolution* (12 October 2016), p. 163.

²² Healy told O'Brien that 'Murphy [William Martin Murphy, owner of the *Irish Independent* and a close confidant of Healy] is deep in Childers' book [Erskine Childers, *The Framework of Home Rule*, 1911] and his paper will hammer at the finances of Home Rule' (Healy to O'Brien, Christmas 1911, NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/5).

²³ O'Brien, *Irish Revolution*, (12 October 2016), p. 117.

²⁴ Healy to O'Brien, 1 September 1911 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/5).

²⁵ *Freeman's Journal*, 20 October 1913.

party support. Speaking during the second reading of the bill, O'Brien made his opposition to partition clear:

In the course of these Debates, my honourable and learned Friend (Mr T. M. Healy) and myself have done our best to make it clear that we are prepared to go to almost any lengths to meet them, with one exception—that is, the partition of our country.²⁶

At an AFIL conference in March 1913, O'Brien condemned not only Asquith and the Irish party, but also 'the Irish people for their moral cowardice in condoning their conduct', and again called for a conference as the best way of achieving an agreement.²⁷ Throughout 1912 and 1913 the Irish party had been unwilling to countenance concessions or round table conferences on the basis that this would almost inevitably result in a watering down of the bill and would focus on an opt-out for Ulster. O'Brien blamed Redmond, Dillon and Devlin for this, and as he claimed *ad nauseum*, they had firmly set the Home Rule movement against conciliation over the previous decade, a process that in turn had inflamed unionist obduracy. Carson acknowledged this in a speech during the first reading of the Home Rule bill:

When the honourable gentleman [O'Brien] and some others proceeded to what they called trying to reconcile Ulster and the Protestants from Ulster and Ireland generally, they made speeches, which if they had been made by the majority of them for the last twenty years might. I admit, possibly might have had some effect on some of the Unionists in Ireland.²⁸

Divisions also opened up within unionism itself. Up to 1912, there was general unanimity (except for a relatively small federalist wing who advocated 'Home Rule all round') that self-government for Ireland should be opposed (an exception was O'Brien's old ally Colonel Hutchinson-Poe who organised a meeting to condemn Ulster unionist opposition to Home Rule. O'Brien, anxious not to alienate Ulster unionists, refused to support the initiative).²⁹ When partition became a viable option in 1913, the shock, to Southern unionists especially, was profound. Although there

²⁶ *Parliamentary debates* (Hansard), fifth series, *House of Commons*, 15 January 1913 (vol. 46, London, 2190-1).

²⁷ *Cork County Eagle and Munster Advertiser*, 8 March 1913.

²⁸ *Parliamentary debates* (Hansard), fifth series, *House of Commons*, 13 June 1913 (vol. 39, London, 1078).

²⁹ O'Brien to Dunraven, 1 October 1912 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/11).

were often tensions between Southern and Ulster unionists, this was the worst of all worlds: to be cut off from the majority of unionists with a Home Rule parliament dominated by Catholic nationalists. Lord Midleton told Bonar Law that Southern unionists were organising as a group to preserve the Union.³⁰

However, Ulster unionism was not monolithic in its embrace of Carsonism and O'Brien was heartened by a letter from Captain Jack White, the idiosyncratic son of Field Marshal Sir George White the hero of Ladysmith, who, following his father's death, returned to Ulster and took up the cause of Protestant Home Rule.³¹ He told O'Brien that he was in contact with a number of influential men, including some on Carson's 'central committees', who 'would be glad to find a *modus vivendi* in which all sides could participate[...] It is not much of an outfit with which to propose to embark on a campaign against organised bigotry, but the novelty of the attempt might surprise people with sympathy'.³² O'Brien replied enthusiastically but warned White that while Protestant unionists would support him in private, they would shrink from doing so in public 'until they know what is going to become of Carson's movement'. He urged White to gather signatories and send them, in confidence, to the Prime Minister and Bonar Law.³³

White also mooted the possibility of an alignment between a Protestant Home Rule movement and the AFIL. He wrote that he thought they needed 'a big speaker', possibly George Bernard Shaw to address a meeting. Louis Walsh, a Ballycastle solicitor sympathetic to O'Brien and suspicious of White's hubris, added a word of caution, 'He [White] is an exceedingly clever fellow and full of ideas and ideals. He is the sort of stuff that Wolfe Tones and Mitchells and Davitts and William O'Briens are made, and if I mistake not, he will yet be heard of in Ireland.' However, he thought 'he was too good a man for his mission[...] He would have no patience with

³⁰ Tim Healy told O'Brien that he had shared a railway carriage from Cork with Lord Midleton who 'I could see did not approve of Carson's lot.' (Healy to O'Brien, 3 October 1911 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/5).

³¹ Jack White's extraordinary career included winning the DSO in the Boer War, founding the Irish Citizen Army, organising the Irish Volunteers in Ulster, driving an ambulance on the Western front in 1914, standing as a republican socialist candidate in the Irish Free State, and volunteering with the British Red Cross during the Spanish Civil War.

³² Capt. J.R. White to O'Brien 22 August 1913 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AS 21).

³³ O'Brien to White, 26 August 1913 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AS 25).

the men who lack the moral courage to come out in the open.'³⁴ Both O'Brien and Walsh proved to be correct. The 'Protestant Home Rule Movement' failed to attract enough supporters to enable it to mount a challenge to Carson. It was, said *The Times* 'Like the Cheshire cat. It has vanished until only its grin lingers furtively in a corner of County Antrim'. White's energy was soon attracted by another cause in Dublin where, during the lockout of 1913, he helped Larkin and Connolly organise a workers' militia which would soon become the Irish Citizen Army.

In September 1913, the Liberal peer Lord Loreburn, a former Lord Chancellor in Asquith's government and close friend of Tim Healy, wrote to *The Times* calling for a conference of all the parties.³⁵ This initiative was manna from heaven for O'Brien who had never lost faith in his 'business plus conference' approach for even the most intractable of problems. However, Tim Healy, again acting as a moderating influence on O'Brien's hubristic instincts, urged caution as he thought that if the conference collapsed then nationalists would blame the AFIL.³⁶

Following Churchill's Dundee speech in September 1913, in which he accepted an Ulster opt-out as the price of Home Rule, and Asquith's clandestine meetings with Bonar Law, partition was now firmly on the agenda.³⁷ The response of Redmond and the Irish party was at first outright rejection, but then as the reality of the shifting sands of Liberal support dawned, a despairing and grudging acceptance that an opt-out was becoming inevitable. Healy claimed that Augustine Birrell, the Irish Secretary, met Joseph Devlin at the National Liberal Club and told him 'that the Protestant Ulster counties would be temporarily left under Imperial control. I believe R [Redmond] has accepted this'.³⁸

³⁴ Louis J. Walsh to William O'Brien, 1 September 1913 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AS 27).

³⁵ *The Times*, 11 September 1913.

³⁶ Callanan, *Healy*, p. 492.

³⁷ Tim Healy told O'Brien that F.E. Smith, (the Conservative MP and close ally of Carson), and Churchill wanted a coalition government (Healy to O'Brien, 26 October 1913 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/5). However, Healy's biographer notes that although Healy was 'Searing critical of the Irish party and the Liberals' he was disconcertingly credulous in his dealings with unionists. 'He appeared blithely unmindful of the purposes to which they could put their encounters with him, in using him as a springboard, in the eliciting of information, and in seeking to accentuate the division in the nationalist parliamentary ranks.' (Callanan, *Healy*, p. 492).

³⁸ Healy to O'Brien, *William O'Brien Papers*, 26 October 1913 (NLI, 8556/6) (Emphasis in the original document).

The chimaera which the Irish party clung to was that any opt-out would be temporary and that once unionists accepted that Irish Home Rule was a reality, they would come to their senses and opt back in. Redmond was forced to accept first a three-year opt-out, which Asquith was then forced to increase to six years. Richard English notes that one of the defining features of Irish nationalism has been its ruthless pragmatism, which Redmond, his eye set firmly on the prize of Home Rule and desperate not to lose the electoral leverage he had in a hung parliament, exhibited first by his acceptance of the limited financial provisions of the Home Rule bill, then the amendment to remove the right of the Irish parliament to reduce customs duties, and finally in his acceptance of partition; the latter concession was a devastating blow for the Home Rule leadership and party.³⁹

Partition presented the AFIL with an even worse conundrum than the Irish party. Up to the start of 1914, although O'Brien's repeated calls for conferences to find an agreed solution were ignored, the AFIL was broadly supportive of the bill, although critical of its limitations especially its financial provisions, and the AFIL voted in favour of the bill during its first reading. However, for O'Brien especially, the exclusion of four, six or nine counties, temporary or permanent, was wholly unacceptable and a betrayal of every tenet and principle of Irish nationalism. He was also aware of the depth of feeling amongst Southern unionists that they were being abandoned, especially by the Conservative party with whom they had close political and familial ties, but whose only priority now seemed to be support for Carson and the Ulster unionists. Opposing the Home Rule bill would, however, allow O'Brien's enemies to portray him, and the AFIL, as attempting to wreck Ireland's greatest opportunity for self-government. The AFIL was vulnerable to such accusations because the focus of Redmondite attacks since the AFIL was founded in 1910 had been that it was a proxy for unionists and O'Brien a naïve and reckless fool allowed to pursue his destructive obsessions by his wife's money.

O'Brien resigned his seat in January 1914 in protest at what he claimed was a sectarian campaign run by the Redmondites during the elections for Cork

³⁹ R. English, 'History and Irish nationalism' in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 37, no. 147 (May 2011), p. 454

Corporation.⁴⁰ He was returned unopposed in the by-election and now faced the most challenging period of his long political career as the Home Rule bill entered its final passage and second reading. O'Brien blamed Redmond, the Irish party and the AOH for the Home Rule crisis and partition, 'The Hibernian Party, in general, ranged on their benches like so many automata, mechanically wound up on the touching of a spring to vote, to roar the Hallelujah choruses at the right moments [...]'⁴¹ In essence, O'Brien accused Redmond and the Irish party of not only failing to take any serious measures to assuage unionist, and especially Ulster unionist concerns, but also of not standing up to unionist militants and, faced with the threat of civil war, conceded to partition. He also blamed Churchill, 'I suspect the First Lord of the Admiralty is to a large extent responsible, namely, the marching of the Army up the hill in Ulster and then marching it down again, so far as they could get it to march at all.'⁴² Tim Healy did not agree with O'Brien's absolute refusal to accept partition in any shape or form. Given that he owed his seat in North-East Cork to O'Brien however, he did not make his opposition to O'Brien's position public.⁴³ Apart from Maurice Healy, who spoke on the financial provisions of the bill, the other AFIL MPs did not play an active role in the parliamentary debates, nor did they dissent from O'Brien's policy. When O'Brien spoke in the House in February 1914 he did so on behalf of the AFIL, 'If we were forced to choose between the loss of this bill and consenting to the exclusion of Ulster or any part of Ulster, under any disguise or makeshift whatever, hard and bitter though the choice would be, Irishmen of my way of thinking will prefer to go out into the wilderness again [...]'⁴⁴

The die was therefore cast. If the government proceeded with its plans for an opt-out for Ulster, then the AFIL would neither oppose, nor support the Home Rule bill. In doing so, O'Brien was aware that this would provide the Irish party, its affiliates and a supportive press in Ireland, the opportunity to cast the AFIL as unionist dupes who

⁴⁰ See Chapter Four.

⁴¹ O'Brien, *Irish Revolution* (12 October 2016), p. 173.

⁴² *Parliamentary debates* (Hansard), fifth series, *House of Commons*, 9 July 1914 (vol. 40, London, 1243).

⁴³ Callanan, *Healy*, pp. 498-9.

⁴⁴ *Parliamentary debates* (Hansard), fifth series, *House of Commons*, 24 February 1914 (vol. 58, London, 173-18)..

would betray Ireland when Home Rule was within grasping distance. For the beleaguered Home Rule movement, the AFIL's refusal to support the bill had the advantage of providing a scapegoat which took away some of the ignominies of accepting the partition of Ireland. O'Brien had already brought down nationalist opprobrium with proposals to reassure unionists. Firstly, giving unionists in the Imperial parliament an effective suspensory veto over legislation in a Home Rule parliament. Secondly, proposing increased representation for Ulster unionists in a Home Rule parliament to include twenty seats for Belfast, sixteen for Antrim, sixteen for Down, eight for Armagh and eight for Derry. He estimated that this would give unionists sixty seats and would need only thirty sympathetic nationalists to give them a majority over the Redmondites. These concessions were necessary, he argued, because 'we covet above all things the cooperation of this millions of level-headed Irish folk for the country's sake, for their own sake, and (frankly) for the sake of our own nationalist minority [in Ulster] as well'.⁴⁵

O'Brien's proposals made little impression on Ulster unionist opinion, although H.J. Smith, who claimed to be a Protestant, a unionist and member of the UVF, thought a solution might be found, but the most significant obstacle was that Ulster commercial and industrial interests would be at the mercy of Southern agricultural voters. He told O'Brien that a veto on Irish legislation was not enough and Ulster unionists would need a majority in the Senate of an Irish Home Rule parliament.⁴⁶ O'Brien did not agree: 'an upper chamber [the Senate] would always give rise to cheap claptrap against a privileged order while our programme would secure to the Protestant minority a commanding presence in the popular chamber itself as well as an absolute veto'.⁴⁷

O'Brien claimed that his proposal to give unionists a veto 'would be gladly submitted to by the best thinking men in our race, in the belief that it would serve as a wholesome restraint on an infant parliament in its first inexperienced years in the

⁴⁵ *Cork Free Press*, 22 January 1914. A Sinn Féin convention in April 1914 offered unionists increased representation on the basis of population, rateable value and bulk of trade (D. Ryan, 'Sinn Féin, Policy and Practice 1916-1926 in D. Williams (ed.) *The Irish Struggle 1916-1926* (London, 1966), p. 38).

⁴⁶ H.J. Smith to O'Brien, 7 May 1914 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AS 63).

⁴⁷ O'Brien to Smith 9 May 1914 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AS 64).

firm conviction that nothing will be attempted which would either tempt the Ulster Party to exercise the veto or the Imperial Parliament to enforce it'.⁴⁸ His proposal, however, infuriated nationalists, as it appeared to reinforce the stereotypes so long perpetrated by the British press, and more recently by Ulster unionists, which presented the Irish as being infantile and incapable of running their affairs without the steady oversight of the British state and the Imperial parliament. Cork Corporation, now dominated by the UIL, exercised its recently increased majority and voted by twenty-nine votes to eleven to repudiate O'Brien's proposals.⁴⁹ Dunraven, who had some years earlier, persuaded O'Brien that a federal home rule scheme could be the answer to the Irish conundrum, now proposed a variation as the answer to the terrible dilemma of partition. He told O'Brien that he abhorred partition but, as the lesser of two evils, 'Home Rule all round' with Ulster as a separate federal entity should be considered.⁵⁰ However, anything which would institutionalise partition was utterly unacceptable to O'Brien. In response to another call for a round table conference, Dunraven told O'Brien 'We are sitting on the edge of a volcano, and unless something occurs pretty soon to avoid an immediate catastrophe, I do not see what chance a conference has.'⁵¹

Asquith announced that the government would permit the nine counties of Ulster and Belfast and Derry to decide by plebiscite whether or not to be excluded from Home Rule. O'Brien laid the responsibility on the Irish party, 'It may be, as the Honourable Member for East Mayo [John Dillon] anticipates, that the country is for the moment dragooned into a state of sullen submissiveness: the time will come when that sullen submissiveness will cease, and you will rue the day that you ever touched this fatal and criminal conspiracy against the unification of Ireland as a nation.'⁵² Tim Healy advised that the AFIL should support the bill until 'the moment Redmond's "blasphemy and abomination" are engrafted on it we shall oppose the measure, believing that once vivisection takes place, a permanent wound has been

⁴⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 7 February 1914.

⁴⁹ *Cork Examiner*, 2 February 1914.

⁵⁰ Dunraven to O'Brien, 1 and 2 April 1914 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/15).

⁵¹ Dunraven to O'Brien, 22 May 1914 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/15).

⁵² *Parliamentary debates* (Hansard), fifth series, *House of Commons*, 1 April 1914 (vol. 60, London, 1254).

inflicted on Ireland'.⁵³ The AFIL was not an orthodox party when it came to party discipline. As O'Brien recounted, 'we never formed ourselves into a party or elected a leader',⁵⁴ although his leadership was never in doubt. Given that a thirty-two county self-governing all-Ireland was a central policy of the AFIL, there was no room for dissent, and its MPs abstained on the second reading of the bill on 25th May 1914. O'Brien recalled, 'By declining to vote we at least did something to save the future by placing it on the record that there was at least one body of Irish representatives, however small, who refused to be accomplices in the infamy'.⁵⁵

The opposition of the AFIL to the exclusion of Ulster received support from Sinn Féin, as Arthur Griffith wrote, 'We believe the All-For-Irelanders leader is worth in patriotism and energy all the Redmonite Parliamentary Party. We believe they have done well, and are doing well, in opposing the Partition of Ireland[...]'⁵⁶ Healy wrote to O'Brien that William Martin Murphy (the owner of the *Irish Independent*) 'said that he had never lost a night's sleep during the tram strike, but was awake all night from humiliation after these pronouncements [Redmond's acceptance of Ulster exclusion]'.⁵⁷ However, attempts to build a broad anti-partitionist front foundered and John J. Scollan, the National Director of the Irish American Alliance wing of the AOH, told O'Brien he was sure that Jim Larkin, James Connolly, Countess Markievicz, Tom Clark and Sir Roger Casement would attend. However, he had no money to organise a campaign; O'Brien, who had little in common with any of these figures, showed no inclination to provide it.⁵⁸ Apart from support from the *Independent* and advanced nationalists, O'Brien and the AFIL were isolated and now felt the full wrath of the Home Rule movement. The party's previous support of the House of Lords' veto and opposition to the Parliament act was linked to its opposition to the Home Rule bill. Nationalist anger was intense, especially in Cork where feelings had been running high.⁵⁹ The Cork Division of the AOH proposed a

⁵³ Healy to O'Brien, 5 April 1914 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/7).

⁵⁴ O'Brien, *Irish Revolution* (12 October 2016), p. 157.

⁵⁵ *Ibid* (12 October 2016), p. 205.

⁵⁶ *Cork Free Press*, 4 July 1914

⁵⁷ Healy to O'Brien, 17 March 1914 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/5).

⁵⁸ Scollan to O'Brien, 7 May 1914, (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AS 63).

⁵⁹ John J. Horgan, a leading figure in the Cork Home Rule movement, recounts a bizarre plot in 1913 to kidnap O'Brien and take him to a hotel where a waiting barber would cut off his beard. Horgan acknowledges that this would probably have led to serious rioting in Cork and he claims that he and

resolution congratulating Redmond and the Irish parliamentary party on passing the second reading of the Home Rule bill ‘despite the traitorous actions of the mis-representatives of Cork City’.⁶⁰

During the summer of 1914, O'Brien continued to appeal for further conciliation and conferences. In a letter to the *Morning Post*, he called for an all-Ireland Conference, ‘The Amending bill starts on a hopelessly wrong track. It kills Home Rule for Ireland under the perfidious pretence of enacting it.’⁶¹ Tim Healy and his brother Maurice concentrated their fire on the financial provisions of the Home Rule bill claiming that the proposed budget for a Home Rule parliament was a deliberate attempt by the government to deceive as it did not take account of estimates for the police and education.⁶² O'Brien was dismissive of the Buckingham Palace conference, for the apostle of ‘conference plus business’ this was a conference too far. When, in Churchill’s words, the talks collapsed ‘in the muddy by-ways of Fermanagh and Tyrone’, it confirmed O'Brien’s views that the issue of partition had already been accepted and it was ‘only the extent that Ireland was to be mutilated’ which was to be decided.⁶³

In general, historians and Irish nationalism have been somewhat kinder to John Redmond and the Irish party when considering the Home Rule crisis in comparison to the years after the outbreak of war.⁶⁴ This dispensation is justified given Redmond’s role in delivering a Home Rule act, albeit a truncated one. He is often seen as a decent man faced with intransigent and militant unionism which had been backed by some of the most powerful forces in the British state and confounded by a more able and devious political operator in Asquith; in Ronan Fanning's resonant phrase ‘The Prime Minister harpooned his Leviathan.’⁶⁵

other Redmondites managed to put a stop to the plot before it could come to fruition (Horgan, *Parnell to Pearse*, p. 247).

⁶⁰ *Cork Examiner*, 8 April 1914.

⁶¹ *Morning Post*, 25 June 1914.

⁶² *Parliamentary debates* (Hansard), fifth series, *House of Commons*, 20 May 1914 (vol. 64, London, 404-7).

⁶³ O'Brien, *Irish Revolution* (13 October 2016), p. 207.

⁶⁴ For example, English, *Irish Freedom*, p. 255; Maume, *Long Gestation*, pp. 217-9; Jackson, *Home Rule*, pp. 106-8.

⁶⁵ ‘Leviathan’ was Asquith’s nickname for Redmond (Fanning, *Fatal Path*, p. 103).

William O'Brien's vituperative and histrionic attacks on the Irish party leadership frequently overshadowed his analysis of the Home Rule bill. Although Tom Garvin notes that '[political] debate in Ireland frequently resembled rhetorical warfare rather than a reasoned exchange of views',⁶⁶ O'Brien's criticisms were egregious even by the standards of the day, and it is likely that this contributed to the decline in the AFIL's support. O'Brien's prescient assessment of the Home Rule movement and partition, however, should not be dismissed because of his hubris or verbal excesses, for his warnings on partition and the failure to take unionist anxieties seriously were to prove uncannily accurate. Following the collapse of the Buckingham Palace conference in July 1914 Ireland seemed to be drifting towards civil war. The outbreak of the Great War may have averted this terrible prospect, but for the AFIL, already damaged by the Home Rule crisis, the war, and O'Brien's reaction to it, was to be the *coup de grace*.

⁶⁶ Tom Garvin, 'Priests and patriots: Irish separatism and fear of the modern, 1890-1914' in *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. xxv, no. 97, (May 1986), p. 76.

CHAPTER FOUR

'God had abandoned the lanes of Cork, and so had the Corporation': The All for Ireland League in Local Government 1910-1914

In the absence of parliamentary elections from 1910 to 1918 popular support for the All for Ireland League, and implicitly its policy on the Home Rule crisis, can only be assessed in local government elections. The lineaments of ideological division between AFIL and UIL councillors are difficult to detect, and the differences were often expressed in terms of personality, or the eruption of the tribal loyalties that had developed between the 'All Fors' and 'the Mollies'. Both were right of centre parties on economic and social issues whose appeal was a cross-class populism, but whose policies on local issues differed little. The rise of militant trade unionism and the failure of the AFIL to deliver tangible benefits to its working class supporters highlighted the stark fact that, on local social and economic issues, there was little to choose between the O'Brienites and the Redmondites. The principal differences, therefore, related to national issues in the years from 1911 to 1914, particularly the Parliament act, the National Insurance act, and dominating all else, the Home Rule bill. The AFIL's record in local government also indicates the limits of its populist policies which had been successful in mobilising nationalist support on economic issues but the party was unable to frame a populist message relating to its policy of conciliation with unionists and its abstention on the Home Rule bill. While local issues may have played a part, it was Home Rule which damaged the AFIL's credibility amongst its nationalist supporters.

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The AFIL is remembered for its policy of conciliation with unionists and its opposition, and eventual abstention, on the Home Rule bill in 1914. For the majority of people, however, the high politics of Westminster was but a distant backdrop, and it was in the more intimate realm of local councils that politics, and politicians, acquired a relevance to everyday life. The 1898 Local Government act democratised local councils and broadened its responsibilities to include provision of housing for the poor, public health, technical education and public lighting of municipal areas

and roads. David Fitzpatrick argues that the act 'ensured that local, like national, polices became the preserve of the Irish Parliamentary Party'.¹ This was not true of Cork where the bitter AFIL-Redmondite conflict seen in the general elections of the previous year continued in the local elections of 1911 both reflected and driven by the daily partisan vituperation of the *Cork Free Press* and the *Cork Examiner*.

Like much of post-1898 nationalist local government, Cork was dominated by a conservative consensus on social and economic issues which viewed the alleviation of poverty and inadequate housing through the narrow prism of Victorian morality: a *laissez-faire* view of the role of the state, the poor. In addition councillors lived under the fear of electoral consequences. As Catherine B. Shannon notes, 'If the councillors chose to be extravagant and inefficient in the expenditure of public funds they could readily expect to be devoid of a council seat when the results of the next election were known'.² The nature of the local government system established by the 1898 act also militated against decisive action on expenditure, with constant wrangling and displacement of responsibility between County Councils, Urban and Rural District Councils, Boards of Guardians, and Congested Districts Boards, with the threat of sanction by the Local Government Board which maintained a strict oversight on spending. There was little to choose between AFIL and Redmondite councillors on any of the Cork councils on local issues. In rural areas however, the vexatious issue of housing for the poor had, to some extent at least, been addressed by the Labourers acts of 1906 and 1911 which, at no cost to local councils, provided cottages and a plot of land at an average rent of a shilling a week for farm labourers and their families. Due in large part to the efforts of D.D. Sheehan and the ILLA, Cork had the highest provision of cottages in the country.³

The contours of nationalism were more attuned to the cadences of the countryside and not urban society: the idealisation of the rural idyll over urban dystopia chimed with cultural nationalism and the Catholic Church. It was also in the interests of conservative nationalism to prevent an alliance of urban labour and agrarian radicals

¹ Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, p. 74.

² C. B. Shannon, '*Local Government in Ireland: The Politics and Administration*' (unpublished MA Thesis, UCD, 1963).

³ Bradley, *Farm Labourers*, p. 22.

which would have challenged the relatively low priority of labour issues and social reform on the nationalist agenda.⁴ In Cork city, as in Dublin, poverty, and especially housing, became issues that proved more difficult for conservative interests to contain with the re-emergence of the ITGWU as a radical mobilising force from 1912. Cork Corporation, although dominated by a conservative consensus, was thus the focus of radical opposition in a way that rural councils were not, and the AFIL in particular, was subjected to a degree of scrutiny relating to social and economic issues given its claim that it represented an alternative to Redmondite policies and O'Brien's promises to put labour at the heart of his movement.

The All For Ireland League consolidated its political dominance in Cork by taking control of Cork Corporation with the support of independents, and it won twenty-three seats (one more than the UIL), and James Simcox was elected as Lord Mayor of the city in January 1911.⁵ The party also took control of Cork County Council in June 1911, again with independent support, with William MacDonald, the long-standing chairman of the County Council who moved seamlessly across to assume the same position as a member of the AFIL. In thirteen of the eighteen Rural and Urban District Councils in Cork, AFIL chairmen were also elected.⁶ The AFIL and the *Cork Free Press*, having made wildly unrealistic predictions relating to the decimation of the Redmondites, sought to explain their less than sweeping victories. O'Brien blamed the clergy: people who voted against the AFIL 'obeyed an influence of which I will say only that, employed as it has been, has most deeply wounded Catholic feeling in Cork'.⁷ The *Cork Free Press* blamed 'the Jack the Ripper press' for keeping the Irish people in ignorance 'as if they were heathens in darkest Africa'.⁸

In Cork, as in the rest of the country, limited resources and a conservative consensus relating to expenditure and the relief of social deprivation meant that these issues, in general, were addressed only in rhetorical terms. Although there was little difference between the AFIL and the Redmondites in local government, Cork was also more

⁴ O' Mahony and Delanty, *Rethinking Irish History*, p. 113.

⁵ Simcox immediately promised to give half of his Mayoral salary to charity.

⁶ *Cork Examiner*, 18 January 1910; *Southern Star*, 10 June 1911..

⁷ *Cork Examiner*, 16 January 1910.

⁸ *Cork Free Press*, 7 January 1910.

politicised and fractious than any other part of the country outside the North-East. Having taken control of Cork County Council, the AFIL removed long-standing nationalists from influential positions, amid allegations that they were prevented from sitting on committees and denied influence and resources,⁹ and there were allegations of bribery and corruption.¹⁰

On Cork Corporation, Cork County Council and many district councils, the bitter AFIL-Redmondite conflict continued. The principal lines of demarcation in Cork were the same issues which had dominated the general elections: the AFIL attacked the Home Rule movement as being corrupt place-hunters, in thrall to a sectarian sect (the Ancient Order of Hibernians), of being too close to the Liberals, and of acquiescing to Lloyd George's budget which would damage the Irish economy. On the other hand, the Irish party, the UIL and the nationalist press attacked the AFIL as being 'factionalists' and unionist proxies. The *Cork Examiner* claimed that 'Unionists are using the All for Ireland League to help their cause, and they look on factionalism as a useful adjunct to the unionist organisation.'¹¹ This was not an unreasonable claim, although the underlying tone of the *Examiner's* editorial suggested that unionists had no right to expect representation or to exert influence. Unionists, who, in the 1880s, controlled one-third of seats in Cork Corporation with just fifteen per cent of the vote, had not put forward candidates under a unionist banner after the 1898 act. As Ian d'Alton notes, the price of overt political action was 'a dangerous visibility'.¹² It therefore suited unionists to channel their political energy through the AFIL. In the claustrophobic and febrile atmosphere of Cork politics, religion, class and the national question provided a subterranean thrum to local as well as national politics.

Although it is impossible to know how unionists voted, the AFIL's support for self-government alienated some unionists, and only Joseph Hosford, of the AFIL's four Protestant Corporation candidates, was elected. In the North-East ward, which had a strong unionist presence and where a leading unionist Sir John Scott topped the poll

⁹ *Cork Examiner*, 18 January 1910.

¹⁰ *Southern Star*, 16 June 1912.

¹¹ *Cork Examiner*, 28 September 1911.

¹² d'Alton, 'Keeping Faith', p. 779.

as a Conservative, three AFIL candidates, including an alderman, were elected.¹³ However, the fine line that the AFIL had to thread between retaining the support of nationalists and unionists was illustrated by the visit of the King in June 1911. The AFIL Lord Mayor proposed a loyal address which was opposed by the Redmondites councillors on Cork Corporation. The *Examiner*, which now labelled the AFIL ‘the Unionist-Factionalist combination’, accused them of violating a fundamental nationalist principle and of being unionist dupes, ‘The tail has wagged the dog.’¹⁴

Although party designations for local elections were looser and more fluid than parliamentary elections (for example, in Cork some candidates stood as nationalists or conservatives with the added designation of the Ratepayers Alliance),¹⁵ some AFIL candidates for the 1911 local elections had been elected as nationalists (UIL) in the previous elections three years earlier. In the Corporation elections, eight of the twenty-two AFIL were sitting councillors; and in the County Council elections, five served in the previous council. In the city Board of Guardians six members, standing under the AFIL banner were re-elected. The AFIL, therefore, managed to bring part of the Home Rule movement to its cause, including notable figures like William MacDonald, J.C. Forde, and prominent councillors and well-known local figures like Michael Egan, William Kelleher and James Simcox. The AFIL's promise of a new kind of politics attracted many of the new councillors who did not have a background in political activity.

The Home Rule crisis exposed the fissile coalition of interests that underpinned the AFIL, and in April 1912 the first divisions relating to the Home Rule bill appeared. Initially, O’Brien welcomed the bill but instructed AFIL members not to participate in a convention organised by the Home Rule movement to welcome and debate its introduction in parliament. The AFIL Executive passed a resolution warning ‘our friends on public boards, in associations and on Councils against lending countenance in any shape or form to the so-called National Convention.’¹⁶ This

¹³ d’Alton, ‘Cork Unionism’, p. 158.

¹⁴ *Cork Examiner*, 9 June 1911.

¹⁵ The Ratepayers Alliance was formed in 1904 by prominent nationalist and unionist members of Cork commercial classes to protect their interests and combat the power of organised labour.

¹⁶ *Cork Free Press*, 25 March 1912; *Irish Independent*, 15 April 1912.

perverse edict reflected the difficulties inherent in the AFIL's position relating to the Home Rule bill. It could not be seen to oppose it and alienate its nationalist supporters but did not want to join in the hubris which could only bolster the Irish party's dominance of the Home Rule movement; also, it had no wish to affront unionists who did not want Home Rule.

The AFIL Lord Mayor of Cork, Alderman James Simcox and Councillor J.F. O'Sullivan, Chairman of the All for Ireland Club in Cork, promptly defied the AFIL prohibition and both accepted an invitation from the UIL to attend the National Convention in Dublin to consider the bill. This precipitated the first split in the AFIL when their actions were attacked in the *Cork Free Press*, 'Those that are not with us are against us'.¹⁷ Simcox immediately stood down as Lord Mayor, leaving the way open for the election of the Redmondite Henry O'Shea.¹⁸ Councillor O'Sullivan also resigned from the party and his position in the All For Ireland Club, 'As to Mr O'Brien and his policy, I am done with both'. He accused O'Brien of adopting a policy of being 'willing to wound but afraid to strike' relating to Home Rule and called for a united nationalist movement: 'Whatever has been done and said during the last few years should now be buried and done with'. His brother, a director of the *Cork Free Press*, also resigned.¹⁹

The motion to accept the UIL invitation to attend the national convention was passed unanimously at Cork Corporation, and those voting in favour included all AFIL councillors who were present, indicating support for Simcox and O'Sullivan's call for a *rapprochement* between the AFIL and the Home Rule movement. Although the party lost control of Cork Corporation, the leadership managed to contain the revolt, and the AFIL- controlled County Council, voted twenty to thirteen against nominating delegates to the Convention.²⁰ However, the personal animus directed at O'Brien was indicative of underlying tensions within the party and suggested that

¹⁷ *Irish Independent*, 13 April 1912.

¹⁸ *Cork Examiner*, April 20 1912. The AFIL launched a legal challenge to O'Shea's eligibility because he had American citizenship, which he did not deny. The case, which was eventually heard before the King's Bench Division, was dismissed (J. J. Horgan, *Parnell to Pearse* (Dublin, 2009), pp. 250-1).

¹⁹ *Southern Star*, 20 April 1912.

²⁰ *Cork Examiner*, April 17 1912.

his control was by no means absolute. The previous year, Tim Healy had raised this when he wrote to warn O'Brien of underlying grassroots unease, 'So as to put you on guard I heard that one of our colleagues complained that you "consulted no one now but the Healys" and however absurd these feelings are, they are realities, which affect the conduct of the shrimps who think themselves "neglected"'.²¹

This was an unnecessary split, which a more adept politician than O'Brien could have avoided. At an AFIL conference a few weeks later, the party passed a resolution welcoming the Home Rule bill.²² O'Brien now accepted the bill 'as a reasonable compromise and possibly the best compromise that it might now be possible to get England to agree to'. He concluded that 'it was never too late to bury the hatchet' and offered to unite with all nationalists to carry the bill through parliament.²³ However, the Simcox and O'Sullivan resignations left O'Brien open to the accusations of obduracy and hypocrisy, of preaching conciliation between all classes and creeds, while castigating his supporters who dared to do so. It seemed as if conciliation applied only to unionists and not other nationalists. There was further dissent at the conference from the other wing of the party when Moreton Frewan claimed that he resigned his seat because he was unable to vote for the Parliament bill, and the absence of the House of Lords' veto would now 'intensify a hundredfold every Ulsterman's objection to Home Rule'.²⁴ Lord Dunraven did not attend but indicated that he was withholding his opinion on the Home Rule bill and, although he was in favour of devolution, he thought the bill contained grave defects of principle, and they were getting 'stones instead of bread'.²⁵

²¹ Healy to O'Brien, William O'Brien Papers, 11 September 1911 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/5).

²² *Cork Free Press*, 25 May 1912.

²³ *Irish Independent*, 27 May 1912.

²⁴ Later in 1912 Frewan signed the Ulster Covenant.

²⁵ *Cork Free Press*, 25 May 1912. The *Cork Free Press* reported that several priests had been forbidden to attend the conference by Canon McNamara, the priest of the parish in which the conference was held.

What the All for Ireland League stood for could be interpreted in different ways. O'Brien, Dunraven and some of the other AFIL notables were willing to challenge political orthodoxy by espousing a policy of conciliation between Catholics and Protestants, nationalists and unionists, but their policies, and that of the AFIL, on social and economic issues, remained solidly conservative. During its tenure of Cork Corporation from January 1911 to March 1912, the AFIL took no significant initiatives concerning housing or public health which might have relieved the distress of Cork's poorest citizens. The 'All for Ireland' designation was often used to obfuscate underlying class tensions further. For example, Redmond Walsh, son of the AFIL MP John Walsh, who had a large farm in North Cork, told a County Council election rally that 'there was no greater blessing for the country than to see a bond of friendship between the farmers and the labourers', and he offered no election promise 'but to act fairly and honestly'.²⁶ Patrick Murphy, president of the CUTLC, addressed a meeting of a new branch of the AFIL at Knockavilla and proclaimed that the AFIL policy was 'one of unity, unity of all creeds and classes'.²⁷

This was similar to the rhetoric of the Irish party which deflected calls for social change by either calling for unity of all classes but proclaiming the pre-eminence of the national question; or alternatively, blaming British rule for working class poverty, inadequate housing and low wages. This harked back to Parnell's emphasis on solidarity between social classes, which as Liam Kennedy argues 'would have militated against income and wealth redistribution',²⁸ in effect a form of Irish one nation Toryism. However, constitutional nationalists, both in the Home Rule movement and the AFIL, were conscious of their failure, and electoral vulnerability, with regard to urban poverty. Both Redmondites and O'Brienites were aware that improvements in rural areas which land purchase and the Labourers' acts brought about were not matched in Ireland's cities and towns. In 1905 William O'Brien had

²⁶ *Southern Star*, 13 May 1911.

²⁷ *Skibbereen Eagle*, 20 August 1910

²⁸ L. Kennedy, 'The Economic Thought of the Nation's Lost Leader: Charles Stewart Parnell' in D.G. Boyce and Alan O'Day (eds), *Parnell in Perspective* (London, 1991), p. 193.

proclaimed that labour should now take precedence over all other issues.²⁹ Although he and D.D. Sheehan campaigned on farm labourers' housing and land purchase for small tenant farmers, there is little evidence to suggest that the problems of the urban working class became a priority either for O'Brien or the AFIL

Wages in Cork were estimated to be between 10% to 20% below the British average with significant differentials between skilled and unskilled workers, and large numbers of workers were employed on a temporary or daily basis.³⁰ The tenements in the 'flat' of the city known as The Marsh and the lanes around Shandon Street to the north and Barrack Street to the south had some truly dreadful housing conditions which by 1900 was estimated at 12.5% of households. Even by 1917, a report by the president of the Cork Municipal School of Commerce identified the housing problem as being due to a propensity for throwing up cheap housing haphazardly with no thought or provision for sanitation, light or air. Some tenements housed up to 23 families, and rents were exorbitant. The report stated that in the previous thirty years only 532 houses and 33 flats had been built in Cork city, an average of nineteen dwellings per year, and noted caustically that, at that rate, it would take 232 years to address the housing crisis in which almost a quarter of the population lived in unsatisfactory dwellings.³¹ A report from the Cork Public Health Committee in February 1910 blamed higher than average infant mortality and death rates from pulmonary tuberculosis on inadequate housing and unsanitary living conditions.³² Moreover, in 1920, Cork suffered one of the most significant outbreaks of typhoid fever in the country resulting from *b.coli* contamination from a pipe which had been leaking raw sewage into the water supply for over twenty years.³³ The redoubtable Suzanne Day, one of three women elected to the Cork Board of Guardians in 1911, attempted to introduce some badly-needed reforms, not only in the provision of hospital and medical services for the poor but also to some of the antediluvian practices of the Union. She was opposed, not only by innate conservatism and apathy but also subjected to the casual misogyny common at the time. In response to one of

²⁹ *Cork Examiner*, 11 September 1905.

³⁰ E. Lahiff, 'Industry and Labour in Cork, 1890-1921' (unpublished MA thesis, UCC 1988).

³¹ M. A Dwyer, 'Housing Conditions of the Working Classes in Cork City in the early 20th Century' in *Journal of Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, (vol. 117, 2012), pp. 93-94.

³² *Irish Independent* 10 February 1910.

³³ Dwyer, 'Housing Conditions', p. 96.

her proposals, an AFIL councillor proclaimed that ‘in an average lady's skull, he would find that the bump of intelligence was badly developed and the bump of logic was missing’.³⁴

Soon after the election of the new Corporation, James Connolly attended a meeting in Cork to demand that National Insurance provision should be extended to empower local authorities to provide meals for hungry children. Connolly told the audience that agitation had already started in Dublin organised by the Trades Council and other organisations and sympathetic public representatives. In Cork, however, he noted that not one member of the two Trades Councils or any member of Cork Corporation or other public body was in attendance or had shown any interest in a problem which affected so many of Cork’s children.³⁵ As the writer, Frank O'Connor recalled in his memoir *An Only Child*, ‘God had abandoned the lanes of Cork, and so had the Corporation.’³⁶ Because of the indolence of Cork Corporation and the Guardians, housing and public health became highly political issues at election times and were then, for the most part, quickly forgotten. The Labourers Housing acts, 1906 and 1911, and the Housing of the Working Classes (Ireland) act, 1908, known as the Clancy act, provided homes for thousands of families. The former mostly benefitted the rural working class, but many municipal authorities took advantage of the Irish Housing Fund, established by the Clancy act, to provide subsidised housing for the poor in urban areas.³⁷ The only exception was in Cork which made no application to the fund. Murray Fraser convincingly argues that this was because ‘There was not the decisive combination of active Irish Party MPs plus the Town Tenants League that was to prove effective in promoting the Clancy act in other centres of nationalism.’³⁸

³⁴ Quoted in C. O’Mahony, *In The Shadows: Life in Cork 1750-1930* (Cork, 1997), p. 306. Suzanne Day was a feminist, playwright and novelist and went on to write the novel *The Amazing Philanthropists* (1916). One of the few issues that united both Redmond and Sir Edward Carson was their opposition to women’s suffrage. Redmond believed that because of the property qualification more unionist women were likely to get the vote to the disadvantage of nationalists. (V. Kelly, ‘Irish Suffragettes at the Time of the Home Rule Crisis’ in *History Ireland*, vol. 4, issue 1 (Spring, 1996), p. 34.) William O’Brien supported women’s suffrage although his wife Sophie O’Brien did not (Maume, ‘Nursery of Editors’, pp. 42-46).

³⁵ *Cork Free Press*, 2 March 1911.

³⁶ Frank O’Connor, *An Only Child* (London, 2005), p. 15.

³⁷ *Cork Free Press*, 25, 29 November; 6, 18 December 1913.

³⁸ M. Fraser, *John Bull’s Other Homes: State Housing and British Policy in Ireland, 1883-1922* (Liverpool, 1993), pp. 91-2.

The AFIL-‘Molly’ conflict was also refracted through the labour movement. As has already been seen, the notoriously fractious Land and Labour League split in 1910, and the Cork trades council also fractured in 1909 into the O’Brienite supporting CUTLC and the Redmondite CDTC, the former representing mostly semi-skilled and unskilled workers and the latter, skilled craft unions. The Labour party, which in 1899 hoped to break the conservative nationalist consensus and had some success in municipal elections up to 1908, was also pulled into the orbit of the ‘All Fors - Mollies’ conflict and in 1911 only one labour councillor was elected to Cork Corporation. Divisions appeared relating to the National Insurance bill as many of the Liberal government's social policies were deeply resented by the AFIL’s and Irish party's wealthier supporters but welcomed by many less affluent nationalists who would benefit from the old age pension and National Insurance provision to provide health and unemployment benefits. O’Brien attempted to have Ireland excluded from the provisions of the National Insurance bill and, following its enactment, the *Cork Free Press* advised farmers and employers not to pay their contributions and ‘to light their pipes on the act’.³⁹ The president of the CUTLC and AFIL councillor Patrick Murphy claimed, without explanation, that the bill ‘would smash into atoms the Trade and Labour Unions of Ireland and England’.⁴⁰ A Redmondite councillor expressed astonishment that Murphy, ‘who posed as an advocate of Labour was standing up and opposing the Bill’.⁴¹ The leader of the breakaway Land and Labour League, Patrick Bradley, berated William O’Brien for not supporting the bill and claimed that if it were not for the Irish party ‘we wouldn't have Old Age Pensions’.⁴² Bradley’s rival Land and Labour Association, based mostly in East Cork, quickly registered as an approved society under the National Insurance act allowing it, like the AOH, to build up significant assets.⁴³

Lord Dunraven was similarly critical of the National Insurance act and told the first AFIL convention in Cork that ‘I do not see what the Irish labouring man is going to

³⁹ *Cork Free Press*, 22 January 1912.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 12 August 1911.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*.

⁴² *Cork Examiner*, 10 May 1911.

⁴³ Bradley, *Farm Labourers*, p. 29.

get in return for his fourpence a week. How can Ireland's interests be watched by men [Redmond and the Irish party] who have become a mere Radical annexe and who come to heel at the crack of the radical whip'.⁴⁴ Even the old labour campaigner D.D. Sheehan, the AFIL MP for mid-Cork, took the view that the National Insurance act provided only opportunities for jobbery and corruption, 'it provided a regular deluge of well-paid positions for the votaries of the secret sectarian society that had the country in its vicious grip.'⁴⁵ Sheehan, in common with O'Brien and Dunraven, ignored the benefits that many of his impoverished constituents gained from the act. For example, the vagaries of casual rural employment kept farm labourers on the edge of destitution, for which the National Insurance act offered some hope of relief as most farm labourers were included in the non-contributory scheme because their wages were so low that they were exempt from paying even the minimum contributions.⁴⁶ Sheehan, whose natural political home was on the left, was unable to articulate support for this measure because of his need to maintain solidarity with O'Brien.

The ITGWU, which had been dormant since its crushing defeat in the 1909 lock-out began organising in Cork again in 1912 and affiliated to the CUTLC, which was also radicalised by the redoubtable John Good of the National Union of Railwaymen (N.U.R.). He argued not only for a more confrontational trade union policy, but also a Labour party free of the O'Brienite-Redmondite conflict.⁴⁷ It became increasingly difficult for both the AFIL and the UIL to hold to the old labour-nationalist position of keeping working class dissent within strictly confined parameters. The Dublin lock-out of 1913, the most serious labour dispute in Ireland's history, exposed the vacuum at the heart of this strategy. The AFIL attempted to deal with the lock-out by condemning Redmond and the Irish party for their inaction while refraining from supporting Larkin and the ITGWU. A cartoon in the *Cork Free Press* portrayed Redmond as Nero, fiddling while Dublin burned, and mocked him for playing golf instead of trying to resolve the dispute:

⁴⁴ *Southern Star*, 10 June 1911.

⁴⁵ Sheehan, *Ireland Since Parnell*, Chapter XIX.

⁴⁶ Bradley, *Farm Labourers*, p. 18.

⁴⁷ Lahiff, 'Industry and Labour in Cork', pp. 169-71.

Devolution is my lay
To nought else will I hearken;
It and golf I quietly play
While Murphy brawls with Larkin.⁴⁸

O'Brien donated £20 for the relief of distress in Dublin and regretted the failure of mediation in the dispute. On the other hand, he refused a plea from the NUR to support Dora Montefiore and Lucille Rand who were arrested when they attempted to relieve the distress of the children of the locked-out workers by removing them from Dublin temporarily to the homes of labour supporters in England. He wrote: 'It was in my judgement, a profound mistake to imitate the precedent set by the French Anarchists by transporting children of tender age to strange surroundings no matter how friendly.'⁴⁹ The AFIL came under intense attack for its prevarication and refusal to support the workers. James Connolly's *Irish Worker* criticised AFIL-supporting members of the CUTLC and claimed that they 'had turned it into nothing more than a tool for the O'Brien party'.⁵⁰ John Good also condemned Tim Healy who acted as counsel for the Dublin employers:

If William O'Brien had a political corn it would pain him when he read of the action Mr Healy had taken against the workers who were fighting for their rights. Mr Healy was always anxious to support the workers when it would have proved useful to him, but when he wanted to earn a large salary, he was only too anxious to run to the side of the employers to try and hound the workers.⁵¹

The AFIL, having lost control of the Corporation in 1912, launched a concerted populist campaign the following year to provide homes for the poor. In the run-up to the local elections of January 1914, the party held weekly marches and outdoor meetings demanding houses under the banner, 'A Demand for Houses for the Workers at a Shilling and One and Six Pence per Week.'⁵² William O'Brien continued to reiterate his message that the National Insurance act had taken money from the Irish working class that should have been spent on providing affordable housing. He claimed that, 'City labourers had been cheated as grossly as if their

⁴⁸ *Cork Free Press*, 31 October 1913.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Irish Worker*, 30 August 1913.

⁵¹ *Cork Examiner*, October 1913.

⁵² *Cork Examiner*, 3 January 1914.

pockets had been picked.’⁵³ Eugene Crean told a rally in the West ward that ‘It was such grievances as those in their housing conditions under which the workers of Cork lived that drove the French into revolution.’⁵⁴ O’Brien declared that he wanted to do for the towns and cities what he had done for tenant farmers, ‘To make the poorest dwellers in some of the most foetid slums of Cork feel that they have a God-given right to a fair share of the joy and happiness of life.’⁵⁵ The AFIL having singularly failed to spread joy or happiness, or to build houses for the poor during its tenure, berated the Redmondite-controlled Cork Corporation for not securing a share of the Irish Housing Fund.⁵⁶ The *Examiner* chided the AFIL MP Maurice Healy for suggesting that National Insurance resources could be directed to clearing the Cork slums when this was clearly outside its provisions, and claimed that he had ‘after thirty years of political life, suddenly awakened to the need for better housing in Cork’.⁵⁷ The abysmal record of Cork Corporation in housing the poor was in contrast to the completion of thirty-five cottages for labourers and fishermen by the UIL dominated Cork RDC in the city suburb of Blackrock at a rent of ten pence a week and a cost to the rates of one-eighteenth of a penny in the pound.⁵⁸

The CUTLC announced that it would put forward seven Labour candidates for the Corporation elections. Alderman Kelleher, the only sitting Labour councillor, said that they currently had public representatives, ‘who told the workers they would get anything they wanted, but after the elections these people would forget the existence of the workers for two and a half years more, while some of the people who promised healthy houses for the workers were themselves slum-owners’.⁵⁹ John Good promised that Labour candidates were ‘pledged not to take part in party politics’.⁶⁰ A few days before the Corporation elections the AFIL launched an All for Ireland Workmen’s Club in a vain attempt to shore up working class support.⁶¹

⁵³ *Ibid*, 20 October 1913.

⁵⁴ *Cork Free Press*, 23 November 1913.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 10 January 1914.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 25, 29 November; 6, 18 December 1913. The Clancy act established the Irish Housing Fund to provide subsidised housing for the poor in urban areas.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 23 November 1913.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 24 October 1913.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 6 December 1913.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 5 January 1914.

⁶¹ *Cork Free Press*, 12 January 1914.

Although the Dublin lock-out damaged the AFIL labour vote, the fulcrum of political opinion was already beginning to shift towards the Redmondites.

In January 1914 the UIL retained control of Cork Corporation taking thirty-three seats in the Corporation.⁶² The AFIL lost eleven, taking twelve seats with six independents, and four unionists. Labour also suffered from the predominance of national issues and only managed to retain its one councillor.⁶³ Following the Corporation elections, O'Brien immediately resigned his parliamentary seat, the third time he had 'Taken the Chiltern Hundreds' and stood down as an MP within ten years.⁶⁴ His latest resignation was triggered by what he claimed was the 'machinations of a secret society' during the elections and a sectarian campaign by the UIL and the AOH against Protestant AFIL and independent candidates for the Corporation.⁶⁵ The reactions of the defeated candidates undermined O'Brien's accusation of a sectarian campaign. Of the three Protestant AFIL candidates who had failed to be elected, W.R. Finnegan was a Home Ruler but did not attribute his defeat to being a Protestant. Joseph Hosford claimed that he believed in Home Rule since Parnell and was not successful because Protestant voters refused to support him because of this; the third AFIL candidate, T. A. Farrington, said that he did not stand as a Home Ruler. The independent Protestant candidates, T.C. Andrews and Suzanne Day also did not attribute their defeat to religion.⁶⁶

In the wake of the AFIL's abstention on the Home Rule bill in May 1914, retribution came swiftly and decisively. In the local elections in June, despite Redmondite

⁶² Two prominent republicans were also elected: J.J. Walsh as an independent nationalist, and Denis O'Mahony, a member of the provisional committee of the Cork Irish Volunteers, stood as a UIL candidate (de Roiste Diaries, January 1914 (BMH, WS 1698).

⁶³ *Cork Examiner*, 17 January 1914. Maurice Healy tried to console O'Brien by reminding him that although the elections were a disappointment for the AFIL their vote was similar to that of 1910 in the North-East and North-Central wards, although the vote had dropped in 'the Liberties', where the AFIL previously had a majority and, 'it is possible to do this again' (Maurice Healy to O'Brien, 18 January 1914, William O'Brien Papers, NLI, 8557/6).

⁶⁴ 'Taking the Chiltern Hundreds' is a parliamentary device dating back to the Act of Settlement of 1701 which allows the House of Commons to circumvent a previous resolution passed by Parliament in 1624 which prevents MPs from resigning their seats. Maurice Healy told O'Brien that 'We will sink or swim with you, my seat is yours if you are beat' (Healy to O'Brien (telegram) 20 January 1914, NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8557/6).

⁶⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 19 January 1914.

⁶⁶ *Irish Independent*, 20 January 1914; *Cork County Eagle and Munster Advertiser*, 20 January 1914.

triumphalism, the AFIL vote did not collapse, but they lost some crucial seats by relatively small amounts and, as a result, lost control of Cork County Council. In Monkstown, the AFIL Chairman of the County Council William MacDonald, lost by 963 to 934 (in 1911 MacDonald defeated the nationalist candidate 953 to 765). The AFIL was strongest in the North and West of the county, but even here they lost crucial seats to UIL-backed candidates. In Bandon, a unionist stronghold, the AFIL candidate was defeated 672 to 634 (in 1911 the AFIL won the seat 847 to 469); the earl of Bandon who had been active in local government for over forty years, latterly as a member of Bandon Rural District Council, also lost his seat.⁶⁷ In Charleville the AFIL candidate L.M. Brazier-Creagh, a local unionist, was defeated 863 to 760 (1911: AFIL victory, 812 to 679).⁶⁸ The AFIL lost two West Cork strongholds in Skibbereen and Castletownbere. Even in Kanturk, the heartland of D.D. Sheehan and the ILLA, the AFIL candidate lost his seat. Sheehan stood as a candidate in Warrenscourt and failed to be elected. In the elections for Rural District Councils and Boards of Guardians, the AFIL lost control in Middleton, Macroom, Kanturk and Youghal, but polled strongly in Bandon and parts of Cork city, especially the North-West ward. As in 1911, the results showed a deeply divided electorate although the AFIL still had significant support in the city and north and west of the county.⁶⁹

Violence once again marred the elections. In January there were clashes between rival bands of supporters and reports that the AFIL attacked Redmonds GAA club and houses in the UIL-supporting area around Barrack Street. In contrast, O'Brien claimed that drunken mobs of 'Mollies' had intimidated and attacked his supporters, and an AFIL enclave in Blackpool was attacked;⁷⁰ AFIL supporters were also attacked in Gillabbey Street on the South side of the city.⁷¹ In Millstreet, there were large-scale disturbances, and an AFIL supporter was shot in the leg.⁷² The most

⁶⁷ *Cork Constitution*, 8 June 1914.

⁶⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 8 June 1914. The *Belfast Newsletter* noted that Brazier-Creagh was the only Protestant member of Cork County Council. But, the *Independent* noted, 'Of course they will say the one Protestant was rejected because he was an O'Brienite and not because of his Protestantism. However, it will always be possible for them to find reasons for depriving Protestants of representation without mentioning their religion.' (*Irish Independent*, 8 June 1914).

⁶⁹ *Cork Examiner*, 6 and 8 June 1914; *Southern Star*, 3 June 1914.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 5 January 1914.

⁷¹ *Cork Free Press*, 17 January 1914.

⁷² *Cork Constitution*, 9 June 1914.

serious incident took place near Bandon when a young man was killed by a blast from a shotgun, which was accidentally discharged when a large group of Redmondites surrounded a smaller group of AFIL supporters.⁷³ The *Cork Free Press* alleged widespread clerical interference and even violence, citing an assault in west Cork by a priest on an eighty-seven-year-old man, a relative of an AFIL councillor. In Donoughmore a local priest accosted David Mullane, the secretary of the AFIL branch and ‘jumped around the road, bounded repeatedly into the air, threw his hat aloft and shouted “up with Father Murphy and the priests of God”’. The following day there was a walk-out by AFIL supporters during the same priest’s mass.⁷⁴

The *Cork Free Press*, seemingly unable to face the real reasons for the AFIL losses, posited a bizarre explanation, ‘Wherever the AFIL were defeated the balance was turned by the women’s vote which will be missing at the General Election, and the women’s vote being wholly that of old and timid women of property was unquestionably decided by the undue influence of the priests.’⁷⁵ The loss of support for the AFIL was more prosaic; for, in addition to losing votes because of its policy on the Home Rule bill, the AFIL also faced a better organised and well-funded opposition than in 1911. The UIL in Cork began a process of rebuilding its branches in 1910 following a period when O’Brienite affiliates had supplanted the organisation in the previous four years.⁷⁶ By 1910 there were forty UIL branches in Cork which rose to sixty-seven by 1914, and in most of the areas where the AFIL lost seats, there were strong UIL branches.⁷⁷ In the previous three years, the AOH had also grown in numbers, influence and wealth, facilitated mainly by its role as an approved society allowed to dispense National Insurance benefits, which the AFIL and the ILLA, who opposed the National Insurance act, had refused to countenance. The AOH became an integral and influential part of the Home Rule movement, whose members frequently had leading roles in other affiliated organisations. As

⁷³ *Cork Examiner*, 6th June 1914.

⁷⁴ *Cork Free Press*, 12 June 1914. Father Murphy was a nationalist hero and leader of the 1798 rising in Wexford who was killed by Crown forces.

⁷⁵ *Cork Free Press*, 6 June 1914.

⁷⁶ O’Donovan, *The United Irish League in Cork, 1900-1910* (<http://afilcork.blogspot.com/2010/02/united-irish-league-in-cork-1900-1910.html>) (12 November 2016).

⁷⁷ UIL Minute Book of the National Directory: 1904-18 (NLI, MS 407).

John Borgonovo notes, 'In Cork city, the AOH was not an ally of the Irish party but an elite within the party.'⁷⁸ The strength of the organisation can be glimpsed in the 1914 Saint Patrick's Day parade in Cork where the AOH was by far the largest participating contingent.⁷⁹ O'Brien's obsessive hatred of 'the Mollies' and his constant iteration that a 'sinister secret society' had taken over the nationalist party allowed his enemies to present him as unstable and paranoid. However, there was some truth in his assertions that the AOH and its leader Joseph Devlin, one of the triumvirate which led the Irish party in 1914, was the most potent force in the Home Rule movement.

As well as facing a better-organised opposition the AFIL lost the support of its electoral base because, in contemporary parlance, it had expended its political capital. Having presented itself as an alternative to the Redmondites, it failed to satisfy either nationalist or unionist supporters during its brief sojourn in control of local government and during the Home Rule crisis. Working class nationalists, many of whom were now joining the ITGWU, were no longer in lockstep with the AFIL because of its failure to deliver on promises of betterment to those in need. Many more nationalists were alienated by O'Brien's failure to support the Home Rule bill, and by offering what were seen as over-generous promises to unionists. The *Cork Constitution* meanwhile denied that Home Rule was a significant factor for unionists and that the most critical factor was 'the good and efficient administration of Cork Borough' and claimed that 3,000 unionist voters did not vote for the AFIL in the Corporation elections because of its record in local government.⁸⁰

1911 proved to be the high water mark of the AFIL in local government. Following the outbreak of war in August 1914 political opinion, which had shifted towards the Redmondites, would later swing to advanced nationalists. Cork Corporation, which passed a loyal address to the King in 1911, elected the republican J.J. Walsh in 1914 and, in 1916, passed a resolution calling for the release of rebel prisoners, including Walsh, who had been sentenced to death for his part in the Easter Rising.⁸¹ During

⁷⁸ Borgonovo, *War and Revolution*, p. 10.

⁷⁹ *Cork Examiner*, 18 March 1914.

⁸⁰ *Cork Constitution*, 15 January 1914.

⁸¹ *Cork Examiner*, 13 May 1916.

its parliamentary successes in the two general elections of 1910, the AFIL ran successful populist campaigns in which it portrayed itself as the political underdog standing up for the plain people of Cork against a corrupt and plutocratic elite. This was more difficult to do in 1914 when its credentials as the defenders of the workers were much less credible. Also, the AFIL was unable to frame its failure to support the Home Rule bill, and the broader policy of conciliation with unionists in a populist campaign, especially at a time of national crisis when nationalists faced the prospect of civil war with that minority.

CHAPTER FIVE

'A Future of Black Despair': War and Insurrection 1914-1916

The changes which war unleashed in Ireland exposed the ephemeral nature of Ireland's constitutional relationship with the United Kingdom, and, as R.F. Foster has argued, 'should be seen as one of the most decisive events in modern Irish history'.¹ It halted a seemingly inexorable descent into civil war in Ireland, and also, in the short term, strengthened the Irish parliamentary party's position in Westminster by allowing Redmond to commit nationalist Ireland to the war effort. The war, and Redmond's support for it, also made the enactment of the Home Rule bill more likely and threw unionism into disarray. Although advanced nationalists traduced Redmond for his unequivocal support of the war, he undoubtedly spoke for many Irish nationalists. His speech at Woodenbridge, two days after the enactment and suspension of the Home Rule act, in which he moved from offering nationalist support for the defence of Ireland to, 'wherever the firing line extends', may, as Alvin Jackson argues, have been more nuanced than he was given credit for,² but the Home Rule movement was left as a hostage to the fortunes of war, and as David Fitzpatrick observes, 'the very events which marked the party's triumph were also the sources of its subsequent petrification'.³

The AFIL, already damaged by its abstention on the Home Rule bill, now faced another critical dilemma: should it, as a party that aspired to represent the two traditions, follow John Redmond's example and support the war and encourage enlistment? Or should it align itself with advanced nationalists and oppose the war? The former stance could drive away young nationalists unenthusiastic about fighting a war many did not support; the latter position would clearly differentiate it from the Home Rule movement but alienate its unionist supporters. Once again, the fractures between nationalists and unionists which the AFIL sought to heal, were exposed by a further crisis and another binary choice. The war and the Easter Rising which followed, would prove to be an existential threat to the AFIL

¹ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 471.

² Jackson, *Home Rule*, pp. 144-5.

³ Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, p. 91.

War changed Cork, as it did the rest of Ireland and the United Kingdom, in inestimable, though not identical ways. The Cork Trades Council complained that the price of flour and sugar increased immediately the war started despite large stocks of both commodities being available and accused local merchants of profiteering and of exploiting the poor.⁴ Local shops advertised ‘Soldier’s Comforts’ pyjama suits, specially adapted raincoats, knitted jackets and ‘unshrinkable flannel clothing’. A great number of horses were bought or commandeered for military service, and a plethora of committees to help the war effort were established. However, it was enlistment that brought about the most profound changes. Victoria Barracks became a major staging post for troops being deployed overseas from Queenstown, and army accommodation and a system of trenches used for training purposes on the north side of the city became known as ‘Tin Town’. The *Cork Examiner* noted that there was barely a house in the poorer parts of the city unaffected by enlistment, and that ‘prominent Unionists everywhere are identifying themselves with the cause of the National Volunteers’.⁵

It has become a truism that many young men, especially in Ireland, enlisted because of dire economic necessity rather than patriotic impulse. Although poverty was the prime motivator for peacetime enlistment, David Fitzpatrick’s penetrating analysis shows that it was those in permanent and relatively well-paid employment who joined up in greater numbers during the first few weeks of August and September 1914, in comparison to workers in less secure and less well-paid occupations.⁶ Those working on the land, however, even accounting for wartime exemption, showed a marked reluctance to enlist, and rising agricultural prices bolstered their inhibitions about joining the colours. Farmers did well from the war and prices for agricultural produce almost doubled during the war years.⁷

⁴ *Cork Free Press*, 6 August 1914.

⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 6 and 7 August 1914.

⁶ D. Fitzpatrick, ‘The Logic of Collective Sacrifice: Ireland and the British Army, 1914-1918’ in *The Historical Journal*, vol. 38, no. 4 (Dec., 1995), pp. 1017-30.

⁷ K. Jeffrey, *Ireland and the Great War* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 31.

Those who enlisted did so for a multitude of reasons. There were undoubtedly young men from the lanes and tenements of Cork who joined up because almost anything seemed better than the dire poverty at home - recruits raised on meagre fare wrote home in wonder of army rations: 'meat every day'. There were also those who enlisted for excitement and adventure; some who heeded Redmond's call to arms as a way of ensuring Home Rule for Ireland; and those who were horrified by accounts of German atrocities, which the newspapers carried on a daily basis. Despite the National Volunteers declarations of loyalty, many unionists, with justification, saw it as an affiliate of the Irish party and had no wish to be associated with it. However, as Keith Jeffrey has noted, unionists, unlike nationalists, were 'hoisted with their own patriotic petard'.⁸ The exigencies of war trumped all other considerations, and Carson had to abandon his attempt to tie the offer of the Ulster Volunteer Force for war service to the suspension of the Home Rule bill.

Although there was widespread support for the war, there were no ecstatic displays of patriotic fervour in Cork. The complex undertow of competing loyalties and the ambivalent nature of Irish nationalist sentiment can be glimpsed in the large crowd, mostly relatives and friends, which marched with the first contingent of reservists from the Royal Munster Fusiliers to Cork's rail terminus and sent the troops on their way with rousing choruses of both 'Rule Britannia' and the nationalist anthem 'A Nation Once Again'.⁹ The leadership of the Home Rule movement in Cork, although it endorsed Redmond's policy, showed little enthusiasm for the war and recruitment, and, as John Borgonovo notes, even less for joining the colours themselves.¹⁰ The only prominent Cork nationalist to enlist was the AFIL MP for Mid-Cork D.D. Sheehan, who, aged forty-one, was given a commission in the Munster Fusiliers.¹¹

⁸ Jeffrey, *Ireland and the Great War*, p.15.

⁹ In typically raucous Cork style the departure of the reservists ended in a near-riot and police baton charges when crowds of supporters tried to force their way onto a section of the platform restricted to the enlisted men (*Cork Examiner*, 6 August 1914).

¹⁰ Borgonovo, *War and Revolution*, p. 32.

¹¹ Sheehan served with distinction on the Western Front and was discharged in 1917 because of ill health. Three of his five sons also enlisted, and two were killed in action. His daughter, a nurse on the Western Front, was severely injured.

For William O'Brien and the AFIL, the dilemma, as with the Home Rule crisis, was even more acute than that of the Irish party. Should the AFIL, a party whose *raison d'être* was to offer an alternative to the Home Rule movement, follow Redmond in supporting the war and encourage young Irishmen to enlist, or should it attempt to advance a more sceptical and independent position? On the day Britain declared war on Germany, Lord Dunraven, still an influential voice in the AFIL, argued that the government should withdraw its troops from Ireland and leave the defence of the country to the volunteer militias.¹² A meeting of the Cork city AFIL branches called on all its supporters to join the National Volunteers.¹³ O'Brien's response to the declaration of war was predictable and typically indefatigable. He called for a conference of nationalists and unionists and proposed a recalibration of the Home Rule bill in an all-Ireland context with safeguards and assurances for unionists. However, he stopped short of endorsing Dunraven's call for the effective merging of the Irish and Ulster volunteers.¹⁴ Writing in the *Cork Free Press*, he argued that 'comradeship between North and South upon Continental battlefields, earnest and persistent conciliation of all classes and religious persuasions will eventually bring about a genuine National Settlement by Conference and Consent.'¹⁵ He also met with Lord Kitchener to press his case for an Irish Corps (as had Redmond).¹⁶ On 29th August O'Brien sent a letter to all MPs again calling for the enactment of Home Rule to be temporarily suspended, and the establishment of a commission to look again at the bill. He hoped in the ensuing breathing space 'the growing comradeship of the National and Ulster Volunteers Forces would induce 'a spirit of generous Irish patriotism and mutual concession'. He again proposed a veto of Irish legislation for Ulster MPs in the Imperial parliament for five years, and an increase in the number of Ulster MPs in the Home Rule parliament to 68.¹⁷

¹² *Cork Free Press*, 4 August 1914; *Irish Independent*, 4 August 1914.

¹³ *Irish Independent*, 10 August 1914.

¹⁴ *Irish Independent*, 6 August 1914.

¹⁵ *Cork Free Press*, 21 September 1914.

¹⁶ Healy, *Letters and Leaders vol ii*, p. 550.

¹⁷ *Skibbereen Eagle*, 29 August 1914. The Home Rule bill proposed a bicameral Irish parliament with a 40-member Senate and 164-member House of Commons. It did not propose a disproportionate allocation of Ulster seats.

However, the government, now wholly focused on the war, had no wish to reopen the Home Rule talks. The unpalatable truth that O'Brien found it difficult to accept was that Ulster unionists largely supported partition as the lesser of two evils (the greater evil being Home Rule for the whole of Ireland). The majority of Southern unionists (apart from the small minority of Southern unionists who supported the AFIL from which O'Brien extrapolated his majority) were opposed to Home Rule. Patrick Maume notes that some Southern unionists began to accept the inevitability of Home Rule,¹⁸ but their opposition was still trenchant and would lead to the collapse of Lloyd George's Dublin conference in July 1916. Redmond and the Irish party, with the imminent prize of the enactment of the Home Rule bill within reach, were equally unwilling to revisit talks, which had so decisively failed at Buckingham Palace only a short time before.

The young London correspondent of the *Cork Free Press*, Frank Gallagher, was in no doubt about the route that O'Brien should advocate. In his memoir *The Four Glorious Years*, Gallagher claims that following the outbreak of war 'O'Brien became the hope of those who looked for a voice for freedom', and thought he had the opportunity of offering an alternative to Redmond's support for the war and enlistment. Gallagher met O'Brien in the press gallery of the House of Commons and tried to persuade him not to support the war. However, O'Brien was troubled by tales of atrocity in France and Belgium (his wife's family lived in France) and, in the end, his reply was 'We must either be the open enemy or the open friend of England in the war – and are not strong enough to be an open enemy'.¹⁹ In effect, Gallagher was suggesting that O'Brien should claim a leadership role in the emerging, but as yet unformed, movement of advanced and cultural nationalists, in addition to constitutional nationalists opposed to partition. As advanced nationalism moved inexorably towards a rejection of constitutional nationalism and a preference for separatism, this was a role that O'Brien could not accept. His ambition, and that of the AFIL, was to offer young nationalists an alternative to the Irish party and its affiliates, but in the context of a self-governing Ireland within the United Kingdom. There seems little doubt also that if O'Brien had refused to support the war, it would

¹⁸ Maume, *Long Gestation*, p. 152.

¹⁹ F. Gallagher, *The Four Glorious Years* (Dublin, 1953), pp. 222-3.

have split the AFIL with the inevitable loss of unionist support and the possible defection of older nationalist supporters who supported Redmond's position. By supporting the war, however, he risked alienating a younger generation of nationalists whom he hoped to attract to the party and many were unimpressed by his and Redmond's enthusiasm for recruitment, and the offer, seen from their perspective, of the young men of Ireland as an indemnity for Home Rule when the war ended.

O'Brien spoke at a meeting at Cork City Hall on 2nd September and shared a platform with unionist grandees the earl of Bandon, Lord Barrymore, the Protestant bishop of Cork, Sir Alfred Dobbin of the Cork Employers Federation and the AFIL MPs Eugene Crean, Maurice Healy and John Walsh. His tone had now changed and, presaging Redmond's Woodenbridge speech later that month, told the audience that he 'would not place any stipulations whatever on the price of Ireland's services – that would be mere despicable huckstering and not statesmanship'. O'Brien promised to bury past quarrels with other nationalists 'as deep as the ocean' and called on all Irishmen to join the war effort 'even if it cost them the last drop of blood in their veins'. He proposed a motion, seconded by Lord Barrymore, 'To tender to his Majesty's ministers the assurance that the manhood of Ireland is at their command in this emergency'.²⁰ To Frank Gallagher the consequences were predictable:

He made his speech, and his leadership was over. The circulation of the daily paper [the *Cork Free Press*] fell not by a half but by three quarters, and it soon had to become a weekly. His All for Ireland movement melted away, and the volunteer companies and Sinn Féin clubs took its place.²¹

This view was endorsed by the prominent Cork republican Liam de Roiste who

²⁰ *Cork Examiner*, 4 September 1914; *Skibbereen Eagle*, 5 September 1914

²¹ Gallagher, *Four Glorious Years*, p. 225. Sophie O'Brien had a poor opinion of Gallagher's integrity as a journalist and claimed he had fabricated much of the copy for his regular 'London Letter' for the *Cork Free Press*, 'Never had lying been carried to such a fine art (Sophie O'Brien, to Michael MacDonagh, Sophie O'Brien Papers, NLI, 8507/2, p. 6, undated). Her view of Gallagher's journalistic integrity needs to be viewed in the context of her enmity towards him which is evident in her correspondence based on the belief that he had betrayed William O'Brien's trust. He was 'a very incompetent and faithless editor and my husband was so kind and forgiving'. After O'Brien's death, she claimed that Gallagher had written an article about him which was 'a hideous perversion of fact' (Sophie O'Brien, to Michael MacDonagh, Sophie O'Brien Papers, 11 November 1928, NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8507/7).

claimed that many O'Brienite supporters subsequently switched their allegiance to Sinn Féin.²² In the early months of the war, however, there was widespread nationalist support for Redmond and O'Brien's policies and little sympathy for dissentient opinion. The young Fianna member Joseph O'Shea recalls an attempt to distribute an anti-war pamphlet aimed at AFIL supporters at the meeting in Cork City Hall where O'Brien made his pro-war speech. They received a hostile reception and one of the older volunteers Riobárd Langford was 'left with a fine pair of black eyes'.²³

The travails of advanced nationalists in Cork deepened following an acrimonious split in the Volunteers. The majority, estimated at between 1,400 to 1,500, joined the National Volunteers and left only a small number, which some estimated at less than thirty, in the Irish Volunteers.²⁴ In October 1914 members of the National Volunteers raided the Irish Volunteers' hall in Cork (de Roiste claims the raiders were members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians),²⁵ and their entire stock of rifles, part of the Howth gunrunning consignment, was spirited away.²⁶

In addition to O'Brien's potentially damaging stand on the war, the AFIL also had to deal with the Home Rule bill on which it had abstained. O'Brien was dismayed and angry at the prospect of its enactment, 'So the miserable compromise has been patched up. It lets the King out of the use of the Parliament Act, lets Carson out of rebellion, and gives Redmond something as well. While Devlin can pose as opposing the dismemberment by a fake note.'²⁷ Tim Healy, whose animus towards Redmond and the Irish party was tempered by *realpolitik* and an awareness of the AFIL's isolation, proposed a joint pro-war and recruitment address with Redmond and Dillon. O'Brien agreed, and Healy approached Asquith who told him 'This is

²² de Róiste diaries, 2 September 1914 (BMH, WS 1698).

²³ J. O'Shea, (BMH, WS 0021, Statement 2, File S); BMH, R. Langford, (BMH, WS 0016, Statement 16, File S).

²⁴ Riobárd Langford claims that the Cork corps of the Irish Volunteers numbered only twenty-eight following the split (Langford, WS 0016, p.2.). However, the small nucleus of the Irish Volunteers included the future leadership of the most active and feared IRA brigade in the country.

²⁵ de Roiste diaries, 4 October 1914 (BMH, WS 1698).

²⁶ Langford (BMH, WS 16). The number of rifles is disputed: Langford claims only twenty-eight, while de Roiste states there were 100.

²⁷ O'Brien to Healy, 20 August 1914 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/8).

most important, and I will never forget it'. He agreed to put the proposal to Redmond and Dillon, but no agreement was forthcoming.²⁸ Speaking with a degree of prescience during the parliamentary debate on the Suspensory bill O'Brien argued:

While we are prepared to pay almost any other price for a general national settlement, there is one price which some of us, at all events, will never in any possible circumstances consent to pay, and that is the dismemberment of our ancient Irish nation.²⁹

O'Brien thus called for the Home Rule bill to be enacted but with the addition of a 'one clause bill' to ensure that the act would not come into force until a representative conference was convened to reconsider how Home Rule could be implemented with the agreement of nationalists and unionists. The bill was enacted on September 18th, and O'Brien's proposals were ignored. The *Cork Free Press* claimed that nationalists had been duped and the act would never be implemented without another general election, and the paper was confident that this would result in an anti-Home Rule government which would consign the act to history.³⁰

O'Brien, disillusioned with national politics and his inability to influence events at Westminster, now spent little time in London and became more reliant on those like Moreton Frewan who was also removed from the realities of political life. O'Brien's perceptions and judgment, which always veered towards solipsism, now became even more eccentric. With no evidence in support, he continued to hope that unionists would see the folly of partition and rise up against it. Writing to Moreton Frewan, he still believed that Carson and the Ulster unionists could be persuaded to support federal Home Rule:

It is certain a broad Unionist scheme launched at the right moment, would carry all before it. Both Irish Unionists and Nationalists would feel that therein alone would lay the safety on the national points:

- Interests of Ireland
- Finance and
- Land Purchase.³¹

²⁸ Healy, *Letters and Leaders vol. ii*, p. 550.

²⁹ *Parliamentary debates* (Hansard), fifth series, *House of Commons*, 15 Sept. 1914 (vol. 5, London, 914).

³⁰ *Cork Free Press*, 18 June 1915.

³¹ O'Brien to Frewan, 10 March 1915 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/4)

O'Brien was, however, realistic enough to know that his espousal of such a proposal was likely to be a poisoned chalice: 'The one thing I would press on you and all disposed to a friendly settlement in Ireland is that the initiative (in Ireland) should come from Irish Unionists and not from me or my side.'³² Both O'Brien and Healy became increasingly detached from political reality with the former arguing that the solution to the Home Rule conundrum was to work for the appointment of Walter Long as Lord Lieutenant, with a seat in cabinet.³³ Long's opposition to devolution was consistent and implacable, and the notion that he would abandon these trenchant views to support all-Ireland conciliation was fantastical.³⁴ Not to be outdone, Healy posited his strange notion that Ulster unionists were terrified of partition and thought that if Redmond accepted Home Rule for three provinces 'in the secrecy of negotiations' they would accept all-Ireland Home Rule.³⁵ Although O'Brien had grown disillusioned with Westminster, he was still indefatigable and continued to contact prominent unionists. He wrote to enlist the support of Lord Powerscourt and 'his influential friends' in 'a new departure for conciliation'.³⁶ He also contacted an AFIL supporter in Kerry urging him to convene an anti-partition meeting, 'Partition is now Redmond's only hope of getting any sort of "Irish Parliament". There is still time to convince him that the country won't stand for it'.³⁷

Unionists showed little interest in O'Brien and Frewan's federal schemes, and advanced nationalists eroded the narrow political space that the AFIL occupied as public sentiment towards the war began to shift in 1915. In 1914 and the early months of 1915, support for the war and enlistment in Cork was solid, bolstered by the triumphant tour of his home county by Sergeant Michael O'Leary of West Cork, the first recipient of the Victoria Cross in the war.³⁸ Anti-German feeling was also

³² O'Brien to Frewan, 28 March 1915 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/4).

³³ O'Brien to Healy, 22 May 1915 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/9).

³⁴ John Kindle, *Walter Long, Ireland and the Union 1905-1920* (London, 1992), p.81. The following year O'Brien wrote that Frewan told him that Long was favourable to a scheme of Imperial federalism. (O'Brien to Dunraven, 22 January 1915 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/16)).

³⁵ Healy to O'Brien to Frewan, 1 June 1915 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/10).

³⁶ O'Brien to Lord Powerscourt, 10 March 1915 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/4). Lord Powerscourt replied that he was now in the army and waiting at the Curragh to be deployed and, although sympathetic, regretted that he could not become involved (Lord Powerscourt to O'Brien, 23 February 1915 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/11)).

³⁷ O'Brien to G. Quinlan, 29 July 1915 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/11).

³⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 5 March 1915.

fervid, fed on a newspaper diet of German atrocities in Belgium, fears of an invasion and German subversion at home, and the sinking of the Lusitania off the coast of Cork in May 1915. The German scholar Kuno Mayer, who had an association with University College Cork and had been granted the freedom of the city, had that honour withdrawn by a majority of Cork Corporation councillors.³⁹ Several tourists, suspected of being German spies, were arrested for sketching and taking photographs of Cork harbour.⁴⁰ There were numerous sightings of German submarines around the Cork coastline, and even the shells, which accidentally rained down on the unsuspecting citizens of Crosshaven from the British Army fort overlooking Cork harbour, did not seem to diminish the public mood of stoic patriotism.⁴¹

However as early as Christmas 1914, Tim Healy was beginning to detect a distinct lack of nationalist enthusiasm for the war:

I don't think there is much pro-German [sic] but the farmers don't want their sons to leave the work and perhaps return cripples, or not at all[...]they think we should have let Johnnie [Redmond] to "fry in his own fat" and blame us for coming to his rescue.⁴²

Healy was here referring to O'Brien's enthusiastic endorsement of Redmond's pro-enlistment policy, which Healy also supported, although his well-tuned political antennae now detected the beginnings of a sea change in public sentiment as it became evident that the war was likely to be longer than expected (as O'Brien predicted), and Irish casualties were beginning to rise. Recruitment in Cork between the outbreak of war and the end of April 1915 stood at 9% of men who were eligible for recruitment, more than double that of Mayo or Leitrim but still less than half of Ulster counties.⁴³ D.D. Sheehan, now a commissioned officer in the Munster Fusiliers, berated recalcitrant Cork farmers at a recruiting meeting in Bantry. He

³⁹ *Irish Independent*, 9 January 1915.

⁴⁰ *Cork Examiner*, 6 August 1914; *Cork County Eagle and Munster Advertiser*, 15 August 1914; B. Mac Goille Choille, (ed.) *Intelligence Notes 1913-16*, (Dublin, 1966), p. 93.

⁴¹ *Kerry Weekly Reporter*, 9 January 1915.

⁴² Healy to O'Brien, 24 December 1914 (NLI William O'Brien Papers, 8556/8).

⁴³ T. Denman, *Unknown Soldiers: The 16th (Irish) Division in the Great War, 1914-1918* (Dublin, 2014) p. 36.

proclaimed his shock at reports that young men were leaving Queenstown for the United States rather than enlist. If this were true, he would 'blush for them as recreant and degenerate sons of a brave and ancient ancestry'.⁴⁴

Here again, the inherent contradictions of the AFIL began to manifest themselves. As with the Home Rule crisis, the war brought to the surface underlying tensions between the two traditions that the party hoped to reconcile and underscored the inevitable conflict between nationalist ambivalence and unionist enthusiasm for the war. As David Fitzpatrick notes, not all unionists embraced the call to arms,⁴⁵ but in Cork dissentient opinion chose discretion as the better part of valour and the unionist newspaper the *Cork Constitution* never deviated in its support for the war, but also reflected a widely-held unionist suspicion of the Irish Volunteers (and the National Volunteers following the split) as organisations that could be used to impose Home Rule on unwilling unionists. The paper had little faith in O'Brien and Lord Dunraven's lofty aspiration that the collective experience of war, a sharing of 'the bloody sacrament of the battlefield', would result in the breaking down of ancestral enmities.⁴⁶ In any case, the demarcation of Ulster unionists and nationalists into different divisions meant that there was little opportunity for communal contact through the shared suffering of the trenches. The refusal of the War Office to allow the establishment of an Irish Corps also reinforced the suspicions of many nationalists that Irish Catholics were being asked to fight and die for Britain but were only trusted to do so in regiments which were predominantly led by English officers.⁴⁷ As casualties rose and the dreaded telegrams bearing death notifications became a common feature in the lanes of Cork, a nationalist commitment to the war, which was always more ambivalent than the unionist one, began to waver.

The *Cork Examiner*, however, proclaimed that there was no shortage of will or enthusiasm on the part of nationalists and it was the failure of the War Office to

⁴⁴ *Cork Free Press*, 25 May 1915.

⁴⁵ Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, p. 55.

⁴⁶ *Cork Constitution*, 2 and 21 September 1914.

⁴⁷ Colonel Maurice Moore, Inspector General of the National Volunteers, expressed his frustration that even English-based Irish battalions like the Tyneside Irish were subsumed into British regiments, in this case, the Northumberland Fusiliers. (Maurice Moore to William O'Brien, 11 November 1914, UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AS 74).

raise an Irish Corps and to deploy the National Volunteers to home defence roles which had a deleterious effect on nationalist morale.⁴⁸ To much nationalist fanfare, armed members of the National Volunteers were deployed on 1st January 1915 to guard railway bridges in Cork. O'Brien, who was inherently hostile to all militias, described the National Volunteers as 'undisciplined partisans controlled by a secret society' (the AOH) and accused the War Office of surrendering to demands for their recognition.⁴⁹ The General Officer Commanding in Ireland, Brigadier-General Hill, seemingly agreed with O'Brien and only five weeks later ordered them to stand down. He advised the Volunteers that they could provide unarmed patrols 'in the manner of special constables' but made it plain that he saw no place for an armed militia, regardless of its professions of loyalty to the Crown.⁵⁰

The unwillingness of the Cork National Volunteers to exchange drilling and home defence for actual warfare was illustrated by a letter in the *Examiner* from the adjutant of the Volunteers listing the names of all those who had joined the colours since the start of the war: sixty-one officers and men of the four Volunteer companies had enlisted from a total membership estimated at 600 men.⁵¹ This reinforced unionist anger that nationalist recruitment was far lower than that of unionists, and below the average for the United Kingdom. Lord Dunraven, who had campaigned vigorously for voluntary recruitment had, by September 1915, concluded that conscription was needed for the whole of the United Kingdom including Ireland.⁵² In a letter to the *Cork Free Press* he went further, and in a tone likely to alienate many nationalists:

Only in Ireland, I feel sure, as every Irishman must who sees young men loafing about racecourses, railway stations and public spaces of all sorts who ought to be backing the gallant Irish who are upholding the great traditions of their race abroad. They cannot be cowards, cannot they see for the honour of

⁴⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 13 October 1914.

⁴⁹ *Cork Free Press*, 6 January 1915.

⁵⁰ *Cork Examiner*, 8 February 1915.

⁵¹ *Cork Examiner*, 27 March 1915. Official recruiting figures for Cork from 15 December 1914 to 15 December 1915 was 2,256 of which 451 were National Volunteers; 259 of these recruits were Protestants (Mac Goille Choille, *Intelligence Notes*, p. 181).

⁵² *Daily Mail*, 3 September 1915.

the Irish regiments, for the existence of their country, they must “do their bit”.⁵³

Dunraven’s memoirs present a more nuanced view and claimed that ‘Irishmen would have volunteered to a man if it had not been for the buckets of cold water that were thrown over them’.⁵⁴ However, his assessment of public sentiment in Ireland in the latter part of 1915 and early 1916 bore little relation to reality as nationalist enthusiasm for recruitment and the war, waned. He spent much of 1915 in the Mediterranean in a yacht that he bought and refurbished as a hospital ship, so there is perhaps some mitigation for his woefully misjudged perceptions. Also, as Michael Spillane perceptively notes, ‘Long years spent in the rarefied atmosphere of power in Britain coupled with the deference shown to him at home by tenants, retainers and villagers had dulled his sense of judgement to such an extent that he failed to discern the profound sea change then enveloping Ireland.’⁵⁵ Although he had not been close to O’Brien since the general elections of 1910 he represented the kind of liberal unionist opinion which the AFIL sought to attract but which was now becoming increasingly estranged from the party as it attempted to satisfy both nationalists and unionists but stopped short of supporting conscription

The other constituency which the AFIL aspired to attract, was young nationalists disillusioned by the Home Rule movement. These were the young men who Home Rule politicians like Redmond and O’Brien daily exhorted to join the colours, but who in turn, seemed increasingly reluctant to do so. Frank Gallagher may have overstated his case by asserting that the AFIL ‘melted away’ as soon as O’Brien made his pro-war speech in September 1914, and there must be some doubt, even had he refused to support the war and recruitment, that his version of constitutional nationalism would have been attractive to a younger generation disenchanted with conventional politics. However, O’Brien’s enthusiasm for the war alienated young men who noted that most of the same politicians of military age (which did not include O’Brien) who urged them to risk life and limb in Flanders and the Balkans showed little inclination to do so themselves. As Tadgh Barry, the republican activist and trade unionist, and one-time sports columnist on the *Cork Free Press*

⁵³ *Cork Free Press*, 19 February 1916.

⁵⁴ Dunraven, *Past Times* (23 November, 2016), p. 52.

⁵⁵ Spillane, ‘Dunraven’, p. 303.

drily observed, 'They'd shed all others' blood but not their own'.⁵⁶ Liam de Roiste noted that the blights of age and ineptitude now tainted constitutional nationalism:

The "old men" could do no more. The fate of Ireland is now in the hands of the young men. True for Mr William O'Brien. And the young men are not doing badly for Ireland – going to jail, facing many threats, losing their positions, being shadowed by police, being denounced by the pro-British[...] Irish nationalism seems to have been submerged last August [1914]. There is no fear of it now. It will survive and conquer.⁵⁷

Speaking of the Cork Irish Volunteers in general, the police inspector's report of September 1915 stated:

They are active propagandists, bitterly disloyal, and if only for their adverse effect on recruiting are potential dangers. They are almost entirely composed of farmers' sons of military age, who, before the war were followers of Mr O'Brien MP but who are now in opposition to his war policy. Their organisers are known suspects, and their cry against conscription and war taxes appeals to the O'Brienite farming classes.⁵⁸

The AFIL was also adversely affected by the changing nature of Irish rural society reflected in a letter to the *Cork Free Press* from D.D. Sheehan, the AFIL MP who reported that the ILLA had almost ceased to exist.⁵⁹ The organisation was, to some extent, a victim of its own success in helping to bring about a more contented rural working class with better living and working conditions. Land purchase transformed Irish rural society, and Cork, with the highest proportion of new tenant proprietors, thanks mainly to O'Brien and Sheehan's efforts, now had a changed class structure as Catholic nationalist tenant-proprietors replaced Protestant Anglo-Irish landlords.⁶⁰ This created new class tensions between those who had successfully bought their land and small tenant farmers, evicted tenants and landless labourers who had not benefited from land purchase, although this potential conflict was postponed to another day by improved wages due to the war economy. As the poet Patrick

⁵⁶ Quoted in de Roiste diaries, 24 November 1918, (CCCA, U271/C/15).

⁵⁷ De Roiste diaries, 20 June 1915. (BMH, WS 1698).

⁵⁸ Mac Goille Choille, *Intelligence Notes*, p.148.

⁵⁹ *Cork Free Press*, 26 September 1914.

⁶⁰ The Protestant Anglo-Irish landlord is a familiar trope in Irish history and literature, although in 1861 less than half of all Irish landlords were Protestants and 43% were Catholic. (Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, p. 288).

Kavanagh recalled, ‘the price of farm produce soared. Everybody was in good humour. They had money in every pocket’.⁶¹

As the AFIL had flourished on the back of these discontents, their amelioration boded ill for a small party whose narrow political space was already being eroded on other fronts. In Cork, O’Brien, Sheehan and the AFIL were credited by many nationalists as being instrumental in bringing about these improved conditions in rural communities, and consequentially accumulated a significant amount of political capital, especially amongst an older generation of nationalists who remembered the struggles of the Land War. This currency, however, did not extend to a younger generation who, alienated by war and the pressures to enlist, were beginning to see constitutional nationalism, including the AFIL, as a homogenous, hostile and increasingly irrelevant force. O’Brien recognised the risk that the Home Rule movement could disintegrate if it lost the support of the younger generation, ‘I would appeal to them in the most solemn words I can command not to cast Constitutional Action to the winds in a fit of impatience because one particular ring of a half a dozen politicians have gone politically bankrupt.’⁶²

As Frank Gallagher recalled, the loss of support for the AFIL also affected the *Cork Free Press* whose circulation was falling, and, in the first fifteen months of its existence, the paper had accumulated losses of £8,700.⁶³ Tim Healy attempted unsuccessfully to persuade William Martin Murphy, the proprietor of the *Irish Independent*, to take over the paper. He told O’Brien that Murphy ‘wishes you well and would find a couple of hundred pounds to enable the *Cork Free Press* to keep afloat a little longer until you could tap more promising sources’.⁶⁴ However, there were no more ‘promising sources’ to be tapped, and by June 1915 the paper was forced to become a weekly (Liam de Roiste recorded, ‘It went out with a sigh. The “old men” could do no more. The future of Ireland is now in the hands of the young

⁶¹ P. Kavanagh, *The Green Fool* (London, 1988), p. 58.

⁶² *Cork Free Press*, 11 September 1915

⁶³ *Ibid*, 19 September 1913.

⁶⁴ Healy said he could not make any contribution to the *Cork Free Press* owing to a long-running legal dispute with the former Irish party MP Richard Hazelton ‘which cost me more than I could afford’ (Healy O’Brien, 3 June 1915, NLI, William O’Brien Papers, 8556/10).

men').⁶⁵ The final edition of the daily paper carried a tendentious leading article, which proclaimed that the paper had achieved its primary objectives in alerting the Irish people to the danger that 'a new sectarian ascendancy' (the AOH) was seeking power, and the chances of the Home Rule act ever becoming a reality were negligible, 'The fair ship Home Rule has been torpedoed by the captain.'⁶⁶ Six months later O'Brien told Moreton Frewan that a paper shortage had brought about a crisis for the *Cork Free Press*, and as his resources were 'at a low ebb', he would use the excuse of a paper famine to close the paper if he was not convinced that there would be an imminent general election, 'By close economising, I can still manage £500 or possible even £600 a year until the General Election but beyond that, I cannot possibly go, and £1,000 to £1,100 is the deficit we have still to reckon with.'⁶⁷ Dunraven sent £150, Frewan promised £250 and O'Brien told him that he had sold some Norwegian securities and could manage to keep the paper going for another three months and even longer 'should my parliamentary salary which I devote entirely to the *Free Press* not be cut off'.⁶⁸

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The decline in support for the Home Rule movement before the Easter Rising is sometimes exaggerated, and Paul Bew notes that the Irish party won all bye-elections it contested from the outbreak of war up to the eve of the Rising.⁶⁹ However, this electoral support also masked the profound changes which were underway. William O'Brien was given a glimpse into the nationalist realignment by Frank Gallagher, who reported on the Saint Patrick's Day parade in Cork five weeks before the Rising. Irish Volunteer companies representing Cork city and twenty-four

⁶⁵ de Roiste diaries, 20 June 1915 (BMH, WS 1698).

⁶⁶ *Cork Free Press*, 16 June 1915.

⁶⁷ O'Brien to Frewan, 29 January 1916 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/8, emphasis in the original document). O'Brien depended on his wife's wealth to subsidise the *Cork Free Press* which she accepted with a degree of stoic forbearance, 'Luckily we had no more anxiety about keeping up a paper that had swallowed a great deal of our means' (Sophie O'Brien, 'Recollections of a Long Life', CCCA, PR 25/3). Tim Healy recalls that 'O'Brien told me that he has sold £13,000 of his wife's investments to finance his movement' (letter dated 10 March 1911, in Healy, *Letters and Leaders vol ii*, p. 503).

⁶⁸ O'Brien to Frewan, 16 March 1916 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers 8554/16).

⁶⁹ Paul Bew, 'The Easter Rising: Lost Leaders and Lost Opportunities', in *The Irish Review*, no. 11 (Winter, 1991/1992), pp. 9-13.

county towns marched; there was one National Volunteer company. Gallagher estimated Irish Volunteers numbers at 1088 and 132 National Volunteers; 735 of the Irish Volunteers were armed with rifles, 136 with pikes and 217 were unarmed.⁷⁰ The organising committee split over a proposal to allow 6,000 British troops to join the Parade with the AFIL councillor William Kelleher voting in favour and his party colleagues J.C. Forde and John O'Callaghan opposed.⁷¹

The Easter Rising came as a complete surprise to Cork's revolutionary elite, as it did to the rest of the country. Even the ubiquitous Liam de Roiste, active in the Irish Volunteers, Sinn Féin and the Gaelic League (but not the IRB), recorded in his diary, four days before the Rising, that there would be no insurrection 'unless the Castle authorities force the issue'.⁷² On Easter Saturday his Cork city company of Irish Volunteers was ordered to march to Macroom on an undefined mission in heavy rain and with two police constables following on bicycles. There, they were gathered in the town square ('with the green dye from their hats running down their faces') and then dismissed by their commandment and told to return to Cork by train.⁷³ Following the Rising, the *Cork Examiner* immediately took the view that Connolly and the Irish Citizen Army were to blame for a 'communistic disturbance' and 'thought it quite out of keeping with the known ideas of Sinn Féiners'.⁷⁴ The *Examiner's* tone softened when it became evident that the Rising had far broader support than the socialist insurrection it at first suspected. The unionist *Cork Constitution*, however, was unambiguous in its condemnation, 'This alternative exhibition of the Nationalist cloven foot in all its hellishness'.⁷⁵

Although William O'Brien previously detected a change in sentiment amongst young nationalists, he later admitted that he was not aware of the metamorphosis

⁷⁰ Gallagher told O'Brien that 'The Sinn Féin [sic] county contingent had awfully ancient guns of every conceivable fathom. The City Corps' arms were quite modern. All the Volunteers carried ammunition belts which were filled.' (Gallagher to O'Brien, 18 March 1916, UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AS 85).

⁷¹ de Roiste diaries, 20 April 1916 (BMH, WS 1698).

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ G. White and B. O'Shea, *Baptised in Blood: The Formation of the Cork Brigade of the Irish Volunteers* (Cork, 2005), p.104.

⁷⁴ *Cork Examiner*, 28 April 1916.

⁷⁵ *Cork Constitution*, 29 April 1916.

which had transformed cultural nationalism into revolutionary separatism, 'We had not kept pace with the newer school of the Pearses, the O'Rahillys and the MacDonaghs who had replaced the dilettanti.'⁷⁶ The Easter Rising fulfilled his worst fears. In common with the *Cork Examiner*, he initially thought the Rising was a socialist revolution by 'sans-culottes and down and outs' and wired Frank Gallagher, 'Rely on your utmost discretion in dealing with the heartbreaking folly in Dublin. Confine yourself to arguing what might have been if our unity proposals published in *Free Press* in January of last year had been accepted.'⁷⁷ Gallagher told him that the editorial staff of the paper, which contained some ardent republicans, including himself, would not countenance attacks on Sinn Féin and told him that he had resignation letters in his pocket from the whole editorial staff if he insisted on a firm anti-Sinn Féin policy. They eventually reached a compromise that the paper would not attack Sinn Féin but equally would not print anything which might lead to its suppression under DORA regulations.⁷⁸ The leading article of the *Cork Free Press* on April 29th condemned both the Rising but also the government for its differential treatment of the Ulster and Irish Volunteers. It commended the leaders for their courage but not common sense, 'They were men of no mental balance, for some moon-calf ideal of their own they were ready to smash the whole Irish nation into blood and sorrow.'⁷⁹ The offices of the paper were raided by military and police searching for arms, and the paper commented, 'The only thing they found on the premises to wit, is the moral that newspaper offices are sometimes as empty of cannon as military scares of justification.'⁸⁰ In parliament, O'Brien and Tim and Maurice Healy raised the treatment of prisoners, questioned the execution of Thomas Kent in Cork,⁸¹ and the wrongful incarceration of prominent members of

⁷⁶ O'Brien, *Irish Revolution* (12 October 2016), p. 388.

⁷⁷ O'Brien to Gallagher, 26 April 1916 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AS 87).

⁷⁸ Gallagher, *Four Glorious Years*, p. 226. Following a meeting with the Irish Secretary Henry Duke, Tim Healy noted, 'Duke seems nervous about Co. Cork. He referred to the tone of O'Brien's paper saying it was giving him concern' (Healy *Letters and Leaders vol ii*, p. 576).

⁷⁹ *Cork Free Press*, 29 April 1916.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 13 May 1915.

⁸¹ Thomas Kent was the only nationalist, other than Sir Roger Casement, to be executed outside of Dublin following the Easter Rising. He and his three brothers were involved in an armed confrontation with police at the Kent family home near Fermoy, Co Cork where one his of brothers was killed and Thomas Kent shot and killed a RIC Head Constable.

Initially, at least, O'Brien had little sympathy for the rebels and thought that Redmond should have disowned John Dillon who spoke out in their favour, 'the trouble with Redmond is that knowing the right thing, he always consents to the wrong thing'.⁸³ O'Brien was aware, however, that the tectonic plates of Irish nationalism were shifting irrevocably, 'All the old forces are breaking up'. His analysis was predictable: he blamed the 'Mollies' for their 'utter corruption and overthrow of parliamentarians' which had led the 'young men', as he predicted, into precipitate action, 'I cannot think of the future except with black despair'.⁸⁴ Although he remained resolutely opposed to the actions of the rebels, his opinions were more aligned with at least some of their sentiments. His political career, which had started in the Fenian movement, had taught him that there was no clear-cut binary divide between revolutionary and constitutional nationalism and he was acutely aware of the deep sense of grievance and injustice that could drive young men and women to lose faith with the promise of incremental progress and seemingly interminable constitutional processes.

Ireland's relationship with Great Britain (or with England as nationalists preferred), and its position within the United Kingdom would, inevitably from then on, be viewed through the prism of the Easter Rising. The Irish war poet Francis Ledwidge's short poem *O'Connell Street* reflected the seismic changes underway:

A noble failure is not vain
But hath a victory of its own
A bright delectance from the slain
Is down the generations thrown.⁸⁵

The victory which was soon glimpsed in this 'noble failure', the metamorphosis in nationalist opinion which followed the Rising, was reflected in the public debate.

⁸² *Parliamentary debates* (Hansard), fifth series, *House of Commons*, 10 May 1916 (vol. 82, London, 630-6); 15 May 1916 (vol. 82, 1122); 18 May 1916 (vol. 82, 1799-82). Seven Irish Volunteers released from Frongoch internment camp thanked O'Brien for his efforts in gaining their release. (September 1916, UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AS 119).

⁸³ O'Brien to Frewan, 15 May 1916 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/5).

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 5 May 1916.

⁸⁵ anxietyetc.wordpress.com (18 May 2018).

The *Examiner*, which like most nationalist newspapers, had railed against the Rising and the rebels, calling it ‘the mad project’⁸⁶, within weeks was carrying advertisements for picture postcards of the sixteen executed leaders, ‘suitable for framing’.⁸⁷

The Rising had a profound effect on O’Brien. He told his old ally from his days in the UIL John O’Donnell, ‘I am extremely doubtful whether it will be worth the while of any self-respecting Irishman to remain any longer in corrupt public life of Ireland.’⁸⁸ Faced with the terrible destruction of his dreams of building a consensus for a self-governing Ireland within the United Kingdom, O’Brien, as he had done in the past, turned on the Irish people:

But I regret to say that the Irish people have been pleased to completely destroy any power of my own, that I can conceive no possibility of rebuilding the Nationalist Movement from its ruins until “other men on other time” arise to build our cause up again from its foundations upon the principles we have struggled so hard for in vain in our times.⁸⁹

Although O’Brien’s indefatigable spirit had begun to flag, the *idée fixe* which still drove him was opposing partition, and he viewed Lloyd George’s proposed Home Rule conference (what the *Cork Free Press* called ‘this mad plan for partition’)⁹⁰ as a further bid to foist what he considered an undemocratic abomination on the nation and he refused to attend. However, he wrote to Moreton Frewan in terms which suggested that he would be willing to attend the conference if the Ulster unionists also agreed to participate:

All my cards have long been on the table and if Ulstermen will only join us in Dublin, they can practically name their own terms. The only thing that is for me unthinkable is the exclusion of Ulster, in whole or in part, or (which is absolutely the same thing) “temporary” is a “temporary” that would last as long as Colonel Craig’s objection to his own accord with Dublin rule.⁹¹

⁸⁶ *Cork Examiner*, 28 April 1916.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 30 June 1916.

⁸⁸ O’Brien to John O’Donnell, 6 May 1916 (UCC, William O’Brien Papers, AS 88),

⁸⁹ O’Brien to Fr. Madden, 20 May 1916 (UCC, William O’Brien Papers, AS 90).

⁹⁰ *Cork Free Press*, 10 June 1916.

⁹¹ O’Brien to Frewan, William O’Brien Papers (NLI, 8556/5, 29 May 1916).

The fundamental changes in nationalism after the Rising were brought painfully home to O'Brien at an anti-partition meeting, which he convened, at the City Hall in Cork on 23rd June 1916. On such occasions, speaking in his Cork heartland, O'Brien could be sure of an enthusiastic and supportive audience, and where dissent from 'Mollie' hecklers would be robustly dealt with. On this occasion, however, a significant element of the hostile attendance were not Redmondite protagonists but young Sinn Féin supporters, many waving republican flags. When O'Brien rose to speak his words were drowned out by chanting and rebel songs.⁹² Liam de Roiste had little doubt what this event portended, 'O'Brien seems to think that the end of "the constitutional movement" has come. So, it has, and the ending, as expected, is very miserable.'⁹³

Many of those, mostly young, protesters who shouted down O'Brien and Maurice Healy, would in normal times, have taken the emigrant ship to America but were now forced to languish in an uncomfortable limbo. Most would not have been part of the 'revolutionary elite' or even active separatists before the Rising, and may, in the recent past, have been AFIL supporters. These were also young men who, for varied reasons, had resisted the call to join the colours and had been traduced by unionists such as Lord Dunraven and nationalists, including the AFIL MPs Maurice Healy and D.D. Sheehan who accused them of being 'shirkers' and 'slackers'. Some had endured the contempt of their families and communities who had seen brothers and neighbours enlist to fight and die. The popular Cork war song *Salonika* reflected the depth of feeling against the 'slackers':

Now when the war is over
What will the slackers do
They will be all around the soldiers
For the loan of a bob or two
And when the war is over
What will the soldiers do
They'll be walking around with a leg-and-a-half
And the slackers will have two⁹⁴

⁹² *Cork County Eagle and Munster Advertiser*, 1 July 1916.

⁹³ de Roiste diaries, 25 June 1916 (BMH, WS 1698).

⁹⁴ The 10th (Irish) Division, in which many Cork recruits served, was based in Salonika, the British Army base for the launch of the Balkans campaign. (Jeffrey, *Ireland and the Great War*, p. 59).

Although the motivations of those who enlisted have been closely examined, as has that of the revolutionary elite,⁹⁵ the complex psychological pressures which bore down on those young men who refused to enlist, and who were not politically or ideologically committed in the twenty-one months from the start of the war to the Easter Rising, has received scant attention from historians. For many, torn between conflicting loyalties and emotions, and without the comfort of a developed ideological hinterland, the Easter Rising provided a form of catharsis. It offered an exculpation of residual feelings of confusion and shame relating to their refusal to join the war effort; it provided a ready-made cast of heroes and villains to be venerated or despised; and it gave the opportunity to be part of a noble and historic cause to which they could direct their idealism and virility, and which increasingly attracted the support of the wider nationalist community. Also, as George Dangerfield observed, ‘the great political effect of the Easter Rising was that it generated impatience in a living generation’.⁹⁶ Against the perception of this heroic enterprise stood the Irish parliamentary party, increasingly caricatured as tired, corrupt, inept and unable to deliver on its central policy of Home Rule.⁹⁷ O’Brien’s egregious attacks on the leadership triumvirate of Redmond, Dillon and Devlin and his characterisation of the Irish party as venal place-hunters, had gone some way to undermining support for constitutional politics. However, as the Cork anti-partition meeting indicated, the AFIL’s attempts to differentiate itself from the Irish party failed, and both parties were swept up in the post-Rising maelstrom and the backlash against the Home Rule movement.

It was not just a romantic identification with those Yeatsian ‘grey vivid faces’, which changed public opinion. For, as David Fitzpatrick argues, police reports ‘that one week of physical force did more for the cause of Ireland than a century of Constitutional agitation’ reflected a turning away from the Irish parliamentary party

⁹⁵ For discussions relating to enlistment see Fitzpatrick, ‘The Logic of Collective Sacrifice’; Jeffrey, *Ireland and the Great War*; and Denman, *Ireland’s Unknown Soldiers*. R.F. Foster has written a penetrating analysis of the lives of the revolutionary elite in *Vivid Faces*.

⁹⁶ G. Dangerfield. *The Damnable Question: A Study in Anglo-Irish Relations* (Boston, 1976), p. 218.

⁹⁷ James McConnel argues that, before the Easter Rising, the Irish party was not perceived as corrupt, and it was only after 1916 that this perception took hold and, even then, was related to the payment of parliamentary salaries rather than any evidence of widespread graft. (James McConnel, ‘Jobbing with Tory and Liberal’ Irish Nationalists and the Politics of Patronage 1880-1914’ in *Past & Present*, No. 188 (August 2005), p. 123).

and accelerated a national trend that was already underway.⁹⁸ Before the Rising this disenchantment related primarily to the party's support for the war and recruitment. In Cork, however, this bifurcation had already taken place over the previous decade culminating in the rise of the AFIL. One of the most significant failures of the O'Brien and his party, however, was that it was unable to persuade enough dissidents, outside of Cork, to their banner. Only there was the party able to act as a lightning rod for discontent with the status quo. However, there is no evidence to suggest that support for constitutional politics was weaker in Cork than elsewhere (and the AFIL was a resolutely constitutional party), or that the metaphorical gulf that AFIL supporters had to cross between a rejection of parliamentarianism and the embrace of armed separatism was less than for other nationalists. But that tradition of heterodox nationalism, which had nurtured O'Brien and the AFIL up to the outbreak of war, now turned away from incremental change and towards the embrace of a more vigorous and idealistic polity.

⁹⁸ Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, p. 109.

CHAPTER SIX

'I move that a warm note of thanks be inscribed on our gravestones': The End of the All for Ireland League, 1916-18

The period from the Rising to the early months of 1917 witnessed an extraordinary period of uncertainty and flux in Irish nationalism. Public opinion swung rapidly from shock and hostility to reverence for the executed leaders and hesitant support for a nascent form of nationalism which was beginning to emerge from the maelstrom of the Rising. The popular historical narrative that has evolved in the century after 1916 is Yeatsian: that after the Easter Rising things 'changed and changed utterly', in an inexorable progression towards revolutionary separatism and eventual independence. In the immediate aftermath of the Rising, however, although it was evident that change was coming, its nature was still unclear, and the tributaries of advanced nationalism had yet to merge. The Irish parliamentary party, tainted by its support for an increasingly unpopular war and doubts about its ability to deliver Home Rule, faced an existential threat, but the allergen that would eventually destroy it had not, as yet, taken hold of the communal bloodstream. As Patrick Maume observes, the main advantage that the Irish party possessed was the absence of an alternative.¹ In the brief lacuna between the Rising and the resurrection of Sinn Féin in 1917 it was by no means certain, despite the change in public mood, that revolutionary separatism was capable of drawing the disparate strands of advanced nationalism into a broad-based movement.

The twin crises of the Home Rule bill and the war diminished the political space for compromise and exposed the fragile coalition at the core of the AFIL. Yet the Easter Rising had potentially opened up new opportunities for the party. The failure of the Home Rule conference in July 1916 and the humiliation of Redmond left the Irish party in its most vulnerable position since its reunification sixteen years before. The difficulty for the AFIL however, was that because of its alignment with the Irish party on the war and enlistment, it was now, in the eyes of many young nationalists, tainted with the failure of constitutional nationalism: an old and jaded movement

¹ Maume, *Long Gestation*, p.186.

exposed in sharp relief to the sanctified martyrs of the Rising and their young disciples. The West Cork by-election signalled the diminishing support for the AFIL and the rising power of separatism. The consolidation of Sinn Féin over the following two years as the political and even the moral voice of the nation prefigured not only the end of the Home Rule movement but also the AFIL. For William O'Brien there was also the bitter irony of Southern unionists' acceptance of Home Rule which Tim Healy described as 'Yielding up all the old fortresses of unionism'.² This however, was too late to prevent the annihilation of constitutional nationalism in the general election of 1918.

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Sinn Féin, with Griffith and other leading figures incarcerated, was in no position to provide leadership and the revolutionary movement itself was deeply divided. As Michael Laffan notes, the 'Irish Citizen Army was suspicious of the Irish Volunteers who in turn were wary of Griffith's Sinn Féin.'³ The ubiquitous Cork republican activist Liam de Roiste wondered 'who can speak for Ireland now?'⁴ There was a brief flowering of hope that a constitutional compromise could be achieved over the heads of Redmond and the Home Rule movement. Such an aspiration was given impetus by the failure of Lloyd George's Dublin conference in July 1916 – O'Brien and the AFIL refused to attend - which delivered another body blow to the Irish party and stripped it of even more credibility. As legitimacy slipped away from the Home Rule movement some of those who had long sought a 'third way' between the extremes of the nationalist and unionist traditions wondered if their hour had come. Was it possible to pull together dissentient constitutional nationalists, advanced nationalists who did not advocate physical force separatism and moderate unionists willing to accept self-government? This was, in effect, the elusive dream of the AFIL. John O'Donnell, a staunch O'Brien ally, one-time editor of *United Ireland* and former secretary of the UIL, wrote to O'Brien, 'I am about a fresh start. There is a marvellous transformation of feeling. Now is your time to take the traitors fore and

² Healy to O'Brien, 3 December 1917 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/12).

³ M. Laffan, 'The Unification of Sinn Féin in 1917' in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 17, no. 67 (March 1971), p. 356.

⁴ de Roiste diaries, 16 June 1916 (BMH, WS 1698).

aft. Of the thousands of those who blindly followed Redmond are looking to you and Mr Healy to help them from national destruction.’ He urged O’Brien to get the backing of the Northern Bishops and the Cardinal and call a national convention, ‘Hoping to see you soon at the head of a fresh movement to prevent the horrible holocaust.’⁵ O’Brien also hoped that a constitutional alternative to physical force separatism could be found in the context of a Parnellite consensus. He told the sympathetic Irish party MP Sir Thomas Esmonde ‘There is an opportunity for the National Movement on a basis broad enough to admit men like Dunraven at one extremity and the rational Sinn Féiners at the other, only a lead is waiting. None of the old group (including myself) could fill the bill.’⁶

However, the difficulties of organising a broad-based constitutional and anti-partition movement, eschewing both the Home Rule movement and physical-force separatism, were considerable. Herbert Pim, a mercurial Northern Irish Quaker, who had recently converted to both Catholicism and Irish nationalism and had been incarcerated for his role in organising the Irish Volunteers in Ulster, attempted to do so by invoking a form of ‘constitutional Sinn Féin’. This was a post-Rising attempt to articulate Griffith’s policies of separatism, abstention from the Imperial Parliament, economic self-reliance and cultural regeneration to be achieved by non-violent means. ‘Sinn Féin’, had, by the time of the Easter Rising, become a catch-all term to define rebels and advanced nationalists, and the Rising itself was commonly called the ‘Sinn Féin Rebellion’, although the corporeal or ‘real’ Sinn Féin had played no part.⁷ Therefore, as well as being a political party of ambiguous definition, which in many parts of the country had ceased to exist, ‘Sinn Féin’ had become a generic term of such nebulous elasticity that Pim hoped another form, in this case, ‘constitutional Sinn Féin’ was one that could be conjured up without departing too far from its origins. Sinn Féin’s rejection of what it considered to be a debased form of parliamentarianism, after all, did not necessarily include a rejection of constitutional politics, the only proviso being that the constitution it embraced could not be British. However, Pim was also aware that it was a stretch of the imagination

⁵ O’Donnell to O’Brien, 16 June 1916 (UCC, William O’Brien Papers, AS106).

⁶ O’Brien to Esmonde, 21 August 1916 (UCC, William O’Brien Papers, AS118).

⁷ Most British and Irish newspapers used the term ‘Sinn Féin Rebellion’, and the *Irish Times* published a handbook with that title. (*Sinn Féin Rebellion Handbook*, *Irish Times*, Dublin, 1917).

to attempt to rebrand Griffith's vision as 'constitutional Sinn Féin'. As he told O'Brien: 'You can appreciate that the introduction of the word Constitutional in the Sinn Féin policies was a daring move.'⁸ Such a manifestation would have been unthinkable two years later but, in 1916, given Sinn Féin's political antecedents, this did not seem completely improbable. However, in the febrile politics of post-Rising Ireland, although there may have been a political space for 'constitutional Sinn Féin', it would have required a polemicist and leader of sharper intellect and more astute political skills than Herbert Pim.

Pim had been incarcerated with Griffith in Reading gaol and claimed he had Griffiths' support for the direction he wished to take the party. Griffith however, writing from prison, begged to differ, 'My well-meaning but feather-headed friend Herbert Pim seems to be muddling up Sinn Féin a bit. However, we must trust in God to take him in hand and show him how to unmuddle it.'⁹ Pim sought to enlist the AFIL in his incipient movement and wanted permission to announce the withdrawal of O'Brien and the other AFIL MPs from Westminster. Displaying the kind of grandiose egotism that would later prove to be his downfall, he appealed to O'Brien, 'Give me the permission I ask, and I shall have you the most useful and popular man with our Sinn Féiners.'¹⁰ There is no record of O'Brien's reply, if any, but previous attempts to forge an alliance with Sinn Féin had foundered on the issue of abstention.¹¹

There should have been a greater chance of an alliance between the AFIL and the Irish Nation League (I.N.L.) which, at least in its early days, did not advocate abstention, was not separatist and was resolutely anti-partition. O'Brien made overtures to one of its leading figures, Laurence Casey; but it was personalities and not policies which proved to be insurmountable. The INL, bereft of significant political figures, came to be dominated by Laurence Ginnell, the maverick Irish party MP for Westmeath and an old adversary of O'Brien's, who wrote to Casey

⁸ Pim to O'Brien, 30 October 1916 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AS132).

⁹ Quoted in: Laffan, 'Unification of Sinn Féin', p. 70.

¹⁰ Pim to O'Brien, 30 October 1916 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AS132).

¹¹ O'Brien unsuccessfully attempted to foster closer links with Sinn Féin in 1907, and again in 1909-10, both attempts were facilitated by John Shawe-Taylor.

about the difficulties of forging an alliance between the AFIL and the INL, ‘My difficulties with my own friends are considerably increased by the apparent determination to make Mr Ginnell the apostle of the INL[...]while all other MPs are boycotted’.¹² O’Brien also thought the INL was too introspective, confining itself to ‘constitution-making which has not the slightest influence on the country’.¹³

There was, however, a more prosaic reason why O’Brien was reluctant to lead a new movement. He was now sixty-three years old and had been an MP, with a few self-imposed absences, for thirty-three years and had accepted the dying of his political light as a *fait accompli*.¹⁴ The Easter Rising had a profound effect on his outlook, ‘Ever since I heard of those horrible events I cannot drive Ireland out of my thoughts, day and night.’¹⁵ He told Moreton Frewan ‘One feels like being in the midst of the crash of worlds.’¹⁶ Although he remained publicly ebullient, privately he recognised that the narrow political ground that the AFIL had occupied had been lost in the post-Rising tumult and wrote to Tim Healy, ‘If Redmond and Co. are powerless, so are we. There is not a platform open to us anywhere, not even in Cork.’¹⁷ In a similar vein, Healy replied:

One does not like the idea of throwing up the sponge, but I sometimes feel like it since the Rising and the partition sequel. I never had the smallest feeling of despair before whereas now I feel like men must have felt after the Siege of Limerick.¹⁸

Despite O’Brien’s characteristic solipsism, he was aware, since his public humiliation at the anti-partition meeting on June 30th when he was shouted down by

¹² O’Brien to Casey, 26 September 1916 (UCC, William O’Brien Papers, AS122).

¹³ O’Brien to F.J. O’Connor, 16 December 1916 (NLI, William O’Brien Papers, 8506/1).

¹⁴ The physical strain on a diligent Irish MP could be considerable. Although O’Brien, among the wealthiest of nationalist MPs, did not share the impecunious existence of other Irish members who, in the 1880s, T.P. O’Connor recalled as ‘mostly silent, shabbily dressed and poor men’ who spent their weekends and evenings ‘wandering round the streets until they got to their rooms [...] few of them could afford the money for a theatre or music-hall’. (T.P. O’Connor, *Memoirs of an Old Parliamentarian* (London, 1929), pp. 61-6). O’Brien’s living conditions in London were far better, but the physical and mental strain of frequent long and gruelling journeys between Cork and London and lengthy parliamentary sessions (especially during the third Home Rule bill) took its toll.

¹⁵ O’Brien to John O’Donnell, 6 May 1916 (UCC, William O’Brien Papers, AS886).

¹⁶ O’Brien to Frewan, 7 December 1916 (NLI, Michael Mac Donagh Papers, 11140/46).

¹⁷ O’Brien to Healy, 14 October 1916 (NLI, William O’Brien Papers, 8556/11).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

young Sinn Féiners, that Irish nationalism, as well as undergoing a political metamorphosis, was also experiencing a historic generational shift in the balance of political forces and there was a widespread, if misleading, perception that the young were being lost to separatism.¹⁹ The AFIL dream of reconciling the two traditions was, in the current climate, unrealisable, largely due to the AFIL's pro-war policies which had alienated many of his supporters. Dunraven especially, with his support for conscription and public abuse of young nationalists who refused to enlist, was not a figure who could now command nationalist respect. A motion passed by Rathkeale Board of Guardians reflected nationalist opinion in Limerick, 'That we tell his lordship plainly that if conscription comes it will not be taken lying down, and that if instead of cruising about the Mediterranean, he was mixing among the Irish, he would know more of the present temper against conscription.'²⁰

Since its foundation in 1910, the AFIL, principally influenced by O'Brien, had relied on the iteration of several core beliefs to define itself. These were: reconciliation between the two traditions, self-government within the United Kingdom, land purchase, and latterly, opposition to partition. These beliefs were overlaid by a vituperative and obsessive hatred of 'the Mollies' and especially the Irish party leading triumvirate of Redmond, Dillon and Devlin. However, by the end of 1916 young men were about to be released from internment whose vision was very different. Their views had been forged by the experience of the Rising and in the crucible of Frongoch and English prisons. There was no disagreement between their perspective and those of the AFIL on opposing both partition and the Home Rule movement. However, as the republican vision developed over the next two years, other issues such as conciliation and land purchase came to be seen through the prism of the coming republic. The Parnellite template in which O'Brien still viewed any attempt to construct a new dispensation was, after the Easter Rising, increasingly anachronistic with many of the old verities appearing to be little more than shibboleths. However, as David Fitzpatrick caustically notes, many of the newly-forged separatists entered the altered political landscape with a degree of trepidation and confusion, 'They were often lost sheep than sheep in wolves'

¹⁹ James McConnel, 'The Franchise Factor in the Defeat of the Irish Parliamentary Party, 1885-1918 in *The Historical Journal*, vol 47, no. 2 (June 2004), pp. 355-77.

²⁰ *Limerick Leader*, 10 November 1916.

clothing'.²¹ Many of the old stalwarts of the constitutional movement regarded the young republicans as unworldly neophytes, as Tim Healy observed, 'All the Field Marshals in that army are just beyond their teens and are full of the balmiest strategy'.²²

These contrasting visions were about to be tested in the first major electoral challenge the AFIL was forced to contest since the local elections in Cork in 1914. On October 13th 1916 the AFIL MP for West Cork, James Gilhooly died. Gilhooly was the very embodiment of the AFIL and a challenge to the underlying presumption, as R.F. Foster argues, 'that the pure milk of the separatist tradition is the only sustenance that can produce an Irish nationalist worthy of the name'.²³ Gilhooly was an old Fenian who had made the journey from physical-force separatism to parliamentarianism, evolutionary political change and reconciliation: a testament that *amor patriae* did not necessarily have to end in blood sacrifice and the Banshee's Kiss. His demise, however, came at a time when that sentiment was about to be challenged. Soon after Gilhooly's death, O'Brien was contacted by Serjeant Alexander Sullivan, who expressed his interest in standing in the by-election as an independent and wanted O'Brien's support.²⁴ Sullivan was a relative of Tim Healy, part of the 'Bantry Gang' of influential nationalists who included Tim and Maurice Healy and William Martin Murphy, the proprietor of the *Irish Independent*, and had recently acted as Roger Casement's lead counsel at his trial for treason. However, any kudos which Sullivan might have garnered with nationalists was offset by his enthusiasm for the war and recruitment.²⁵ O'Brien replied, 'It never crossed my mind for a moment that you would consider plunging into the hell on earth of public life in Ireland at the moment.' He told Sullivan that the West Cork constituency, previously an AFIL stronghold, was almost unanimously Sinn Féin,

²¹ Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, p. 99.

²² Healy to O'Brien, 3 November 1918 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/22).

²³ R.F. Foster, 'Varieties of Irishness in idem, *Paddy and Mr Punch*, p. 26

²⁴ Sullivan to O'Brien, 18 October 1916 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AS127).

²⁵ Sullivan was one of the most outstanding advocates of his day, noted for his wit and erudition. In a celebrated exchange at the Court of Appeal where he was representing an appellant in a workman's injury case, he was asked by one of Lord Justices: 'Has your client never heard of the maxim, "Volenti non fit injuria?"', to which Sullivan replied, 'My Lord, in the small village in Antrim from which my client comes, they talk of little else.' His defence of Casement, however, was controversial, relying as it did on a technical defence relating to the provisions of the Treason act of 1351 which was rejected by the trial judges and the Court of Criminal Appeal.

although tendentiously, he suggested that this did not include support for a republic or physical force, and that any candidate not in sympathy with Sinn Féin sentiments had no chance of success and he could not, therefore, endorse his candidature.²⁶ O'Brien's assessment of Sinn Féin strength in West Cork was over-stated, but although Sullivan would, a few years earlier, have been accepted as an outstanding candidate, his pro-war views and support for enlistment, made him unelectable at this juncture.

The by-election took place before the release of the Frongoch detainees, and Sinn Féin at the time did not have a functioning organisation and therefore did not put forward a candidate. O'Brien hoped to take advantage of this by nominating Frank Healy who was an AFIL supporter but also a leading figure in the Irish American Alliance and had close links with the Hibernian Rifles who had played a minor role in the Rising. Healy was briefly incarcerated in the aftermath of the Rising but was released and excluded from Ireland. With this background, O'Brien was confident he could pass the patriotic test and take the West Cork seat.²⁷ Writing to Healy, now back in Ireland, he suggested that he should not surrender himself to the police, 'as your compulsory absence will speak as eloquently as any speech could do'.²⁸ The subterfuge that Healy had braved arrest by returning to Ireland to contest the by-election, however, was quickly exposed by a question in Parliament to the Home Secretary who revealed that Healy had promised to be of good behaviour if allowed back to Ireland to campaign and his exclusion had therefore been lifted.

O'Brien hoped that Healy might stand unopposed, but Daniel O'Leary, who had contested the seat in the last two general elections in 1910 as an Irish party candidate, stood, nominally as an independent, but with the backing of the Irish party. A third candidate, Michael Shipsey, whom O'Brien described as 'an all-for-Irelander more orthodox than myself',²⁹ stood as an O'Brienite independent, objecting that Frank Healy, an outsider, had been imposed on the constituency by

²⁶ O'Brien to Sullivan, 20 October 1916 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AS128).

²⁷ Sophie O'Brien notes that following the outbreak of war in 1914, 'A Queenstown lawyer [Frank Healy] attacked France [where her family lived] and praised Germany.' She suggested to William O'Brien that he may have been teasing. He replied that he thought Healy was in grim earnest (Sophie O'Brien Memoirs, September 191, NLI, Sophie O'Brien Papers, 5924).

²⁸ O'Brien to Healy, 2 October 1916 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/11).

²⁹ O'Brien, *Irish Revolution* (20 October 2016), p. 379.

O'Brien without a selection convention.³⁰ Tim Healy attempted to rally AFIL supporters with the claim that 'if they elected O'Leary it meant conscription for Ireland; if they elected Frank Healy, it meant no conscription but amnesty for prisoners'.³¹ Unwilling to let Frank Healy have sole custody of the Sinn Féin mantle, Shipsey declared that he had 'no objection to Mr Healy as a Sinn Féiner but that Mr Healy should not forget that there were other Sinn Féiners in West Cork besides himself'.³² Healy's candidature was repudiated by the Cork Irish Volunteer leader Tomás Mac Curtain, then incarcerated with Griffith in Reading gaol.³³ Herbert Pim, smarting at the rejection of his overtures to O'Brien, also refused to endorse Healy.³⁴ In the general election of December 1910, O'Leary lost the seat to Gilhooly by 259 votes. This result was now reversed, and O'Leary defeated Healy by fifty-six votes. A combination of doubts by Sinn Féin supporters about Healy's integrity, an intervention by the new Roman Catholic Bishop of Cork which was seen to be in O'Leary's favour, and Shipsey's candidature which took 370 votes mostly from Healy, bolstered the Redmondite vote.

O'Brien admitted that the AFIL, as a functioning party, had almost ceased to exist. He told a supporter 'I have no organisation whatsoever'.³⁵ There are no surviving records of AFIL branch structures, records or minutes, but press reports of AFIL branch meetings had been diminishing since 1915, and even the *Cork Free Press* did not carry branch reports, other than the occasional piece on the All for Ireland Club in Cork, or in July 1916, the All for Ireland Ladies Club annual outing to Courtmacsherry. The decline of the AFIL's political base can largely be attributed to the party's breach of communal nationalist solidarity in refusing to support the

³⁰ *Cork Examiner*, 3 November 1916. AFIL selection procedures for parliamentary elections were, at best, opaque. In some cases, e.g. Moreton Frewan's selection in North Cork in 1910, candidates were imposed on local branches without consultation. Healy's selection by O'Brien was therefore not unusual.

³¹ *Cork Examiner*, 15 November 1916.

³² *Cork Examiner*, 7 November 1916.

³³ O'Brien later claimed that he received a note from Griffith, 'Re our friend Frank Healy. I think the whole thing has been hideously mismanaged by our friends Pim, Tom Curtain and others. Tom Curtain's pronouncement was a totally unauthorised statement and has caused considerable annoyance among us. I think Sinn Féin should have remained absolutely aloof and I fear not doing so will be the cause of lamentable confusion and mischief' (quoted in O'Brien, *Irish Revolution* (12 October 2016), p. 387. There is no record of this document in the archives).

³⁴ *Cork Examiner*, 7 November 1916.

³⁵ O'Brien to Oliver Newall, 14 July 1916 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AS109).

Home Rule bill in 1914, but also its support for the war, and especially the presence of O'Brien, D.D. Sheehan and Lord Dunraven on recruitment platforms which resulted in a failure to differentiate itself from the Irish party and a political tradition that was now rapidly losing credibility and support.

The fissile coalition of support that was the bedrock of the AFIL, based on the land hunger of small tenant farmers and alienated sectors of both the rural and urban labour movements, had also begun to disintegrate. Through the efforts of O'Brien and Sheehan, Cork had the most significant uptake of land purchase after the 1903, and 1909 Land acts, and land reform therefore lost its political and electoral potency. Following the outbreak of the war, D.D. Sheehan's ILLA went into terminal decline. This was due to a rise in wages and living standards for the rural working class, in addition to what Pádraig G. Lane argues was the use of agrarian labour organisations, like the ILLA, as proxies by political parties, to the detriment of their primary role in representing the interests of farm labourers.³⁶ This led to the replacement of the ILLA by the Irish Transport and General Workers Union in 1918 as the principal organising force for agricultural labour with thirteen branches and over 700 members in Cork alone.³⁷ By 1915 Sheehan's ILLA was a hollowed out shell, and the AFIL effectively lost its most potent affiliate. Many Cork trade unionists were suspicious of O'Brien's attempts to align himself with Labour interests.³⁸ His preference for the Conservative Party over the Liberals; his opposition to Lloyd George's 'People's Budget' and social reforms such as the National Insurance act and the old age pension; and the close ties between Tim and Maurice Healy and the hate figure of the labour movement William Martin Murphy, all suggested that the interest and affinities of O'Brien and the AFIL leadership were more aligned with capital than labour. The re-emergence of the ITGWU in 1912, with its radical economic and political agenda and its support for an aligned socialist Labour Party, was also a direct challenge to the AFIL in Cork city.

³⁶ Lane, 'Land and Labour', pp. 90-106.

³⁷ Bradley, *Farm Labourers*, p. 40.

³⁸ In 1905 O'Brien put labour reforms at the top of his political agenda, proposing a resolution at a nationalist meeting that: 'the labourers' question is the first matter of Irish interest and urgency.' (*Cork Examiner*, 11 September 1905). Many on the left accused O'Brien of using labour rhetoric only when it suited him.

Although the AFIL had at least attempted to engage with labour issues, it failed to understand the other emerging social movement, that of women's rights and suffrage. Although O'Brien supported women's suffrage, the party, other than a Ladies' section whose functions were primarily social, made no effort to engage with women, either as candidates or supporters. Senia Pašeta has recently argued that the failure of the Home Rule movement to mobilise women's votes or to acknowledge their growing power, was a significant factor in its annihilation.³⁹ The Irish party actively opposed female suffrage until it became clear by 1918 that Irish women over the age of thirty would get the vote.⁴⁰ Joseph Devlin then welcomed female enfranchisement whilst decrying Sinn Féin's policy of disenfranchising women by abstaining from the Imperial parliament.⁴¹ Cork unionists were more successful in mobilising women voters. The Cork Women's Unionist Alliance held several meetings which were addressed by the two unionist candidates. To illustrate the fraught atmosphere during the 1918 general election campaign, one of the candidates, Daniel Williams, told a rally that he had encountered two groups of women on the way. One group had sung the 'Red White and Blue', while the other had pelted him with mud.⁴²

Republican women were at the forefront of the independence struggle. Sinn Féin, and its affiliate Cumman na mBan, vigorously campaigned for women's votes in the 1918 general election. Women had played a central role in the republican struggle since the regeneration of Sinn Féin in 1917. As Peter Hart has argued, 'Essentially, women did just about everything men did. Women fought, drilled, canvassed, collected and were willing to go to gaol for it.'⁴³ A vibrant branch of Cumman na mBan was established in Cork in 1914 led by the redoubtable Mary McSwiney (sister of the Cork Lord Mayor Terence McSwiney who died on hunger strike in 1920). Although banners bearing the legend 'By Women, For Women, Concerning Women' adorned Cumann na mBan meetings, the organisation generally avoided social and economic issues relating to women which might have been contentious

³⁹ Senia Pašeta, 'Feminist Political Thought and Activism in Revolutionary Ireland, c. 1880-1918' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, XXVII (2017), pp. 193-210.

⁴⁰ McConnel, 'Franchise Factor', pp. 361-4.

⁴¹ *Irish Independent*, 24 September 1918.

⁴² *Cork Examiner*, 13 December 1918.

⁴³ Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies*, p. 236.

for an electorate whose views on women's rights had yet to be tested and the republican movement adhered to a narrow patriotic agenda. In the last two years of the war, gender issues in Cork assumed a significance previously unheard of in a charged atmosphere of political conflict and moral panic. There were several violent confrontations between Sinn Féin supporters, including Cumman na mBan, and 'Separation Women' whose husbands were serving with the armed forces and who deeply resented the republicans' opposition to the war and recruitment. On one occasion this escalated into a full-blown riot in which police charged protestors with fixed bayonets resulting in one fatality.⁴⁴

The arrival of a large American fleet in Queenstown following the U.S. entry to the war in 1917 resulted in an atmosphere of near hysteria as thousands of U.S. sailors descended on Queenstown and Cork city. Amid accusations of moral turpitude aimed at women who fraternised with sailors, a vigilance committee was established and there were assaults both on sailors and women and, for a period, the city was placed out of bounds to the sailors.⁴⁵ One such assault resulted in the prosecution of a member of the Irish Volunteers. The woman he had punched in the face told the court that she and her friends were walking with several American sailors when the protagonist approached her and shouted, 'I won't let you pass, the priest of the parish has sent us out to prevent you going with the American sailors'.⁴⁶ The hostility between the locals and the sailors also elided into the simmering political tensions in the city. The sailors resented the large number of young Irish men who refused to enlist and their antipathy was reciprocated with Sinn Féin supporters harassing and abusing sailors with cries of 'Remember Dublin' and 'Up the Huns'.⁴⁷ The *Skibbereen Eagle* commented, 'The Cork "Republicans" salute the world's greatest Republic with paving stones and "Up the Huns" and "The Soldier's Song" [the republican anthem], sung by men, who whatever else they may be, will never be soldiers.'⁴⁸

⁴⁴ *Cork Examiner*, 25 June 1917.

⁴⁵ *Skibbereen Eagle*, 8 September 1917.

⁴⁶ *Cork Examiner*, 29 September 1917,

⁴⁷ Borgonovo, *War and Revolution*, pp. 130-3.

⁴⁸ *Skibbereen Eagle*, 8 September 1917.

In the wake of the West Cork defeat, O'Brien finally decided to close the *Cork Free Press*. His reflections on the paper's demise was a familiar trope when faced with adversity: he blamed the country for its lack of vision. He told the prominent AFIL supporter William MacDonald, 'My resources for keeping the paper going are at last exhausted[...]It is the unfortunate country that will be the loser for its own folly in letting the paper die just when our principles proved to be its only safety.'⁴⁹ The last edition of the paper, although it had earlier endorsed Sinn Féin, now railed angrily against it, 'The moment the two sets of men known as Sinn Féiners come to realise they are pursuing a course as diametrically opposite as 'constitutional' tea table treason is to armed revolution, their momentary union will turn to bitter antagonism and it is the 'abstentionist' representing no genuine sentiment in the country who will infallibly go to the wall.'⁵⁰

Without a political organisation or newspaper, the West Cork by-election effectively marked the end of the AFIL as a functioning political party. There were still seven MPs ostensibly claiming the party designation in addition to AFIL councillors across Cork city and county, but O'Brien had long felt that the burden of keeping both the party and the *Cork Free Press* fell disproportionately on his shoulders. He wrote to Moreton Frewan, 'The combination is too much for one man without an organisation, without a single daily newspaper[...]and without a single capable parliamentary colleague (excepting the occasional meteoric outbursts of our dear friend Tim [Healy]). Tim can shine in such a vacuum – I cannot.'⁵¹ O'Brien had played an active role in Irish political life for almost forty years, but he was aware that the fulcrum of Irish nationalism was shifting and his dream of a new kind of politics was dead. It was left to Liam de Roiste to record the party's obituary in his diaries privately, 'The All for Ireland League is defunct'.⁵²

⁴⁹ O'Brien to Mac Donald, 12 December 1916 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AS144).

⁵⁰ *Cork Free Press*, 9 December 1916.

⁵¹ Quoted in Schilling, *William O'Brien*, p. 187.

⁵² de Roiste diaries, 20 December 1916 (BMH, WS 1698).

William O'Brien was a politician of extraordinary contradictions, and, in the last two years of his political career, these would become glaringly obvious. Firstly, for all his strictures against abstention and his belief in parliament, O'Brien developed a deep antipathy to Westminster and rarely attended the Commons. He told Healy 'I have given up attending parliament except for the one purpose of struggling against Partition.'⁵³ Although he held fast to his principles: conciliation, self-government, land purchase and opposition to partition, his vision of a better Ireland was increasingly at odds with the *zeitgeist*. He was also wholly alienated from the Prime Minister and government. Of Lloyd George, he wrote to Moreton Frewan, 'Since my interview with him about Partition, I have never doubted that he is an imposter and as weak as water despite all his platform bounce.'⁵⁴

Secondly, despite an almost messianic belief in round table conferences as the solution to even the most intractable problems, O'Brien, when presented with the opportunity to participate, refused to do so. He rejected Lloyd George's invitation to attend the Dublin Home Rule conference following the Easter Rising, and when, the following year, the prospect of a Convention to consider Ireland's future was mooted as an alternative to immediate Home Rule and partition, he cast doubt both on its utility and the motivation of its progenitors. His principal objection and reason for not attending the Convention was that the configuration of delegates meant that there was an overwhelming pro-partition majority, what he called 'a mob of Hibernian partisans'.⁵⁵ O'Brien begged Dunraven to write to *The Times* and propose a smaller and more balanced Convention.⁵⁶ He agreed to meet the Irish Secretary Henry Duke and put forward his nominees for a 'conference of Irish notables' to include the Lord Mayor of Dublin, the Catholic and Protestant Archbishops of

⁵³ O'Brien to Healy, 25 July 1917 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/17).

⁵⁴ O'Brien to Frewan, 7 December 1916 (NLI, Michael Mac Donagh Papers, 11140/4).

⁵⁵ O'Brien, *Irish Revolution* (13 October 2016), p. 325. The proposed representation for the Convention was five delegates each for the Irish party, Sinn Féin and Ulster unionists; two each for the AFIL and the Irish Labour party; the remaining ninety delegates were nationalist and Ulster unionists local government representatives who, O'Brien argued, would be overwhelmingly in favour of partition.

⁵⁶ O'Brien to Dunraven, 9 July 1917 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/17).

Dublin, Lord Londonderry, Lord Dunraven, General Sir Henry Gough (who led the ‘Curragh Mutiny’), Willy Redmond MP, Arthur Griffith, Eoin Mac Neill and Lord Northcliffe (the proprietor of *The Times*). His proposal was for a small ‘Business Convention’ which would agree proposals to be put to a referendum, and he wrote to William Martin Murphy to ask for his and the *Independent*’s support.⁵⁷ He still held fast to the view that a majority of unionists and nationalists would vote for a moderate all-Ireland settlement if given the opportunity:

The Orange section would no doubt, dread that the referendum would produce so overwhelmingly a majority in favour of any fair agreement that further controversy would be impossible. However, the Orange extremists, like the Sinn Féin extremists, might safely be discounted if the mass of the Irish unionists closed with the offer of a magnificent future such as we would be able to make to them.⁵⁸

Healy agreed that a smaller conference of twelve to twenty delegates would be preferable but he, now busy with his legal career and increasingly acting as an advocate for republican prisoners, was uninterested in attending the convention.⁵⁹ He said that he had spoken to the Irish Secretary Henry Duke who told him that the large number of delegates was forced on him to avoid charges of ‘rigging’ the convention. He added that he asked Duke to free the republican prisoners but, ‘I could detect a fear that if he did so, the Belfasters would not attend’.⁶⁰ Lloyd George wrote to O’Brien with an appeal to attend.⁶¹ Dunraven also asked him to reconsider and reminded him that he had repeatedly called for a conference and, if he attended, could move a resolution that any finding of the convention should be put to the Irish people in a referendum.⁶² O’Brien was unshakeable and, much to his chagrin,

⁵⁷ O’Brien to Healy, 3 June 1917 (NLI, William O’Brien Papers, 8556/16). Healy told O’Brien: ‘The sheep sent up by the County Councils would probably be afraid of being mobbed on their return if they agreed to partition and no doubt will be plied *ad interim* with sufficient conjurations to keep their backbones stiff’ (Healy to O’Brien, 11 June 1917, NLI, William O’Brien Papers, 8556/12).

⁵⁸ O’Brien to Healy, 5 July 1917 (NLI, William O’Brien Papers, 8556/17).

⁵⁹ Healy to O’Brien, 11 June 1917 (NLI, William O’Brien Papers, 8556/12).

⁶⁰ Healy to O’Brien, 7 June 1917 (NLI, William O’Brien Papers, 8556/12).

⁶¹ Lloyd George to O’Brien, 20 July 1917 (UCC, William O’Brien Papers, AS157).

⁶² Dunraven to O’Brien, 20 June 1917 (NLI, William O’Brien Papers, 8554/16).

Dunraven decided to accept an invitation to participate. O'Brien told him he knew his decision was 'inspired by the noblest and most patriotic motives'.⁶³

The inertia of the convention was counterpoised by the parallel narrative unfolding in the country: the rapid growth of Sinn Féin as a viable political party, the humiliation of the Irish party in the East Clare by-election,⁶⁴ and the merging of Sinn Féin and the Volunteers as the political and military wings of a united movement with popular and clerical support. Michael Collins' single sentence tribute over Thomas Ashe's coffin seemed to put the cleavage in nationalism into sharp relief: 'Nothing additional remains to be said. That volley which we have just heard is the only speech which is proper to make above the grave of a dead Fenian'.⁶⁵ Opponents of the Convention presented this terse requiem as a contrast to the dreary and verbose deliberations of a system and a caste from which legitimacy was quickly ebbing.

For O'Brien, however, the *volte-face* by Lord Midleton and the Southern unionists in November 1917 seemed to deliver most of what he had hoped for since his espousal of conciliatory politics fifteen years earlier. Tim Healy wrote to alert him that Lord Midleton (the leader of the Southern unionist delegation) had submitted a paper to the Convention accepting a generous measure of Home Rule.⁶⁶ There was a bitter sense of irony in Midleton's precipitous acceptance of Irish self-government, because for years O'Brien had pleaded in vain with him and other unionists to join him in building an alternative to intransigent nationalism and unionism. There had

⁶³ O'Brien told Dunraven 'Devlin and Co, are greater fools than I take them for if they do not even fawn upon you to take the chair' (O'Brien to Dunraven, 9 July 1917, NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/16).

⁶⁴ The by-election was caused by the death of Willie Redmond, who was killed in action on the Western Front. The Sinn Féin candidate Eamon de Valera, recently released from prison following his part in the Easter Rising, took the seat by a large majority over the Irish party candidate.

⁶⁵ Thomas Ashe, a prominent member of the I.R.B. and the Volunteers, died in Mountjoy prison in September 1917 as a result of forced feeding during a hunger strike.

⁶⁶ Healy to O'Brien, 3 December 1917 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/12). Lord Midleton's original proposal, made in November 1917, envisaged an all-Ireland Home Rule parliament with minority safeguards for Ulster, Irish control of internal taxes, administration, legislation, judiciary and the police, but not of customs and excise. This was rejected by both Ulster unionists and nationalists who wanted full fiscal autonomy. Lord Midleton then put forward an amended proposal conceding control over excise duties and proposing that customs and defence be decided by a commission when the war ended.

been no reciprocal gesture of conciliation from Southern unionists who maintained an implacable opposition to Home Rule and had administered the *coup de grâce* to Lloyd George's Home Rule conference in 1916.⁶⁷ However, faced with a rising tide of separatism, and the possibility of the imminent implementation of the Home Rule act, which would have left Southern unionists adrift in a Catholic-nationalist three-province state, Lord Midleton at last accepted self-government.⁶⁸

The convention cruelly exposed the cleavage within nationalism and the powerlessness of the Home Rule movement juxtaposed with the vigour and purpose of Sinn Féin and the Volunteers. There was one issue, however, which united most Irish nationalists: the threat of conscription. Lloyd George in a vain hope to make conscription more palatable to nationalists sought to link it to the promise of Home Rule. For the government, and unionists, the issue was clear: recruitment of Irish Catholic nationalists was significantly lower than that of unionists and far below any other part of the United Kingdom. This, according to Dunraven, resulted in England coming to hold nationalist Ireland in contempt.⁶⁹ In a letter to the *Irish Independent*, he argued that while every effort should be made to encourage voluntary enlistment, 'it should be made clear that those who did not come in must be fetched'.⁷⁰ Nationalists, however, maintained that Ireland could not be treated as any other part of the United Kingdom because there was no parity of esteem. As D.D. Sheehan, the AFIL MP for mid-Cork (now medically discharged having served with the Munster Fusiliers at the Western Front), argued in a Commons debate in April 1918:

We heard that because you applied Conscription to England, Scotland, and Wales there is no reason also why it should not be applied to Ireland. There is every reason in the world. You have never applied to Ireland in the past the same treatment that you have applied to those other countries, and therefore the same argument cannot apply to Ireland as to them.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Alvin Jackson convincingly argues that Southern unionists effectively sabotaged the prospect of a compromise in 1916 because they erroneously judged that the Home Rule was already dead (Jackson, *Home Rule*, p. 172).

⁶⁸ O'Brien to Dunraven, 31 August 1920 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/18).

⁶⁹ Dunraven to O'Brien, 10 March 1918 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/18).

⁷⁰ *Irish Independent*, 19 April 1918.

⁷¹ *Parliamentary debates* (Hansard), fifth series, House of Commons, 9 April 1918 (vol. 104, London, 1405).

In a *tour de force* during the same debate, Tim Healy condemned Lloyd George for his ‘*Daily Mail* style’. The Prime Minister, he said, claimed that he was forced to increase the recruitment age in Britain to fifty while allowing ‘fine strapping young Papists of twenty-one to idle about in Ireland’. The inconvenient truth Healy argued, which was ignored by the Prime Minister and the *Daily Mail*, was that ‘It must be remembered that Englishmen are fighting for a free country. Are we to continue to fight for the enslavement of ours?’⁷² O’Brien, in a rare Commons appearance prompted by a debate on conscription, told the Prime Minister that the Military Service bill ‘is a declaration of war against Ireland’.⁷³ O’Brien and Tim Healy, at de Valera’s insistence (an indication of the changing balance of power), attended a conference at the Mansion House in Dublin on 19th and 20th April 1918 to coordinate opposition to conscription. The conference, convened by the Lord Mayor of Dublin, covered the spectrum of nationalist opinion: in addition to O’Brien and Healy, John Dillon and Joseph Devlin represented the Irish party; Eamon de Valera and Arthur Griffith, Sinn Féin; and Thomas Johnson and Michael Egan represented the Irish Labour party. O’Brien was deputed to lead a delegation to meet the Irish Catholic hierarchy who were holding a parallel conference in Maynooth. They returned later in the day with the support of Cardinal Logue and the Archbishops and Bishops of Ireland who condemned the attempt to introduce conscription and asserted the right of the Irish people ‘to resist by all the means that are consonant with the law of God’. They decreed that a mass should be held in every Catholic church in Ireland the following Sunday where arrangements would be put in place for the faithful to take a pledge against conscription.⁷⁴

In Cork, the biggest demonstration in living memory marched behind a banner, ‘Cork’s Resolve – Death Before Conscription’.⁷⁵ Trade unions organised a general strike and, faced with this level of opposition and the failure of the ‘German Plot’⁷⁶ to disrupt the broad front that had emerged conscription in Ireland was doomed and

⁷²Ibid, 9 April 1918 (vol. 104, 1437).

⁷³Ibid, 9 April 1918 (vol. 104, 1362).

⁷⁴ *Cork Examiner*, 15 April 1918.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 16 April 1918.

⁷⁶ The ‘German Plot’ was an alleged conspiracy between Sinn Féin and Germany to launch another armed insurrection. British authorities used the opportunity to intern dozens of prominent republicans including de Valera and Griffith.

the Mansion House Conference was, as O'Brien was quick to point out, an unbridled success as an example of united nationalist action. Healy noted: 'There was nothing in O'Connell's time to compare with Irish unanimity on Conscription. For the first time, Nationalists have all the selfish elements on their side, which were heretofore the buttress of Castle rule'.⁷⁷ This was O'Brien's first direct contact with Dillon and Devlin in many years. After Redmond's death the previous month he wrote to Dunraven, 'If Dillon is elected leader, he will only be chief mourner at a funeral. If Devlin, he is a corner boy who, like all bullies, is only brave when he has the mob at his back'.⁷⁸ O'Brien's meeting at the Mansion House did not change his view of his old enemy, 'Mr. Dillon did not like the Conference and was with reluctance drawn into it[...]. His only active concern with our affairs was the determination to retain his hold on the administration of the vast sums contributed on our first appeal. He was apparently obsessed with the suspicion that they would be spent on armaments.'⁷⁹ However, as the war drew to an end, the political landscape was shifting, exposing the O'Brien –Dillon feud as trivial and irrelevant.

iii

As John Borgonovo's recent study shows, the war transformed Cork, and political life was changed beyond recognition.⁸⁰ By the end of the conflict the Royal Munster Fusiliers had suffered over 3,000 casualties on the Western Front and Gallipoli, most from Cork, and those that survived returned to a changed country.⁸¹ During the war, a popular Cork ballad, *Salonika*, glorified the war efforts of local soldiers and vilified the 'slackers' who refused to join up. In 1918 a new verse was added which reflected the changing times:

And never marry a soldier
A sailor or a Marine
But keep your eye on the Sinn Féin boy
With his yellow, white and green.

⁷⁷ Healy, *Letters and Leaders vol. ii*, p. 596.

⁷⁸ O'Brien to Dunraven, 12 March 1918 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/17).

⁷⁹ O'Brien, *Irish Revolution* (12 November 2016), p. 365.

⁸⁰ Borgonovo, *War and Revolution*.

⁸¹ G. Whyte and B. O'Shea, *A Great Sacrifice: Cork Servicemen who died in the Great War* (Cork, 2010), p. 61.

Up to the end of 1916 there was no functioning Sinn Féin organisation in Cork. An inaugural meeting in December of that year had an inauspicious start. Liam de Roiste recalls that that he reluctantly accepted chairmanship of the branch after several others had refused, 'It appeared to me that, while it was desired to establish a branch, very few were prepared to work for it[...]it was not too promising a beginning.'⁸² In a remarkably short time however, Sinn Féin spread wide and deep roots in Cork and, by the end of 1917, the party had fifty-six branches and over five thousand members.⁸³ In many areas dual membership of Sinn Féin and the Volunteers was high,⁸⁴ and police reports indicate that there was often no difference between Sinn Féin and the Irish Volunteers.⁸⁵

As the end of the war approached, Sinn Féin in Cork had fostered extensive clerical, if not episcopal, support; dominated the resurgent ITGWU; had the support of some business interests; was able to count on prominent intellectuals like Professor Alfred O'Rahilly and Professor Andrew Stockley of University College Cork, in addition to a large part of the student body; and forged a powerful coalition with the Irish Volunteers and Cumann na mBan.⁸⁶ Although the Irish party and its affiliates still held significant political influence, Sinn Féin's young activists brought the kind of energy and imagination to the political struggle that constitutional nationalism so palpably lacked. Sinn Féin took a leading role in struggles which intimately concerned the people of Cork such as the food shortage crisis of 1917 and the threat of conscription in 1918. They also brought discipline and a unity of purpose to a city and county inured to the bitter O'Brienite-Redmondite conflict. As the end of the war came near and a general election approached, Sinn Féin dominated the political landscape, and the last vestiges of power, influence and legitimacy slipped inexorably from Dillon and the Irish party.

The labour movement was also in the process of transformation, triggered not only by the consolidation of the Labour party under Thomas Johnson's leadership, but also by the relatively powerful position that workers enjoyed due to wartime

⁸² de Roiste diaries, 3 December 1916 (BMH, WS 1698).

⁸³ CI Monthly Report, June-December 1917 (CO 904/102-3, UCC)

⁸⁴ Daniel McCarthy (BMH, WS 1457), p. 4; Denis Lordan (BMH, WS 1457), p.1.

⁸⁵ CI Monthly Report, September 1917 (CO 904/102-3, UCC).

⁸⁶ Borgonovo, *War and Revolution*, pp. 213-21.

shortages of labour and increased demand in some sectors of the economy. The galvanising effects of mass political action relating to labour disputes and the conscription crisis radicalised labour politics. As has been shown, the labour movement in the Cork city split into AFIL and Redmondite factions following the 1909 labour unrest. The decline of the AFIL from the start of the war and the rise of a more militant labour movement finally laid this bitter division to rest. The impetus came primarily from the resurgence of the ITGWU which, in Cork, benefitted from the inspirational leadership of Denis Houston, Cathal O'Shannon and Tadhg Barry.⁸⁷ This precipitated the reunification of the two trades councils in Cork in 1916 as the Cork District Trades and Labour Council which now had a much more ideological and confrontational tone.

The changed political landscape had already brought about the effective demise of the AFIL, who now awaited the general election to finally exit the stage. The old AFIL-Redmondite conflict had lost its power to engender the passions of pre-war days. O'Brienite councillors in local government still sat within the spectral framework of the AFIL but enjoyed an *esprit de corps* with the UIL in the face of the young political and social revolutionaries who held both parties in little-disguised contempt and hungrily eyed their opportunity to consign the *ancien regime* to history. By the beginning of 1918, O'Brien had come within the gravitational pull of Sinn Féin. He wrote to Frank Gallagher 'My own views as looker-on is simply this: The Sinn Féiners have saved the country from Partition, from Conscription and Parliamentary Corruption and they were the only force in Ireland that could have done it.'⁸⁸ However, a more detailed analysis of the source material, primarily the extensive correspondence between O'Brien and Tim Healy, reveals a more nuanced picture and a great deal of doubt about Sinn Féin's competence and readiness to take the place of the Home Rule movement. In July 1917, for example, O'Brien wrote that Sinn Féin speeches during recent by-elections 'revolt the common sense of the

⁸⁷ As well as being an organiser for the ITGWU Tadhg Barry was a journalist who worked on the *Cork Free Press* as a sports correspondent and later as a columnist on the *Southern Star*. He also wrote one of the first textbooks on hurling, *Hurling and How to Play It*. He was active in the Irish Volunteers and elected to Cork Corporation in 1920. He was interned, first on Spike Island and then at Ballykinlar Camp where he was shot dead by a sentry in November 1921, the last casualty of the War of Independence. Michael Collins returned home from the Treaty negotiations to attend his funeral in Cork.

⁸⁸ O'Brien to Gallagher, 3 January 1918 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AS161).

average elector and turns voters against Valera [sic].⁸⁹ O'Brien's opinion of de Valera, who he first met at the Mansion House Conference, was less than flattering and spectacularly wrong, 'de Valera is personally a charming man as well as an honest man, but he is too good for the rough world of old parliamentary hands, and will no doubt subside into a meek instrument of Dillon's'.⁹⁰

Healy and O'Brien's less than flattering assessment of Sinn Féin was reciprocated. Liam de Roiste recorded that he and other leading members of the party in Cork were approached by Cathal O'Shannon, who became a dominant figure in both the republican and labour movements in Cork after his release from prison in 1917. He proposed, on the instructions of the national Sinn Féin leadership, that O'Brien should be asked to move the writ for the East Cavan by-election (Griffith had already written to O'Brien asking him to do so because Dillon had refused to move the writ)⁹¹. de Roiste's response, 'We in Cork, do not want Sinn Féin to be identified with O'Brien and his supporters, in politics, for any purpose',⁹² indicated the animosity that still ran deep in republican circles because of O'Brien's support for the war and recruitment and a generic distrust of the constitutional nationalist movement. O'Brien's attempts to influence Sinn Féin policy also fell on deaf ears, and the leading republican Sean T. O'Kelly rebuffed his attempts to persuade Sinn Féin of the benefits of Dominion Home Rule, 'Sinn Féin are by no means in the mood to compromise with the enemy or accept half measures.'⁹³

Healy's opinion of Sinn Féin had not been enhanced when the former Irish party MP Stephen O'Mara, now a prominent member of Sinn Féin, tried to force him to stand

⁸⁹ O'Brien to Dunraven, 9 July 1917 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/17).

⁹⁰ O'Brien to Healy, 2 May 1918 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/19). This impression contrasts with O'Brien's later published assessment, written with the benefit of hindsight, 'Its sitting [the Mansion House Conference] gave me my first opportunities of getting acquainted with Mr De Valera. His transparent sincerity, his gentleness and equability captured the hearts of us all. His gaunt frame and eyes buried deeply in their sockets had much of the Dantesque suggestion of "the man who had been in hell" (O'Brien, *Irish Revolution* (12 October 2016), p. 365). O'Brien's private opinion may have been influenced by Frank Gallagher who wrote 'He [de Valera] seems to lack something. One thing is certain – that that something is not honesty. He is brimful of it. Perhaps it is that that inspires a little lack of confidence'. (Gallagher to O'Brien, 31 December 1917, UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AS159).

⁹¹ O'Brien, *Irish Revolution* (20 March 2018), pp. 367-8

⁹² de Roiste diaries, 1 June 1918 (BMH, WS 1698).

⁹³ O'Kelly to O'Brien, 20 Meán Fómhair (September) 1918 (N.L.I, Michael Mac Donagh Papers, 11439/6).

down in favour of a prisoner-candidate.⁹⁴ O'Brien was also the recipient of a similar delegation who wanted the AFIL MPs to resign *en bloc* in favour of Sinn Féin, 'I did not like the boorish way O'Mara put it, but I dare say he did not mean anything offensive'.⁹⁵ Healy recounted another visit by two emissaries from Sinn Féin (who 'are on the run') who demanded that he attend the Mansion House Committee and proclaim support for both self-determination for Ireland and a Provisional Government and claimed that they would force Dillon and Devlin to agree, 'They said we should be backed by 80,000 men and blathered of gorgeous precedents of the Yugo-slavs, the Shugs Babs and the Boobo-Kalves. All perfectly sincere and self-sacrificing and piteous. This and O'Mara has convinced me that Shortt's jail-scythe has left only wtlings in control of a great movement.'⁹⁶ Healy did not name the 'two emissaries', but in his memoirs, identifies them as Michael Collins and Harry Boland.⁹⁷

In the end, Healy succumbed to Sinn Féin pressure and resigned his seat before the dissolution of parliament. The *Irish Independent* published a letter he sent to O'Brien on 28th October:

Having served thirty-eight years in Parliament, I should, perhaps make clear that my resignation is not due to weariness, or sloth, or even doubt. I simply want to give new methods a chance, where others have failed. I renounce nothing; I regret nothing; and I have nothing but gratitude for those who undertake, in the new generation, to win for the country all that we have been unable to accomplish in the old.⁹⁸

In the same edition, the *Independent* published a copy of Healy's letter to republican prisoners in Belfast prison, many of whom were ill with influenza which they blamed on poor living conditions. They asked Healy to raise their plight in

⁹⁴ Healy told O'Brien that he suspected O'Mara had forged a letter to him and appended the names of the Sinn Féin secretaries Harry Boland and Thomas Kelly. (Healy to O'Brien, 3 October 1918, NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/21).

⁹⁵ O'Brien to Healy, 14 October 1918

William O'Brien Papers, 14 October 1918 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/21). 8

⁹⁶ Healy to O'Brien, 4 November 1918 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/21). 'Shortt's jail-scythe' refers to the internment of leading members of Sinn Féin and the Volunteers under DORA regulations following the 'German Plot' allegations for which Healy blamed the Irish Secretary Edward Shortt.

⁹⁷ Healy, *Letters and Leaders vol. ii*, entry 7 November 1918, p. 608.

⁹⁸ *Irish Independent*, 30 November 1918.

parliament. The irony of republican prisoners wanting him to make use of his privileged status as an MP was not lost on Healy. He told them that he was unable to speak on their behalf in the House of Commons as he had resigned his seat. This was a subtle rebuke to Sinn Féin, as the *Independent*, just below his response to the Belfast prisoners, also printed a copy of a letter to him from the joint secretaries of Sinn Féin Harry Boland and Thomas Kelly, welcoming his resignation ‘as a protest against the treatment of S. Fein prisoners’. As Healy’s biographer notes, this suggested to the prisoners ‘the folly of Sinn Féin’s indiscriminating policy of abstention’, as the Sinn Féin MP who succeeded him would not be able to raise their plight in parliament.⁹⁹

For O’Brien, the end could not come soon enough, ‘Since the West Cork election, my mind is unalterably made up that I have no friends or practical power to give effect in Parliament to the programme I believe in. That being so, Parliamentary life, always loathsome to me, would cease to be tolerable.’¹⁰⁰ He told Healy that although he was sure, he could hold his Cork city seat he was determined to stand down but would not announce his intentions until parliament was dissolved. He urged Healy to stand again and thought that he could even win back his old Louth constituency.¹⁰¹ Some of O'Brien's supporters could not accept his departure from public life and continued to plead with him to seek a consensual outcome to the national crisis by calling a round table conference. An old ally advised him that ‘Dillon is now in a very chastened mood, and will not, I am sure, oppose any and every suggestion coming from you.’¹⁰² However, O'Brien was unconvinced, rejecting another plea from Healy to stand again at the general election:

This would be, to one of my temperament, unbearable. I should only be poisoning the last years of my life without the remotest possibility of accomplishing the sort of National Settlement I believe in. I should only fret myself to death between the unreasonableness of the Sinn Féin majority at home, and whatever remnant of malignant Dillonites might be left in Westminster.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Callanan, *Healy*, p.545

¹⁰⁰ O’Brien to Healy, 18 September 1918 (NLI, William O’Brien Papers, 8556/21).

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Laurence Casey to O’Brien, 25 October 1918 (UCC, William O’Brien Papers, AS166).

¹⁰³ O’Brien to Healy, 13 November 1918 (NLI, William O’Brien Papers, 8556/22).

O'Brien published a pamphlet in October 1918, *The Downfall of Parliamentarianism*, in which he asserted that Sinn Féin had saved the country from the three plagues of Partition, Conscription and Corruption. He went on to endorse Dominion Home Rule and claimed that the vast majority of Ireland would embrace it if given a chance.¹⁰⁴ Two days after the general election was called he publicly announced his intention to stand down. Predictably, he railed against the Irish party but took comfort that 'our adversaries have been forced to take refuge, but only when it is alas! Too late, for the All for Ireland principles of Conference, Conciliation and Consent'.¹⁰⁵ He endorsed Sinn Féin: 'A striking victory for Sinn Féin (and the more striking, the better) is the only way to make England and America recognise the intensity of Ireland's claim to self-government'.¹⁰⁶ However, his valedictory address to his constituents was more nuanced, 'We cannot subscribe to a programme of armed resistance in the field or even permanent withdrawal from Westminster, but to the spirit of Sinn Féin, apart from its abstract programme, the great mass of independent and single-minded Irishmen have been won over'.¹⁰⁷ The *Cork Examiner* responded to his resignation by quoting his speech in September 1914 following the outbreak of war in which he assured British ministers that 'the manhood of Ireland is at its command in this emergency'. O'Brien, the paper claimed, was 'a disgruntled individual who has been a political failure'.¹⁰⁸ The other AFIL MPs also stood down and avoided splitting the nationalist vote. There were, however, few statements of overt public support for Sinn Féin from the remnants of the AFIL, but there was apprehension about the future. In his valedictory message Maurice Healy wrote, 'I can see no grounds for believing that unconstitutional methods are likely to bring better results; nor is it obvious to me how this poor country, no matter how grossly provoked, can at this juncture benefit from turbulence, disorder and abortive rebellion.'¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ William O'Brien, *The Downfall of Parliamentarianism* (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, A17598).

¹⁰⁵ *Irish Independent*, 16 November 1918

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ O'Brien, *Irish Revolution* (15 October 2016), p 386.

¹⁰⁸ *Cork Examiner*, 19 November 1918.

¹⁰⁹ *Irish Independent*, 25 November 1918.

A concern shared by both Healy and O'Brien was that Dillon would take advantage of a relatively inexperienced Sinn Féin and forge an alliance which could, in their view, save the Home Rule movement from what they considered to be long overdue retribution. At a meeting in Cork, John J. Horgan, a prominent figure in the UIL proposed a motion calling for a national conference which was endorsed by Irish party supporters. Healy was incensed: 'This sets my bald spot bristling'.¹¹⁰ O'Brien was also concerned: 'For the moment the danger seems to me that rather to be a bogus 'unity' with Sinn Féin on the basis of "self-determination".'¹¹¹ Dillon, however, quickly made it clear that although Horgan's sentiments were laudable, they were also impracticable. He also argued that Sinn Féin's anti-war and pro-German utterances would make it impossible for them to play any role in representing Ireland at the Peace Conference.¹¹² In response, Horgan and two other prominent Cork nationalists resigned their offices in the UIL. In jubilation, Healy claimed: 'The Cork Mollies are tearing their hair out and rending their garments.'¹¹³ Any fears that the Irish party would use calls for a united nationalist front to stage a comeback were unfounded.

The Cork labour movement was also split, with some trade unionists wanting Labour party candidates who would not abstain from parliament if elected. Sean T. O'Kelly, a prominent member of Sinn Féin, asked O'Brien to use his influence with labour interests in Cork to persuade them not to put up candidates.¹¹⁴ The pressure to present a united front against the Irish party was intense, and the Labour party in Cork, as well as nationally, agreed not to contest the election. The veteran Cork socialist and republican John Good declared that Sinn Féin was not a political party but a national party, which was the reason the Labour party had stood down in its favour.¹¹⁵ He promised a republic, but, to reassure more conservative voters, reassured them that this 'would not be of the French type that would turn Catholic

¹¹⁰ *Cork Examiner* 11 November 1918; Healy to O'Brien, 11 November 1918 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/22).

¹¹¹ O'Brien to Healy, 6 November 1918 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/22).

¹¹² Horgan, *Parnell to Pearse*, p. 353

¹¹³ Healy to O'Brien, 29 November 1918 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/22).

¹¹⁴ O'Kelly to O'Brien, 20 Deireadh Fómhair (November) 1918 (NLI, Michael Mac Donagh Papers, 11439/6).

¹¹⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 6 December 1918.

churches into stabling for horses'.¹¹⁶ However, J.J. Walsh, one of the Sinn Féin candidates for Cork City, offered a glimpse of the future order of priorities, 'the motherland free, then and not till then can we afford to discuss the smaller issues'.¹¹⁷ The social and economic divisions, which had driven the AFIL's political insurgency and radicalised the labour movement were, once again, subjugated to patriotic mobilisation. As O'Mahony and Delanty argue, 'The extension of the suffrage occurred at a time when mass Irish political culture was in its infancy and could easily be swayed by well-packaged, emotionally resonating arguments that appeared to promise the generalisation of rights and opportunities.'¹¹⁸

Sinn Féin launched its campaign in Cork at a public meeting at the City Hall with a full spectrum platform of Cork society including four prominent Catholic clerics and apologies from three more who were unable to attend. The two Cork city candidates J.J. Walsh and Liam de Roiste, were introduced and, Walsh, who had been sentenced to death for his part in the Easter Rising, told the meeting that physical force had no fascination for him and his comrades 'except in the most extreme emergency, to resort to force to free the country'. He went on to undermine this argument by warning that if there were a contest 'it would be fought not with kid gloves, but with knuckle dusters'.¹¹⁹

Cork unionists, many of whom had supported the AFIL, now found themselves faced with an Irish party who had abandoned the Home Rule act in favour of Dominion Home Rule, and Sinn Féin, backed by the Volunteers, who wanted to break the link with the United Kingdom. In the two previous general elections in 1910, unionists did not put forward candidates in Cork, and many voted for the AFIL. In 1918 however, faced with the choice of the Irish party or Sinn Féin, the Cork Unionist Association, at an acrimonious meeting, decided to contest the two Cork City seats.¹²⁰ The national question dominated the unionist campaign but one of the candidates, Daniel Williams, attempted to extend the unionist programme beyond Home Rule and Sinn Féin and spoke on local social issues such as poverty

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 25 November 1918.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 13 December 1918.

¹¹⁸ O'Mahony and Delanty, *Rethinking Irish History*, p. 128.

¹¹⁹ *Cork Examiner*, 20 November 1918.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 3 December 1918.

and housing, subjects which had been noticeably absent during an election campaign that was almost wholly focused on national political issues.¹²¹ The other candidate, Thomas Farrington, unsuccessfully stood as an AFIL candidate in the Cork Corporation elections of January 1914. He had been in favour of conscription, and he vehemently rejected both independence and Home Rule, and his brand of uncompromising unionism was unpalatable to nationalists and many moderate unionists.¹²² Knowing he had no chance of success, his rhetoric seemed designed to appeal only to his more intractable followers and provoke nationalists. Speaking at an election rally, he declared, 'If the devil himself and all the devils in hell were up against the British Government, the Irish people would be pro-devil and pro-hell'.¹²³ This presented a dilemma for moderate unionists who had supported the AFIL. However, given the history of antipathy between the AFIL and the Irish party, it is unlikely that many would have crossed the line and voted for the Irish party candidates Maurice Talbot-Crosbie and Richard O'Sullivan, given the Irish party's policy on Dominion Home Rule, which was a step too far for most unionists. Equally, despite O'Brien's endorsement of Sinn Féin, an independent Irish republic was anathema to unionists.

The general election, in comparison to the violent campaigns of 1910, was relatively peaceful. The realignment of nationalism may have opened up the prospect of a deadly conflict with the British state, but it signalled an end, for the time being at least, of intra-nationalist conflict in Cork. The Representation of the People act (1918) resulted in the Cork electorate expanding almost fourfold to 133,660.¹²⁴ The withdrawal of the AFIL MPs gave Sinn Féin an overwhelming victory in Cork where they took all nine seats. Liam de Roiste and J.J. Walsh took O'Brien's and Maurice Healy's seats in Cork City with 68% of the popular vote. The two Irish party candidates in Cork City took 24% of the vote, and unionists 8%, a decent performance given that unionists made up less than 10% of the city's population.

¹²¹ Ibid, 13 December 1918.

¹²² Ibid, 7 December 1918.

¹²³ Ibid, 6 December 1918.

¹²⁴ Walker, *Parliamentary Elections Results 1801-1922*, pp. 385-6. The Representation of the People act, for the first time, gave women over the age of thirty the right to vote in parliamentary elections, subject to property qualifications,; over one-third of the adult female population was still disenfranchised. The act also gave the vote, without property qualifications, to men over the age of twenty-one, and to men over the age of nineteen who had served in the armed forces.

Although the Irish party and its affiliates had broad and deep roots in Cork, especially in the nationalist business and professional classes and the clergy, the cleavage that had afflicted nationalism after the Easter Rising had manifested itself in Cork far earlier with the rise of the AFIL and, in the previous general election of December 1910, it held only one of nine seats. Although the UIL maintained control over local government until 1920, all the indications were that most of its support, along with the nationalist AFIL vote, crossed to Sinn Féin. Outside of Cork City, all the other Cork constituencies held by AFIL MPs were uncontested, in addition to the Irish party's only seat in East Cork. Unsurprisingly, O'Brien claimed responsibility for Sinn Féin's victory, not just in Cork but throughout the country, 'It is not perhaps excessive to claim that it was in the large degree the self-effacement of the All-for-Irelanders which put it in the power of the country, upon the straightest of issues to return a verdict which was an unmistakable and overpowering one.'¹²⁵ Healy, in characteristically caustic fashion, had the last word: 'We have our *congé*, and I move that a warm note of thanks be inscribed on our gravestones.'¹²⁶ The results in Cork were replicated around the country where Sinn Féin took 59% of seats and 47% of the popular vote where seats were contested (Sinn Féin polled 65% in the twenty-six counties of what would be soon be the Free State). The Irish party took a third of the popular vote but only managed to hold six seats.

The Sinn Féin landslide in the 1918 general election was a seminal moment in Irish history. But the reasons for the virtual annihilation of the Home Rule movement and Sinn Féin's phenomenal victory have been hotly contested by historians. What did the electorate vote for? Was it for the republic, that ideal of the true believers? Was Sinn Féin's success a rejection by a new generation of the previous one? Or was this the aspirant cry of the working class, those with the least stake in a society whose needs had long been ignored? As Fintan O'Toole argues, the election gave the vote to 'women, the young and the poor. Not only had they not had a voice but no one in the entire line of their ancestors had ever had one'.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ O'Brien, *Irish Revolution* (9 October 2016), p. 388.

¹²⁶ Healy to O'Brien, 19 October 1918 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556/21).

¹²⁷ *Irish Times*, 8 December 2018.

Whilst accurately determining the motivations of the electorate is an all but impossible task, it is beyond doubt that some issues were highly significant in shaping opinion. O'Mahony and Delanty argue that 'a powerful ennui' gripped nationalist Ireland because of the failure to achieve Home Rule.¹²⁸ Added to this, the effects of the war and the catharsis of the Easter Rising fatally damaged the faith of many nationalists in British institutions and in the Home Rule movement which was so closely identified with them, although not necessarily convincing them that the republic was the promised land. More prosaically as John Dillon noted, the Irish party showed an, 'absolute lack of organization and helplessness on our side against the most perfect organisation and infinite audacity on the other, backed by ferocious intimidation'.¹²⁹

Like many populist campaigns, Sinn Féin's version of the good society, the Irish republic, remained tantalisingly amorphous. The republic may have been, in Fintan Lawlor's resonant phrase, 'The banner that floats nearest to the sky', but it was also a *tabula rasa* where the emerging shape of the new society would not, its idealistic supporters claimed, be shackled by the intrigues and inhibitions of a debased Imperial parliament. The claims for the republic could, for the time being, remain rhetorically ambitious in their aspirations but conveniently nebulous with regard to their implementation. As Dorothy MacArdle noted, for every individual in the movement 'the Republic seemed the Ireland of his desire'.¹³⁰ Whilst Sinn Féin promised economic and social benefits to the working class when freedom had been achieved, its *Manifesto to the Irish People* emphasized a more primordial concept, 'Sinn Féin stands less for a political party than for the nation; it represents the old tradition of nationhood handed on from dead generations [...]'.¹³¹ This was to be the more powerful dynamic, 'patriotism was the reality, social reform a dream of the

¹²⁸ O'Mahony and Delanty, *Rethinking Irish History*, p. 119.

¹²⁹ Quoted in Lyons, *Dillon*, p. 452.

¹³⁰ D. McArdle, *Without Fanfares: Some Reflection on the Republic of Eire*, (Dublin, 1946), p. 3. The concept of the Irish Republic as a *tabula rasa* stretches back to the United Irishmen and James Fintan Lawlor who used the term to scorn 'a nationalist movement concerned with constitutional representation and the common law'. (Frank Rynne, 'Young Ireland and Irish Revolutions', in *French Journal of British Studies*, XXII-3, 2017).

¹³¹ A.C. Hepburn, *Ireland 1905-25 Documents and Analysis*, vol 2 (Newtownards, 1998), p.173.

future'.¹³² Labour's decision not to contest the election, according to some historians, irreparably damaged its prospects of ever putting forward an alternative to conservative nationalism. As one commentator noted, at a crucial time, the electorate 'were denied, at the outset, an occasion to form the basis of a Labour-voting habit'.¹³³ In Peadar O'Donnell's memorable phrase, Labour 'confused the prompter's stool with a place on the stage'.¹³⁴ However, Tom Garvin convincingly posits an alternative perspective: if Labour had contested the general election it ran the risk not only of losing heavily to Sinn Féin, but also of being tainted with the accusation of being 'anti-national', and it would have found it even more difficult than it later did to establish itself as a political force in an independent Ireland.¹³⁵

There was a contemporary belief that the younger generation 'had gone over to Sinn Féin',¹³⁶ and two-thirds of those who voted in 1918 did so for the first time. David Fitzpatrick discounts a generational divide, arguing that, 'Only once in recent Irish history has politics split husband and wife, brother and father, householder and dependent, that occasion was not the election of 1918 but the civil war.'¹³⁷ Tom Garvin's research shows only a weak correlation between youth and support for Sinn Féin, but a very strong link to religion: Sinn Féin became an overwhelmingly Catholic party.¹³⁸ Garvin's study analysed demographic data from the 1911 census returns and the electoral results in 1918 (Sinn Féin took twenty-five seats uncontested) although he focused only on age and religion. More recent research, however, indicates a less definitive conclusion. Researchers at the University of Tennessee also used the 1911 census to inform their analysis of the 1918 general election results but as well as looking at age (new voters), also examined socio-

¹³² D. Ryan, 'Sinn Féin Policy and Practice (1916-1926)' in D. Williams (ed) *The Irish Struggle 1916-1926* (London, 1966), p. 36.

¹³³ B. Farrell, 'Labour and the Irish Political Party System: a suggested approach to analysis', in *Economic and Social Review*, vol. 1, no 4 (1970), p. 288. Arthur Mitchell also argues that Labour's syndicalist leadership instinctively took the view that 'economic power precedes and makes possible political power' and therefore contesting the general election was of secondary importance to building a strong trade union movement, although under Thomas Johnson's leadership Labour soon distanced itself from syndicalist and revolutionary policies (Mitchell, *Labour in Irish Politics*, p. 102).

¹³⁴ P. O'Donnell, *There Will Be Another Day* (Dublin, 1963), p. 17.

¹³⁵ Garvin, *Evolution of Irish Politics*, pp. 119-20.

¹³⁶ McConnel, 'Franchise Factor', pp. 368-71.

¹³⁷ Fitzpatrick, 'Geography of Irish Nationalism' p. 126.

¹³⁸ Garvin, *Evolution of Irish Politics*, pp. 120-2.

economic differences, religion and gender. They concluded, like Garvin, that there was a weak positive and statistically insignificant relationship between the Sinn Féin vote and new male voters. However, in the newly enfranchised female electorate there was a high rate of abstention but also a strong negative correlation with Sinn Féin, and it appears that, in spite of Irish party fears to the contrary and sustained efforts by republicans to secure the female vote, many women did not like Sinn Féin. Unsurprisingly, the analysis also shows that the wealthier and professional classes voted strongly for the Irish party but, contrary to assumptions, in constituencies where there was an increase of voters at the lower end of the social spectrum, this did not equate to a corresponding increase in the Sinn Féin vote.¹³⁹

The Sinn Féin victory was not as sweeping as is sometimes claimed and, if proportional representation had been introduced, the Irish party, with almost a third of the vote, would have remained a viable entity. Although the spectral presence of the party played its part in influencing the subsequent political development in the Free State, the 1918 election marked the end of the kind of parliamentarianism of William O'Brien's generation. He claimed, with typical exaggeration but some justification, 'I can answer for the half a million All for Irelanders who turned the scale in the South that the issue for or against a Republic did not even cross their minds as a supreme decision binding them for the future.' Unsurprisingly he blamed the Irish party, 'a Parliamentary imposture which was ending in putrefaction'.¹⁴⁰

The All for Ireland League had been launched with great optimism eight years before, but from its inception had little chance of survival in the political tumult that had engulfed Ireland. The aspiration of building a political movement on the centre ground proved to be impossible. The Home Rule crisis, the war and the Easter Rising opened cleavages between Ulster unionism and Southern unionism, and between constitutional nationalism and separatism, which made compromise and conciliation impossible. As Liam de Roiste had predicted, 'There is really no place

¹³⁹ A. de Bromhead, A. Fernihough, E. Hargaden, *Representation of The People: Franchise, Extension and The 'Sinn Féin Election' In Ireland, 1918* (University of Tennessee) (14 June 2018), <http://econ.bus.utk.rdu>

¹⁴⁰ O'Brien, *Irish Revolution*, pp. 390-1.

now for O'Brien. His "conference, conciliation and consent" ideas are not wanted."¹⁴¹

Social reform - the alleviation of poverty, poor housing, low wages and dreadful working conditions – those demons of want and neglect which had driven the O'Brienite political insurgency, were subjugated to the imperatives of patriotic mobilisation. The Democratic Programme adopted by the first Dáil in January 1919 proclaimed that 'We reaffirm that all rights to private property must be subordinated to the public right and welfare. We declare that we desire our country to be ruled in accordance with the principles of Liberty, Equality and Justice for all'. However, as one of the newly elected Teachta Dáiláí (T.D.), Piaras Beaslai noted, the reason the Dáil was willing to pass such a radical programme was that there was no chance of it being implemented.¹⁴² The political revolution to come was shorn of its social radicalism and a narrow nationalist conservatism triumphed. Once again, labour and the working class were told that the national question took priority over their needs and it was their patriotic duty to wait.

¹⁴¹ de Roiste diaries, 20 December 1916 (BMH, WS 1698).

¹⁴² P. Lynch, 'The Social Revolution that Never Was' in *Irish Struggle*, p. 47.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Banshee's Kiss: The Legacy of the All for Ireland League

The two threads which run through the history of the All for Ireland League are firstly, the evolving nature of Irish nationalism between 1903 to 1918 and the conflict between an inclusive vision of nationalists and unionists sharing power in a self-governing Ireland and a more ethnocentric and exclusivist one. In the words of Paul Bew was 'Irish nationalism capable of being more than simply the expression of the grievances of Irish Catholic democracy?'¹ The second thread is 'the stifled bark'² of the working class struggle for political representation, better wages and working conditions and decent housing. This was a struggle that existed before the AFIL and would continue after its demise. The AFIL was both an attempt to find an accommodation between the two traditions: nationalist and unionist, Catholic and Protestant, in the context of a self-governing Ireland within the United Kingdom, and a political insurgency against the hegemony of the Irish parliamentary party and its affiliates, to which it harnessed social grievances in Cork.

Tom Garvin has credibly argued that the Free State parties, which evolved from Sinn Féin after the civil war to become Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, were, 'structurally and historically' not separate political parties but representations of the internal divides of the old pan-nationalist party: essentially the 'ghost' of the Irish party continued to exert an influence.³ The AFIL however, given its attempt to break the mould of both nationalist and unionist political orthodoxy, does not easily fit into this template. But a similar question can be asked: following its demise in 1918, did the AFIL leave a legacy either in the part that prominent party figures played after 1918, or in influencing the nature of the independence struggle or the political culture that evolved? Such a legacy, if indeed it exists, can easily be overlooked.⁴

¹ Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, p. 7.

² O'Mahony and Delanty, *Rethinking Irish History*, p. 87.

³ Garvin, *Evolution of Irish Nationalism*, p. 161.

⁴ For example, in an otherwise admirable study of Cork politics from 1918 to 1932, Micheál Martin fails even to acknowledge the existence of the AFIL or its influence on Cork political life up to 1918 despite its close historical affinity and resemblance to Fianna Fáil. (M. Martin, *Freedom to Choose: Cork and Party Politics 1918-1932*, Cork, 2009).

This will, therefore, be explored through the political metamorphoses of both the labour movement and nationalism in Cork in the years after 1918 through the struggle for independence and the establishment of the Free State.

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William O'Brien's *idée fixe*, the attempt to build a bi-confessional political movement, a bridge between nationalist and unionist tribalism, was one of the AFIL's most enduring and courageous visions. There were others who also harboured this aspiration and the departure of the AFIL from the political field, the victory of Sinn Féin in 1918 and the imminent prospect of conflict between republicans and Crown forces, provided the impetus for a further attempt to harness what O'Brien had characterised as the forces of moderation and compromise. However, once again, these efforts faced the most inauspicious political climate imaginable.

Two parties were launched within months of each other in 1919. The first was the Irish Centre party, whose driving force was the former Irish party MP, Stephen Gwynn who had taken Wille Redmond's place at the Irish Convention after his death on the Western Front in 1917. Gwynn was a federalist who supported an Irish parliament with four provincial assemblies. He hoped that partition would be temporary and offer 'The means for the provinces to meet on an equal footing thereby weakening Ulster's sense of difference and fostering an all-island unity'.⁵ A few months later Sir Horace Plunkett launched the Irish Dominion League (I.D.L.). Plunkett, in contrast to Gwynn and the Centre party, was in favour of Dominion Home Rule, avowedly anti-partition and claimed that he had support from moderate elements within Sinn Féin. It attracted some prominent figures including the O'Connor Don, Frank Cruise O'Brien, Henry Harrison, Mary Kettle (widow of Tom Kettle), Lord Monteaigle, and A.M. Sullivan, kinsman of Tim Healy, who wanted to stand for the AFIL in the West Cork by-election of 1916. Gwynn's Centre party, which failed to find support, merged with the IDL soon after its launch

⁵ C. Reid, 'Stephen Gwynn and the Failure of Constitutional Nationalism 1919-1921' in *The Historical Journal*, vol. 53, no. 3 (September 2010), p. 730.

but the tensions between Gwynn's federalism and Plunkett's Dominion Home Rule were not resolved. The IDL struggled with the same dilemma that had plagued the AFIL: how to convince unionists that Irish self-government was in their best interests. Plunkett called on unionists to outline what safeguards they wanted,⁶ and when this was not forthcoming fell back on the old trope of blaming the intransigence of Ulster unionists on the support they received from the British government which gave them no incentive to compromise. The divisions caused by partition, which had damaged the AFIL, also erupted in the IDL. Gwynn supported proposals from Walter Long's cabinet committee for Home Rule in a two parliament, partitioned Ireland. Colin Reid argues that this reflected *realpolitik* on Gwynn's part: a realisation that this was the best that could be achieved from the coalition government.⁷ The different proposals for self-government were all quickly overtaken by the pace of events and the eruption of conflict between the IRA and Crown forces. The window of opportunity which the demise of the Irish party offered, quickly closed again. As with the AFIL during the Home Rule crisis, a solution which required conciliation, a willingness to compromise and to set tribal loyalties aside, was lost in the tumult of recrimination and conflict.

The AFIL was a very different entity to the Centre party and the IDL, and, for all its contradictions and limitations, was an authentic manifestation of popular discontent relating to the dominance of the Irish party. It had deep roots in local communities and popular policies to offer its supporters. Both the Centre party and the IDL did not have the same degree of authenticity. They were both predominantly parties of the professional middle classes and some liberal ascendancy figures interested in finding a political solution which would maintain a connection with the United Kingdom. The catalyst for the emergence of both parties was the victory of Sinn Féin in the 1918 general election, but they were several years too late. There was to be no *rapprochement* between nationalists and unionists, no All-Ireland solution that William O'Brien hoped for. As Terence Brown notes, the decade before 1918 had been marked by obduracy and a resolute refusal to compromise on both sides:

⁶ *Skibbereen Eagle*, 5 July 1919.

⁷ C. Reid, *The Lost Ireland of Stephen Gwynn: Irish Constitutional Nationalism and Cultural Politics, 1864–1950* (Manchester, 2011), p. 736.

A dismissive contemptuousness had often reflected the offensive blend of insecurity and caste snobbery that characterised fairly commonplace Protestant reactions to Irish nationalism. The Irish-Ireland movement by turn had not hesitated to repay in kind, proposing a theory of Irish nationality that denied full spiritual communion with the Irish nation to the colonising, landed Anglo-Irishman with his apparently English accent, manner and loyalties and his Protestant faith.⁸

The launch of the Centre party and the IDL indicates that there was, below the surface, some support for the kind of politics that the AFIL sought to offer. This begs the question of why the AFIL failed to harness this spirit and why those moderate nationalists and unionists, who briefly rallied to the Centre party and the IDL banner, did not support the AFIL? O'Brien had progressed through several variations of self-government. In 1910, under the tutelage of Moreton Frewan, he adopted federalism, 'Home Rule all round'. The crucial difference with Gwynn's iteration, however, was that O'Brien's version advocated only an Irish parliament, not provincial assemblies. Gwynn's acceptance of partition later in 1919 was also anathema to O'Brien.

Towards the end of his political career O'Brien accepted Dominion Home Rule (full self-government outside the United Kingdom for the whole of Ireland), similar to what the IDL proposed. Sir Horace Plunkett, the driving force of the IDL, should have been a natural ally of O'Brien and Dunraven. However, O'Brien had very publicly fallen out with him following the publication of Plunkett's controversial polemic *Ireland in the New Century* in 1904. Plunkett was also known to be virtually devoid of political skills, and possessed it was said, 'an unerring capacity for even-handedly offending both sides'.⁹ Given O'Brien's unforgiving nature, relatively small disagreements could become lifelong enmities, and the degree of distrust and dislike he engendered was a significant reason why the AFIL failed to thrive as a movement.¹⁰ The other central AFIL figures like Tim Healy and Lord Dunraven did not possess the kind of political certainty and obsessive energy that O'Brien was

⁸ T. Brown, *Ireland, A Social and Cultural History, 1922-1985* (London, 1985), p. 106.

⁹ T. West, *Horace Plunkett, Cooperation and Politics – A Biography* (Washington, 1986), p. 180.

¹⁰ Dunraven also fell out with Plunkett years before over a business deal in the United States. (West, *Horace Plunkett*, pp. 111-3).

able to focus on the party and did not have the enthusiasm for conciliation which he pursued with such characteristic passion.

Much of the responsibility for not building a national centre party must be borne by the AFIL itself as it was incapable of linking with heterodox nationalists in other parts of the country and failed to extend its electoral base beyond its Cork heartland (O'Brien's dislike of Laurence Ginnell, the maverick Westmeath MP, for example, closed off what could have been a promising alliance). For progressive nationalists and unionists who might have been tempted to support the AFIL, the price of stepping outside their tribal boundaries could be high, and many were unwilling to do so for a party that was not going to provide a serious challenge to the Irish party.

Reconciliation between Ireland's two traditions did not start with the AFIL and continued after it left the political stage. The struggle to build consensus is an indistinct palimpsest, as is the aspiration to reconcile old enmities and build a 'centrist tradition'; it has, however, faced significant, and at times insurmountable opposition. As Duncan Morrow argues:

Societies polarised by violent struggles over inter-group justice are marked by extreme sensitivity to compromises that might put group security at risk. Reconciliation always proceeds alongside the conviction that the enemy remains aggressive. In practice, progress is measured by the resilience of the impetus for change, despite persistent and deep-rooted popular anxieties.¹¹

The AFIL in 1910, like the Centre party and the IDL in 1919, attempted to build a political identity at a time of great instability and in competition with other developing political models. However, O'Brien's lofty aspirations and calls to 'the better angels' of liberal nationalist and unionist sentiment, had to compete with unionist intransigence; and on the nationalist side, invocations of a more sectarian and primordial nature: a vision of an Irish-Ireland that had strong elements of Anglophobia and anti-Protestant rhetoric of the kind represented by D.P. Moran's *Leader* and the Ancient Order of Hibernians. In a time of peace and stability, would the outcome for a centre party and policies of conciliation have been more

¹¹ D. Morrow, 'From enemies to partners? Reconciliation in Northern Ireland', in *Making Peace with the past: transforming broken relationships* (Conciliation Resources, 2016, c-r.org) (12 April 2018), p. 40.

favourable?¹² The auguries were not favourable. The Centre party and the IDL owed their very existence to an imminent threat to Ireland's place within the United Kingdom, and practically all of those involved had previously refused to support the AFIL. The reasons may have been because of the difficulty of working with William O'Brien, and also that the AFIL was seen as a parochial Cork-bound phenomenon. However, it also speaks of the refusal of prominent liberal nationalists and unionists to articulate a vision that might have been attractive to a substantial minority in both cultures. For many, Like Gwynn and Plunkett, who hoped to find an alternative to republican separatism, there was the bitter irony, as Colin Reid notes, that Sinn Féin accepted an Anglo-Irish Treaty closer to the IDL proposal for Dominion status (with partition added) rather than the republic that was proposed in the 1916 Proclamation.¹³

The O'Brienite political insurrection in Cork was driven by working class alienation and the refusal of conservative nationalism to address issues of endemic poverty. Labour militancy however, did not wither on the vine and, as for much else, the war changed the delicate balance of class relations in Ireland. The labour movement, so long in the penumbra of nationalism, was in 1917 able to take advantage of changed economic conditions to assert its latent power. The Irish economy benefitted from the war, and wage levels rose, but the UK, freed from the gold standard had to cope with a considerable increase in public spending to fund the war effort. This resulted in soaring inflation, especially in food prices which doubled during the war years, devalued the gains workers had made and triggered a period of labour militancy.¹⁴ The post-1916 period was also a time of political and social instability. The Rising fractured the political consensus and left a taste for insurrection in the air. Young men and women, unable to emigrate to America because of the war, and unwilling to enlist, were restless for change, both social and political.

¹² Even where conciliatory initiatives such as the Good Friday Agreement succeed in bringing about peace, centre parties such as the Social Democratic and Labour Party and the Ulster Unionist Party, who help bring them into being, sometimes pay the price.

¹³ Reid, 'Stephen Gwynn', p. 742.

¹⁴ Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, p. 200; E. McLaughlin 'Economic Impact of the Irish revolution', *Discussion papers in Environmental Economics*, University of St. Andrews (<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/gsd/research/envecon/eediscus/>) (23 November 2018).

The AFIL split the rural labour movement with D.D. Sheehan's ILLA, which was closely aligned with the AFIL, and Patrick Bradley's Cork City and County Labour Association (C.C.C.L.A.) representing most of the unionised agricultural labourers (Bradley's organisation also represented unskilled workers in the environs of Cork city) and was sympathetic to the Home Rule movement.¹⁵ As Dan Bradley notes, 'The in-fighting meant that the labourers' energies were dissipated on issues that were of no relevance to the improvement of their living conditions.'¹⁶ The introduction of the Agricultural Wages Board (A.W.B.) at the end of 1917 set minimum wage levels for farm labourers for the first time. Agricultural workers had always been considered difficult to organise because of the nature of their employment and the lack of any national structures. Now there was a legally enforceable standard wage, and the ITGWU launched a campaign to supplant the Land and Labour Associations and indicated its willingness to organise strike action, something almost unheard of in rural areas.

In 1918 the O'Brienite ILLA accepted the inevitable and its members were absorbed into the ITGWU.¹⁷ The CCCLA refused to do so and opposed the ITGWU's strikes. Bradley accused the ITGWU of 'being led by men who knew nothing about agricultural matters, and who plunged them into strikes by making demands which were unreasonable and impracticable at the moment'.¹⁸ Throughout 1919 and 1920 there was a wave of farm strikes not only in Cork but across many parts of the country. Land was seized in the West; striking workers in Limerick took control of a creamery and ran it as a socialist enterprise under the red flag; and, in a piece of agitprop which many must have thought emblematic of the times, the socialist firebrand Peadar O'Donnell organised the takeover of the asylum in Monaghan by striking workers who also hoisted the red flag.¹⁹ In rural Cork in 1919, there were eight farm strikes, and twelve threatened strikes and in 1920, thirteen strikes.²⁰ Striking farm labourers calling themselves 'Red Guards' briefly took over roads and

¹⁵ See Chapter Two.

¹⁶ Bradley, *Farm Labourers*, p. 28.

¹⁷ *Cork Examiner*, 22 May 1918.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 16 August 1919.

¹⁹ *Freeman's Journal*, 19 January 1919.

²⁰ Bradley, *Farm Labourers*, pp. 49-50.

a large tract of land in North Cork. The ITGWU issued a 'county demand' of wages rates and conditions far more generous than those of the AWB.²¹

In the midst of an armed insurrection, in a county with a long history of rural agitation and conflict, these were disputes which could have spread widely and deteriorate into violence. That they did not do so, apart from a relatively small number of incidents of intimidation by strikers, was due to the composition of the IRA. Ernie O'Malley, a training officer and briefly, officer commanding the Southern Division of the IRA during the War of Independence, cast a jaundiced eye over the class dynamics of republican supporters, 'In the country the small farmers and labourers were our main support and in the cities the workers with a middle-class sprinkling; the towns we could not count on. The countryman, sympathetic enough where a land revolution was concerned, was hostile to the revolution of organised labour.'²² David Fitzpatrick also argues that IRA members were more likely to come from the unpropertied and unemployed than the more prosperous classes.²³ However, Peter Hart's research into the occupations of rural Cork IRA guerrillas during the War of Independence indicates a preponderance of the sons of relatively prosperous farmers for both officers and men, 'IRA family farms were well above the Cork average in value, and significantly above average in size, so that they would have been seen as better off than most of their neighbours.'²⁴

At a time when Bolshevik hysteria was still rife and, as Arthur Mitchell observes, 'It sometimes seemed that the Irish social fabric was beginning to come apart',²⁵ it was unsurprising that supporters of political revolution from the strong farmer class were fearful of the prospect of social revolution in the face of threats to their land and

²¹ County Demand included the following: '30/- a week, a house free, half an acre of garden seeded, tilled and manured, a quart of new milk a day, and 30 cwt. of coal a year, six days of work of nine hours per day. 1/- per hour overtime. No settlement to be made without communicating with union secretary. Not to work with non-union men. To work for no other farmer except employer, except when casual labour is unobtainable. To follow only the employer's reaper and binder. When taking the place of casual labourers in the case already stated, to work for 5/- a day and nothing less. No distinction at table. Not to take up a position which another member is negotiating for. A living wage for Women and Girls' (Bradley, *Farm Labourers*, pp. 47-8).

²² E. O'Malley, *On Another Man's Wound* (London, 1935), p. 129.

²³ Fitzpatrick, 'Geography of Irish Nationalism', p. 120.

²⁴ Hart, *IRA and its Enemies*, pp. 154-61.

²⁵ Mitchell, *Labour in Irish Politics*, p. 141.

livelihood which, for many, had only been recently acquired through the land purchase acts. Republican arbitration courts were established which, more often than not, favoured employers. For example, at an arbitration hearing relating to a large strike of farm labourers organised by the ITGWU in the 'Liberties' area of Cork, the chairman declared that 'these were not peace times and a strike in such matters could not be justified'.²⁶ In the latter half of 1921, the IRA frequently intervened in farm strikes in Cork in favour of the employers, intimidating and even arresting the strikers.²⁷ A crash in world food prices and the abolition of the AWB in 1921 put an end to the advantageous position that agricultural workers had experienced over the previous years, and the subsequent attempts by employers to reduce wages led to another wave of militancy. The tide had turned, however, and once again labour was forced to give way to the national question and, during the civil war, the government used its draconian powers to suppress labour militancy.

It would be fatuous to attempt to crudely link the farm strikes of the revolutionary period to nineteenth-century agrarian agitation. The latter conflict was primarily a struggle for land with the plight of farm labourers very much a secondary consideration. This was a struggle which bonded the whole nationalist movement together and drew on a primordial land hunger which melded with Parnellism, the Home Rule movement and the emerging strands of cultural nationalism. The labour conflict from 1919 to 1922 was more ideological and class-based. The enemy was now not the Anglo-Irish landlord but Catholic nationalist farmers. There is an evident continuity here with the AFIL-Redmondite conflict: those who had done well from land reform and those who had not. There is also a resonance between the farm strikes and a long tradition, especially in North Cork, of farm labourer organisation, coupled with an even longer history of radical agrarianism, Ribbonism and resistance to authority. The added dimension in the labour unrest from 1919 onwards was the organising power of the ITGWU at a time of armed insurrection and the breakdown of the authority of the state. The embrace of revolutionary rhetoric and emblems by the more militant strikers added a new and terrifying dimension for many nationalists, including most of the labour movement. However,

²⁶ *Cork Examiner*, 8 September 1920.

²⁷ Bradley, *Farm Labourers*, p. 61.

Dan Bradley argues, ‘an analysis of the labourers’ enthusiasm for the Red Flag and “Bolshevism” indicates that militant trade unionism of the Larkinite variety, rather than revolutionary socialism, was what motivated rural workers’.²⁸

The elections for Cork Corporation in January 1920 and the County Council in June 1920 were the first test of public opinion since the 1918 general election and provides an opportunity to assess whether or not AFIL councillors, elected in the previous local elections in 1914, stood again, either as independents, or under other party banners, particularly as Sinn Féin candidates. There were some changes in electoral divisions for the Cork Corporation elections, and the two Centre wards were amalgamated into the West ward; however, it is still possible to compare candidates from both elections. Before the local elections of 1914, the AFIL controlled both Cork Corporation (up to 1912) and County Council and thirteen of eighteen Rural District Councils (By 1914 however, AFIL support had begun to fragment because of the party’s failure to deliver on its promises to working class voters and its stance on the Home Rule bill.²⁹

Of the thirty AFIL candidates who stood for Cork Corporation in 1914 only three stood again in 1920: John Callanan as an independent; Michael Egan for Labour;³⁰ and Thomas Farrington, professor of chemistry at University College Cork, who had been the unionist candidate for Cork City in the 1918 general election, in 1920, stood as a Commercial party candidate. Dr Edward Magner, a successful AFIL candidate for the county council in 1914, was elected as an independent candidate for the Corporation in 1920. Sinn Féin and candidates from the ITGWU stood under the same banner, a palpable elision of national and social issues, and took thirty of fifty-six seats. As a result, in the Cork Corporation elections, the Labour party did much worse than expected and even with the advantage of proportional representation (5.25 % of the vote and 5.35% of the seats) only managed to take three seats, marginally better than the unionist-backed Commercial party. However,

²⁸ Bradley, *Farm Labourers*, p. 118.

²⁹ *Cork Examiner*, May 27 1914; see also Chapter Four.

³⁰ Egan had left the AFIL some years before and was Labour’s representative at the Mansion House Conference in 1918. (J. Crowley, D O’Drisceóil, J. Murphy (eds), *Atlas of the Irish Revolution* (Cork, 2017), p. 325.

it is estimated that at least six of those elected under the joint Sinn Féin/ ITGWU were Transport Union candidates and were included in a nine-seat Labour party bloc by the *Cork Examiner* in 1924.³¹ Nationalists, the old Home Rule movement, creditably held fourteen seats. Working class areas in the North of the city, once AFIL strongholds, now overwhelmingly voted for Sinn Féin, as they had done in the 1918 general election. In the six years since the previous municipal elections, political sentiment had changed, become sharper, with less room for conciliation or nuance. The national issue was now pre-eminent.

The months between the Corporation elections and the County Council elections in June 1920 witnessed a significant escalation in IRA operations and attacks on Crown forces and retaliations, including the assassination of the newly- elected Sinn Féin Lord Mayor of Cork, Tomás MacCurtain, at his home.³² A British military build-up, accompanied by virulent rhetoric on both sides, memorably described in a *Cork Examiner* editorial as ‘Force and Flatulence’, lent a sombre and fearful air to the proceedings.³³ On the day of the county council elections, the IRA launched a full-scale attack on Blarney police station, which was destroyed.³⁴ As well as county council elections, voters in Cork elected RDCs, although contests did not take place in many districts because Sinn Féin candidates were unopposed. In the past, elections in Cork were rumbustious affairs, characterised by widespread disorder and rioting between AFIL supporters and Redmondites. Paradoxically, given the violence sweeping the country, the local elections of June 1920 were peaceful, muted and low-key. As in the 1918 general election, the presence of the Volunteers (now transformed into the IRA), even if they were now forced to keep a low profile, ensured order. What was seen as dissent against the national interest was, in some cases, dealt with harshly. The ever-vigilant *Skibbereen Eagle* campaigned against Sinn Féin’s dominance and described the process as ‘an election under arms’; to call these elections, the paper claimed, ‘was a misnomer, they were nothing else but selection by Sinn Féin clubs’. The editor, Patrick Sheehy, was attacked in his home

³¹ Martin, *Freedom to Choose*, p. 32; *Cork Examiner*, 21 January 1924.

³² Mac Curtain’s murder was carried out by RIC officers in retaliation for the earlier shooting of a police officer in Cork. The suspected leader of the assassins, Inspector Oswald Swanzy, was shot and killed by the IRA, using Mac Curtain’s pistol, in Lisburn five months later.

³³ *Cork Examiner*, 4 June 1920.

³⁴ *Cork Examiner*, 2 June 1920.

by armed men, severely beaten and had a barrel of tar poured on him.³⁵ Unsurprisingly, given the lack of opposition, Sinn Féin/ITGWU candidates had an overwhelming victory. In addition to the aforementioned Dr Magner, of the AFIL's thirteen councillors elected in 1914, the only other 1920 County Council candidate with an AFIL background was Johnny 'Shafter' Collins, brother of Michael, who had been elected for Dunmanway RDC in 1914 and in 1920 stood for Sinn Féin, again in Dunmanway.³⁶ John Joseph Hegarty, elected for the AFIL in 1914, failed to be elected as an independent in Ballincollig for Cork RDC. In Kanturk, once a stronghold of the AFIL, not one of the nineteen AFIL RDC councillors elected in 1914 stood in the 1920 elections and all the Sinn Féin/ ITGWU candidates were elected unopposed.³⁷

ii

The AFIL heartlands in rural Cork were highly politicised communities which had a long tradition of resistance to the Crown and had also led the way in campaigns for labour reforms. Although few AFIL figures played a prominent role following the party's demise, the question of whether or not its legacy can be traced through the political culture of Cork after 1918, especially in the IRA campaign and the Irish Labour party, needs to be addressed. While it is impossible to prove a direct link, an association between the uniquely febrile political environment in Cork and its place at the epicentre of the war which Michael Collins directed, can, at least, be suggested. Liam Deasy, an IRA leader in West Cork, recalled:

The long political rivalry between the O'Brienites and the Redmondites, which I witnessed during the years between 1909 and the outbreak of the First World War, was peculiar to County Cork for the reason that nowhere else, save North Louth [Tim Healy's seat up to 1910] was the sway exercised by O'Brien so strong as in Cork City and County. Also, it may well be that the interest in political affairs roused throughout Cork by the struggle between the two opposing parties of the O'Brienites and the Redmondites helped to stimulate

³⁵ *Skibbereen Eagle*, 15 May 1920.

³⁶ Johnny Collins was thought to have been involved in the planning of the IRA Kilmichael ambush in which seventeen Auxiliaries were killed, and subsequently, Crown forces burned the Collins' family home near Roscarbery, and he was incarcerated on Spike Island (T. P. Coogan, *Michael Collins* (London, 1990), p. 164 and pp. 178-9).

³⁷ Election results reported in *Cork Examiner*, 3, 5, 6, 7, 11 June 1920.

the extraordinary enthusiasm and drive that Cork City and County showed later in the Volunteer movement during the War of Independence.³⁸

Deasy implicitly recognised that the impetus for revolutionary action comes not, as is sometimes claimed, from charismatic leaders, but through the dynamic nature of social, economic and political factors in individual communities. The template in which nationalism was forged in post-Rising Cork, with its long and turbulent history of resistance and tradition of heterodox nationalism, was different from other parts of the country. David Fitzpatrick contends that republican enthusiasm for military action was, in part, related to the nature of the local economy. In Munster (most active in the Black and Tan war), where the agricultural economy was mostly dairy farming for the domestic Irish market and inculcated a more independent mentality than Leinster (with some of the least active counties), where farmers fattened stock for export and were therefore far more dependent and connected to the British economy.³⁹ The febrile political climate in Cork, which attended the split in constitutional nationalism between the Irish party and the AFIL, also witnessed the temporary rejection of constitutional politics and an embrace of revolutionary force. For significant minorities in these communities, there was no binary divide between the evolutionary and revolutionary political traditions, rather a pragmatic recognition that both approaches could, at times, run in parallel, as during the New Departure and the Land War. As circumstances changed, so too did political strategies and, if necessary, the nature of communal resistance.

The reasons why some areas were active during the revolutionary years and others were not, has attracted several studies. Joost Augusteijn, argues that one of the most significant factors which set Munster apart from other parts of the county was the number of IRA members who, from the very early stages of the campaign, became isolated from their family and friends by going on the run and forming flying columns. This he claims, resulted in a disinhibition to use violence compared to other areas where Volunteers remained within their communities.⁴⁰ The relationship

³⁸ L. Deasy, *Towards Ireland Free: The West Cork Brigade in the War of Independence 1917-21* (Cork, 1973), p. 35.

³⁹ Fitzpatrick, 'Geography of Irish Nationalism', p. 118.

⁴⁰ J. Augusteijn, 'Accounting for the Emergence of Violent Activism among Irish Revolutionaries, 1916-21' in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 35, no. 139 (May, 2007), pp. 327-344

between areas of intense conflict and a history of agrarian agitation has been posited by Tom Garvin, David Fitzpatrick, and Rumpf and Hepburn, an argument that could be decisive in a county like Cork with a long tradition of Ribbonism, boycotting, rural outrages, and campaigns for farm labourers rights stretching back to the eighteenth century.⁴¹ Peter Hart, however, has convincingly argued that this was not a significant factor in explaining one area's militancy against another's lack of revolutionary vigour. A tradition of rural agitation, he notes, 'appears to have been more influential in memory than in practice'.⁴² Other possible factors include geographical terrain, police ineffectiveness, the social backgrounds and economic status of volunteers, the prevalence of Christian Brothers' schools and Gaelic League and GAA clubs.

Many of those who joined the Irish Volunteers, and later the IRA, were born in the 1890s and early 1900s and most would have been too young for direct involvement in the AFIL during its most active period from 1910 to 1914. However, as volunteer witness statements indicate, some of the most influential figures in the IRA in North and West Cork came from O'Brienite-supporting families with a strong sense of history, personal agency, and a tradition of the practical application of clandestine activity to further political aims. They came from intensely political, but non-ideological communities who, once hostilities with the Crown were brought to a conclusion (albeit an unsatisfactory one for many), indicated a wish to return to constitutional methods and rejected a continuance of the armed struggle. It is this historical legacy and mentality in Cork, of what Hart calls 'little republics', which is most convincing in explaining why such an effective guerrilla force mobilised so rapidly after 1919.

Some commentators have asserted that the cleavage between O'Brienites and Redmondites prior to 1916 in some way accounted for the ferocity of the IRA campaign in Cork, which resulted in over twenty per cent of all fatalities in the country. In addition, as Tom Garvin notes, one-sixth of the revolutionary elite

⁴¹ E. Rumpf and A.C. Hepburn, *Nationalism and Socialism in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (Liverpool, 1977), pp. 50-5; Garvin, *Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*, pp. 13-5; Fitzpatrick, 'Geography of Irish Nationalism', pp. 136-7

⁴² Hart, 'Geography of Revolution', p. 164.

originated in Cork and ‘was widely seen as a distinct entity within the [republican] movement’.⁴³ David Fitzpatrick has argued that Munster’s robust tradition of nationalist heterodoxy, in part, accounts for the province’s militancy.⁴⁴ It has also been suggested that ‘the AFIL strongholds were the areas where the war of independence was chiefly fought’;⁴⁵ and the presence of prominent O’Brienite activists such as Johnny Collins and the Hales family, is seen as evidence of AFIL influence on the IRA campaign (Manus O’Riordan, tongue-in-cheek, comments, ‘In fact, the boys who bate the Black-and-Tans were Continuity AFIL!’).⁴⁶ Such arguments posit a correlation between the political insurgency of the AFIL and republican physical-force separatism. The difficulties in providing evidence to support these claims are considerable, but there are strong anecdotal indications of a link.

Two of the most prominent figures in the Cork IRA campaign were the Hales brothers, Tom and Sean from Ballinadee, whose father, Robert Hales, was an AFIL councillor on Bandon District Council and a member of the Board of Guardians. In 1914 they were credited with raising an entire Irish Volunteer company.⁴⁷ There are also witness statements of Cork IRA volunteers, collated by the Bureau of Military History, which in some cases includes information on their family backgrounds and political affiliations. Some came from AFIL strongholds in North and West Cork such as Michael Motherway from Charleville who says his family were strong O’Brienite supporters and that his two local representatives were Protestant AFIL councillors Langley Brazier-Creagh and Edmond Lyman.⁴⁸ James O’Connell (Officer Commanding, Kanturk Battalion) speaks of the long history of resistance in his area around the AFIL heartland of Kanturk and says his family were O’Brienites. O’Connell was converted to separatist nationalism in the United States, and his subsequent views of his community and the AFIL were less than flattering:

⁴³ Garvin, *Nationalist Revolutionaries*, p. 51

⁴⁴ Fitzpatrick, ‘Geography of Irish Nationalism’, p. 137.

⁴⁵ B. Clifford (ed.), *Reprints for the Cork Free Press 1910-1916* (Belfast, 1984), p. 51

⁴⁶ M. O’Riordan, *Ballingeary & Inchigeela Historical Society Journal* (2016).

⁴⁷ K. Keyes McDonnell, *There is a Bridge at Bandon: A Personal Account of the Irish War of Independence* (Cork, 1972), p. 35.

⁴⁸ M. Motherway (BMH, WS 1027).

We were farming stock and had a wholesome respect for our landlord and everything British – more or less of the Shoneen type. William O'Brien at the time was in favour of fraternising with the Landlord class some of whom were nominated to the local councils under the banner of the "All for Ireland League". Very few of them, however, were elected. Elections were stormy affairs then and a disgrace to any self-respecting nation. 'Twas a case of plenty of drink, fighting and mud-slinging – all of which was most pleasing to Mother England.⁴⁹

The AFIL-Redmondite conflict in Cork caused open splits in the early days of the Irish Volunteers. John M. McCarthy from Killmallock (Adjutant, East Limerick Brigade), recalled that his earliest political memories were 'A disrespect for the Redmondite party and some vague interest in William O'Brien'. He claimed that the AFIL was influential in the Irish Volunteers in Cork, Limerick and Tipperary.⁵⁰ Michael Sheehy (Adjutant, Charleville Battalion), says his company of Volunteers was split down the middle between AFIL and Redmond supporters.⁵¹ There were also rival O'Brienite and Redmondite companies in Bantry, Millstreet, and Mallow;⁵² and Patrick O'Sullivan (Vice-Officer Commanding., Ballyvourney Battalion), says that his area was so divided that when Sinn Féin clubs were formed 'if the Chairman was an O'Brienite, then the Vice-Chairman would have to be a Redmondite'.⁵³

Following the outbreak of war in 1914 both William O'Brien and John Redmond urged their followers to enlist or to join the National Volunteers. In analysing a correlation between AFIL-supporting areas and the IRA, there is some anecdotal evidence that Volunteer companies with an active AFIL membership were more likely to ignore O'Brien's and Redmond's direction and join the re-constituted Irish Volunteers. If they did so, this could be considered as an indication of future IRA involvement. In Dunmanway, Edward Young, from an AFIL-supporting family, states that an Irish Volunteer company was formed in 1914 when he and his two brothers joined under the leadership of a prominent AFIL member, Florence

⁴⁹ J. O'Connell (BMH, WS 0949).

⁵⁰ J. M. McCarty (BMH, WS 0883).

⁵¹ M. Sheehy (BMH, WS 0989).

⁵² T. O'Sullivan, (BMH, WS 1478); E. Young, (BMH, WS 1402), C. Meaney, (BMH, WS 1416); O. Harold, (BMH, WS 0991).

⁵³ P. O'Sullivan (BMH, WS 0794).

Crowley. The company split between O'Brienite and Redmondite factions, and following Redmond's Woodenbridge speech, the O'Brienites and Sinn Féiners left and joined the Irish Volunteers.⁵⁴ In Mallow, Daniel Hegarty recalls that the Volunteer company was overwhelmingly O'Brienite, and again a small number left to join the National Volunteers but the majority 'carried on as before'.⁵⁵ In Bantry, the majority of the company, including the officers, were O'Brienites and refused to join the National Volunteers. In Millstreet however, where there were also two rival companies, the original O'Brienite faction was reduced to a core of about ten and money to buy six rifles was provided by Dan Lenihan, an AFIL county councillor.⁵⁶

A possible link between the AFIL and the IRA has, however, been challenged by Peter Hart who argues that the IRA was most active where the AFIL was weakest and that there is a correlation between areas where electoral support for the Redmondites was strong (especially East Cork) and IRA violence in 1917-19.⁵⁷ However, the IRA campaign was not launched in its full intensity until January 1920, and although Hart's figures show an increase in general lawlessness and disrespect for the institutions and forces of the state in this period, this cannot be described as a campaign. Indeed, in a previous article, he noted, 'Before 1920[...]most IRA "operations" took the form of drilling and marching', although he posits a correlation between units who were active in this period and those who were most effective in the guerrilla war of 1920-1921.⁵⁸ The argument that the IRA was most active in East Cork is challenged by more recent research into fatalities during the War of Independence which indicates a broader spread of deaths and IRA activity across the city and county:

The two most substantial concentrations of killing outside the city emerged in two zones, one extending West-North-West through the area of the Cork No. 1 Brigade, the second pushing into the Cork No. 3 Brigade area. Notably, the Cork No. 3 Brigade area recorded an additional line of fatalities across West Cork's coastal communities. A similar pattern of concentration is evident in

⁵⁴ E. Young, (BMH, WS 1402).

⁵⁵ D. Hegarty, (BMH, WS 0033).

⁵⁶ C. Healy, (BMH, WS 1416).

⁵⁷ Hart, *IRA and its Enemies*, pp. 205-6n.

⁵⁸ Hart, 'Geography of Revolution, p. 157.

East Cork, and others are visible in and around the urban centres of North Cork.⁵⁹

Peter Hart has also controversially claimed that the republican campaign in Cork was one of ‘ethnic intolerance’ and ‘the quasi-millenarian idea of a final reckoning of the ancient conflict between settlers and natives’, in which Protestants were targeted and killed by the IRA in the Bandon Valley⁶⁰ (an area Hart melodramatically labels ‘the Gaza Strip of the Irish *intifada*’⁶¹). The view of a sectarian IRA campaign was supported in a later study by Gerard Murphy.⁶² However, Hart's and Murphy's claims are contentious, and while some Protestants in West Cork were singled out, there is compelling evidence that they were killed, not because of their religion, but because they were suspected of collusion with Crown forces, or of being informers.⁶³ Cork also had the largest number of Big House burnings in Ireland during the revolutionary years. However, as James S. Donnelly's detailed analysis has shown, many of these houses had been used, at the invitation of their owners, to billet Crown forces; these Ascendancy families also played a traditional role in the state infrastructure and often had close family ties with the armed forces.⁶⁴ The AFIL had attempted to forge a *rapprochement* with these families but in the tumult of the conflict, marked by atrocities and retaliation, the O'Brienite doctrine of ‘The Three Cs’: Conference, Conciliation and Consent was but a barely-remembered dream.

⁵⁹ The authors also challenge Hart's methodology concerning the inclusion of woundings in his analysis of IRA attacks: ‘The reportage on woundings is much more difficult to capture consistently than that on deaths, partly because woundings were underreported and partly because the reports blurred the differences between more and less serious injuries.’ A. Bielenberg and J. S. Donnelly, *Cork's War of Independence Fatality Register* (theirishrevolution.ie) (17 April 2018).

⁶⁰ Hart, *IRA and its Enemies*, p. 288. Hart has come under fierce criticism, not only for his claims that Protestants were targeted but also because of his reconstruction of the Kilmichael ambush where he asserts that IRA volunteers executed wounded and unarmed Auxiliaries. (see letters from A. Boldt and S. Ó Ceilleachoir, *History Ireland*, vol. 13, no. 5 (Sept.-Oct., 2005), pp. 12-14); and M. Ryan, *Tom Barry: IRA Freedom Fighter* (Cork, 2005).

⁶¹ Hart, ‘Geography of Revolution’, p. 143.

⁶² G. Murphy, *The Year of Disappearances, 1921-1922* (Dublin, 2010).

⁶³ B. Keane, ‘Protestant Civilians killed in Cork 1920-1923’ in *Protestant Cork 1911-26*, sites.google.com (12 April 2018).

⁶⁴ J. S. Donnelly, *Big House Burnings in County Cork During the Irish Revolution 1920-21*. (<http://fliphtml5.com/pilz/eaja/basic>) (17 April 2018). Lord Dunraven's homes in Limerick and Kerry were raided for arms, although not burned, by the IRA in 1920 and 1922 (William O'Brien to Dunraven, 31 August 1920; Dunraven to O'Brien, 13 September 1920, NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8554/17).

Although the AFIL is best remembered for its policy of conciliation with Protestants and unionists, the strength of the party's nationalist vote in Cork was based on support for Home Rule and populist policies aimed at urban workers, small farmers and agricultural labourers. Those AFIL supporters who switched their allegiance to Sinn Féin after 1917, did not perforce, indicate a complete rejection of the constitutional path and probably not a wholehearted embrace of armed insurrection. The strong pro-Treaty vote in AFIL heartlands in the 1922 general election (see Table Six below) may have been, as in the rest of the country, due to war-weariness, but it also decisively indicated a preference for the constitutional path once this was deemed possible.

Even within the republican movement there was frequent disagreement between those Sinn Féiners who espoused non-violence and between those, both in Sinn Féin and the Volunteers (and later the IRA), who wanted a military campaign and, as Paul Bew notes, many Sinn Féin candidates 'stressed the primacy of peaceful means'.⁶⁵ This conflict was evident in Cork where Liam de Roiste, elected as an MP for Sinn Féin in the 1918 general election, described the battles to take over Sinn Féin clubs by Volunteers 'who often expressed contempt for Sinn Féin as a 'mere political organisation'.⁶⁶ William O'Brien recounts an intriguing conversation with de Valera at the height of the civil war in August 1922 in which he claims de Valera told him he had spent the previous four years trying to hold the peace between what he termed the Fenians, represented by Cathal Brugha, and Arthur Griffith's constitutional Sinn Féiners. They were, said de Valera, in essence, two different movements and it was 'only the Black and Tan terror that held them together for so long'.⁶⁷

It is striking that, after the trauma of the revolutionary years, Cork, with its long history of conflict and a political culture which was in the days of the O'Brienite-Redmondite split, febrile and frequently violent, settled into a relatively tranquil

⁶⁵ P. Bew, 'Moderate Nationalism and the Irish Revolution, 1916-1923' in *The Historical Journal*, vol. 42, no. 3 (Sept. 1999), p. 736.

⁶⁶ de Roiste Diaries, 21 December 1919 (CCCA, U271/C/15).

⁶⁷ O'Brien, *Irish Revolution* (12 October 2016), p. 429.

harmony and, like the rest of the country, so recently riven by insurrection and civil war, managed the transition to a remarkably stable society in which liberal democratic politics became deeply rooted.⁶⁸ The tone of political discourse in Cork changed from the rumbustious populism and personal invective, so redolent of the O'Brienite spilt, to a calmer more pragmatic politics. During the 1923 general election campaign for example, the Cumman na nGaedhael candidates J.J. Walsh and Alfred O'Rahilly claimed that 'The days of oratory are gone. Hard work and not big talk is what the country needs'.⁶⁹ This was in part because the Black and Tan conflict had been especially vicious in Cork with the highest number of casualties in the country.⁷⁰ The centre of Cork city was destroyed, as well as hundreds of homes, businesses and creameries and, coming so soon after the First World War, and followed by the Civil War, there were few families left untouched. Even though the bitterness of that conflict was still evident there were no outbreaks of violence during election campaigns in the Free State. In Cork, although the gross economic and social inequalities which precipitated the rise of the AFIL had not been resolved, the political context of independence had changed the nature of the intra-nationalist conflict. The hegemonic grip of the Home Rule movement had been broken. Independence brought a new electoral system and proportional representation allowed a different type of politics to develop. In the 1923 general election for example, candidates stood for Cumman na nGaedheal, the Labour party, Farmers Union, and Progressive Association, in addition to republicans and independents. Different interest groups were, with varying degrees of success, at least given the hope that their voices would be heard. By 1925, the *Cork Examiner*, missing perhaps the excitement of previous years, called the Cork County Council elections 'quiet and uninteresting'.⁷¹

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⁶⁸ Garvin, *Evolution of Irish Politics*, pp. 205-17.

⁶⁹ *Cork Examiner*, 20 August 1925.

⁷⁰ theirishrevolution.ie (12 October 2018). Peter Hart's analysis puts the number of all those killed in Cork between 1917 to 1923 at 747 and 877 wounded. (Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies*, p. 51).

⁷¹ *Cork Examiner*, 26 June 1925.

The ideological legacy of the AFIL is difficult to assess because its fundamental political ideas were relatively inchoate. It represented a broad spectrum of opinion from Tim Healy's conservative populism and Moreton Frewan's imperial pretensions on the right, to the rural labour campaigner D.D. Sheehan on the left. William O'Brien was an economic and social conservative in the mould of Parnell, his hero and mentor, whose land policies, as Richard English notes, 'produced the most conservative nationalists imaginable, in the form of small farm-owners committed to private property'.⁷² What united AFIL supporters was a hatred of the dominance of the Home Rule movement; an opportunity to articulate the aspirations of urban and rural working class communities whose interests were not represented by conservative nationalism; and, for a minority, an altruistic desire to build a movement which would represent nationalists and unionists in a self-governing Ireland.

In attempting to develop a political platform which could encompass such disparate political and social constituencies, the AFIL, taking its lead from the Irish party, avoided developing detailed social and economic policies, and for reasons of electoral expediency, ran successful populist campaigns in the two general elections of 1910 and the local elections the following year. From its launch in 1910, the AFIL was immediately caught up in momentous political and constitutional events and its political programme, if it can be termed as such, was dictated not by a coherent expression of its political aspiration, but by the need to differentiate itself from the Irish party (as has been seen in Chapter Two, conciliation was rarely mentioned during election campaigns). Where an ideological position can be discerned, it is conservative populism, suspicious of modernity and deeply antagonistic toward liberalism and especially socialism. Tim Healy's biographer Frank Callanan has argued that the formative role of conservative nationalism between the fall of Parnell and the emergence of the Irish Free State is too little recognised. It was, he argues, 'Coarsely moralistic, ostensibly pietistic and clericalist. Increasingly disaffected from the British Liberal party, it was staunchly

⁷² English, *Irish Freedom*, p. 204.

opposed to radical movements in Irish politics.’⁷³ It was also, in its several iterations, populist in style.

Modern conceptions of populism are frequently negative, seeing it as a strategy used by unscrupulous actors or movements to advance political agendas by stirring up unhealthy and primordial passions, making it essentially undemocratic. Cas Mudde, whilst conceding that populism, ‘is truly an essentially contested concept’, defines it as, ‘a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite,” and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people’.⁷⁴ Peter Worsley takes a positive view of populism, arguing that ‘insofar as populism plumps for the rights of majorities to make sure – by “intervening” – that they are not ignored (as they commonly are) populism is profoundly compatible with democracy’.⁷⁵

This is also the view of Emmet Larkin, one of the few historians to deal specifically with pre and post-independence Irish populism. However, his analysis is undermined by a failure to offer a coherent definition. While arguing that populism has been one of the most critical factors in the evolution of Ireland's unique political tradition, he equates it with the popular political transmission of the aspirations, needs and grievances of the grassroots to political parties, in essence ‘the will of the people’. Populism is he argues, ‘essentially government from the bottom up’ which has kept political parties and institutions, such as the Catholic Church, from becoming overly-powerful, and acting as a corrective in what was, in pre-independence Ireland, effectively a one-party system (albeit, for the Irish party, one without power).⁷⁶ Larkin however, is less than critical of the more negative aspects of populism: its divisive qualities and the obfuscation of inconvenient economic and social issues by a conservative leadership. Central to most forms of populism is the

⁷³ F. Callanan, ‘After Parnell: The Political Consequences of Timothy Michael Healy’ in *An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 80, no. 320 (Winter, 1991), pp. 371-376.

⁷⁴ C. Mudde. and C. R. Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2017), p. 3.

⁷⁵ P. Worsley. ‘The Concept of Populism’ in G. Ionescu and E. Gellner (eds.), *Populism - Its Meanings and National Characteristics* (London, 1969), p. 247.

⁷⁶ E. Larkin, ‘The Irish Political Tradition’ in T. E. Hachey and L. J. McCaffrey (eds.), *Perspectives on Irish Nationalism* (Chicago, 1989), pp. 111-9.

leader who alone, it is claimed, can channel the will of the people and, as Max Weber has argued, especially in times of crisis, societies, or those elements of society that feel threatened or oppressed, will look for charismatic leadership such as William O'Brien's.⁷⁷

A populist strategy was necessary for the AFIL because of the electoral need to attract the rural and urban working class. The ideological preferences of the party relating to social and economic issues, represented by O'Brien, Healy, Moreton Frewan, Lord Dunraven and other AFIL notables, were predominantly subterranean because, on some central economic and social issues, they ran counter to the interests of the class they represented. The AFIL was not primarily opposed to government economic intervention, as O'Brien's central role in land purchase – the single most significant cost to the British exchequer in Ireland's history – proved. What the AFIL's conservatives objected to was the encroachment of the state through redistributive social policies funded by taxation on its middle-class supporters, a view also shared by many in the Irish party. The AFIL's opposition was also driven by the need to differentiate itself from the Home Rule movement, as with the AFIL's opposition to the 'People's Budget' in 1910, which had the effect of discommoding Redmond and the Irish party who were forced to support the budget to save the Liberal government from collapse. However, the AFIL's populist strategy failed after its initial successes in 1910 and 1911. In the local government elections of 1914 it ran ineffectual campaigns focusing on issues such housing and poverty. This did not succeed because of the party's failure in local government to offer anything substantially different to its supporters from the Redmondites it had replaced.⁷⁸

The other reason for the loss of electoral support for the AFIL was that it was unable to frame its policy of conciliation in a populist narrative or indeed to find any alternative political ideology acceptable to its nationalist and unionist supporters. In part, this was because the principal AFIL campaign was a populist mobilisation of its nationalist base: 'the common people' against 'a corrupt elite', in this case the

⁷⁷ M. Weber, *From Max Weber. Essays in Sociology* (2013) <https://doi-org.liverpool.idm.ocic.org/10.10.4324/9780203452196>, (21 April 2019), p. 245.

⁷⁸ See Chapter Four.

Irish party and its affiliates. The difficulty for the O'Brienite MPs however, was that only a few years before the 'corrupt elite' had been Anglo-Irish landlords and the British state. The primordial emotions which these ancestral enemies generated (as John Dillon and Michael Davitt recognised) provided the impetus for nationalist mobilisation and were not going to disappear because of the conjuration of a policy of conciliation by William O'Brien. Up to the Home Rule crisis of 1914 O'Brien was able to obfuscate this policy with attacks on the Liberal government and by blaming Redmond and the Irish party for its pusillanimity. When he had to make it clear what conciliation meant in practical terms, for example, offering unionists a veto in the Imperial parliament and a disproportionate number of seats in an Irish parliament, he was unable to convince his followers that this was in their best interests: the limits of populism had been reached.

The AFIL was also a victim of its own success as, through the efforts of O'Brien and Sheehan, its Cork heartland had the highest rate of land purchase in the country.⁷⁹ However, as John Dillon feared, a degree of economic security was not conducive to a political insurgency and land purchase and better living conditions for farm labourers reduced support for the AFIL. Fergus Campbell argues that the land acts did not end rural class conflict, but relegated it from its primary position of issues which could mobilise nationalist discontent.⁸⁰ The LLAs, for all their shortcomings, were a genuine expression of rural working class grievance relating to the appalling working and living conditions of farm labourers, and were emblematic of a rural political culture in Cork that cleaved to the populist, socially conservative and non-ideological politics of the AFIL for a brief period. From 1917 to 1923 the nuances of party politics were subsumed in the rise of Sinn Féin in its second manifestation. The legacy of this rural labour tradition in the new Irish state, which in Cork had been so closely affiliated with the AFIL, will now be examined.

iv

The Irish Labour party would, on the face of it, have been a good fit for former AFIL supporters, used to supporting small heterodox parties which were unlikely to

⁷⁹ *Irish People*, 26 November 1908; O'Brien *Olive Branch* (13 June 2016), pp. 376-7.

⁸⁰ Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, pp. 286-304.

achieve power. The close affinity between small farmers, the rural working class, the ITGWU and the Labour party reflected that tradition of moderate non-ideological activism of D.D. Sheehan and the ILLA which the AFIL had harnessed so effectively.⁸¹ Labour became the half of what has been described as a ‘two and a half party system’. Under Thomas Johnson and subsequent leaders, Labour was shorn of its radical syndicalist past, reluctant to challenge the Free State's conservative consensus and never managed to gain more than a fifth of the popular vote. Emmet Larkin suggests that there is a strong link between the rural labour tradition which inspired the LLAs and the AFIL, ‘The local Land and Labour Leagues of the 1880s and 1890s, and especially the All for Ireland League just before the First World War, have provided the Labour Party with a politically conscious constituency at the grassroots.’⁸² There had been attempts to organise LLAs in many parts of the country but the most active and resilient organisations were in the Cork-Limerick-South Tipperary triangle.⁸³ The relative strength of the LLAs is indicated by the number of labourers cottages built after the Labourers act of 1906, with the highest numbers in Cork (14.4% of the total), Limerick (8.7%) and Tipperary (North and South Ridings, 7.4%).⁸⁴ Given the paucity and variations in statistical evidence available, any attempt to analyse a correlation between the AFIL, the LLAs and the Labour party is, at best, tenuous. The only general elections which the AFIL contested were in January and December 1910, but it is not possible to directly compare these results with Labour’s performance in Free State elections for three reasons. Firstly, in 1910 the AFIL provided the only organised opposition to the Irish party in Munster constituencies, thus producing a binary choice; in the Free State there was a multiplicity of parties and independent candidates. Secondly, constituencies had also changed: Cork had seven constituencies in 1910 and four after 1923; and Munster counties, apart from Cork, had only one constituency per county in 1923. Thirdly, the post-independence Free State had adopted proportional representation under the single transferable vote. Although these differences limit a comprehensive analysis, a crude comparison of voting patterns between the AFIL and Labour can be made.

⁸¹ See interview with the trade unionist Donal Nevin, *Irish Times*, 18 November 1965.

⁸² Larkin, ‘The Irish Political Tradition’, p. 118.

⁸³ Lane, ‘Land and Labour Association’, p. 97.

⁸⁴ Bradley, *Farm Labourers*, p. 22.

In December 1910 the AFIL was victorious in seven of eight Cork constituencies, the exception being East Cork which had a popular Irish party candidate, and a rival LLA to Sheehan's was launched in 1910 (Table One).

Table One: AFIL Vote in Cork City and County: General Election December 1910

Cork City*	Cork North	Cork North-East	Mid-Cork	Cork East	Cork West	Cork South-East
51.1%	Unopposed (AFIL 61.7% Jan. 1910)	Unopposed (AFIL 50.6% Jan. 1910)	58.3%	37.5%	60.8%	53.6%

*Two AFIL MPs elected

In the other Munster constituencies (Table Two), the relatively strong showing of AFIL candidates needs to be considered in the context of single constituencies and not, as from 1923 onwards (when considering the Labour vote in Table Five), whole county constituencies.⁸⁵

Table Two: AFIL Vote in Munster Constituencies outside Cork: General Election December 1910⁸⁶

Kerry South	Kerry East	Limerick City	Limerick West	Limerick East	Mid-Tipperary	Waterford West
16.0%	33.8%	21.7%	29.6%	27.0%	41.0%	30.6%

Post-war depression decimated the Labour movement and trade union membership fell by over a half between 1922 and 1926 with a consequent decline in Labour party funding and the ability to run an effective political organisation.⁸⁷ Emigration also resumed after the end of the war and played its traditional role in Irish society by syphoning off excessive labour and reducing social tension which might otherwise have increased the demand for social change.⁸⁸ Although these factors adversely

⁸⁵ It is not possible to compare county votes between 1910 and post-independence elections because in 1910, in constituencies where there were no AFIL candidates, Irish party candidates were elected unopposed

⁸⁶ Tables One and Two: Walker, *Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland, 1801-1922*, pp. 177-82.

⁸⁷ Mitchell. *Labour in Irish Politics*, pp. 190-1.

⁸⁸ Garvin, *Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*, p. 148.

affected Labour support, the party managed to gain a respectable one-fifth of the popular vote in Cork in the 1922 general election (Table Three).

Table Three: Labour Vote (First Preference) in Cork City and County
General election 1922⁸⁹

Cork Borough	Cork East and North-East	Cork Mid, North, South, South-East and West
22.5%	NLC*	19.5%

* No Labour Candidate

Of all the Munster counties, the AFIL vote in 1910 and the post-independence Labour vote was strongest in Cork, especially in the city and Cork West. The Labour vote was significantly reduced in Cork North by 1933, as it was in Cork East (Table Four) which Labour failed to contest. This presents a conundrum for Larkin's argument as Cork North in 1922-23 incorporated the old constituencies of Mid-Cork, North-East and Cork North, all AFIL strongholds, but from 1933 Cork North voted overwhelmingly for Fianna Fáil and Cumman na nGaedheal. Cork West, approximately coterminous to the old pre-independence constituency, was lost to the AFIL in a by-election in December 1916. However, the official AFIL candidate took 43% of the vote and would have taken the seat but for a dissident AFIL candidate who polled 12% and split the AFIL vote. West Cork, therefore, can be considered an AFIL stronghold and retained the most substantial rural Labour vote in the county. Parts of Cork city had been strongly O'Brienite, returning two AFIL MPs in December 1910 with over 50% of the vote and, post-independence, the city maintained a significant Labour presence, although with a much smaller share of the vote than that of the AFIL. Of Labour T.D.s elected in Cork constituencies, only Timothy J. Murphy, who represented Cork West from 1923 until his death in 1949, had a background in the AFIL.

⁸⁹ Tables Three to Six: B. M. Walker, *Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland, 1918- 1992* (Dublin, 1992), pp. 108-43.

Table Four: Labour Vote (First Preferences) in Cork City and County: General Elections 1923-33 (includes independent Labour candidates)

Election Year	Cork Borough	Cork East	Cork North	Cork West	Labour's Share of National Vote
1923	12.3%	21.05%**	18.1%	11.8%	10.6%
1927 (June)	23.6%	25.4%**	26.8%	21.3%	12.6%
1927 (Sept)	13.6%	8.2%	22.3%	15.3%	9.1%
1932	20.0%	5.4%	13.7%	17.7%	7.7%
1933	19.8%	NLC	5.4%	14.5%	5.7%

**John Daly was elected as an independent labour candidate. He stood for Cumann na nGaedhael from September 1927.

Before 1918, apart from unionists in Ulster and a handful of independents, the AFIL provided the only organised opposition to the Irish party. However, the significant AFIL votes in Cork and other Munster constituencies, like the AFIL itself, concealed a diversity of interests, including labour and independents. A new electoral system allowed these interests political representation in their own right. The analysis presented here offers some support for the claim that AFIL supporters transferred their allegiance to the Labour Party, but only in Cork city and Cork West; although Limerick, which had strong AFIL support, has managed to return a Labour TD in most elections since 1922. In other areas of Cork and Munster the Labour vote began to decline after Fianna Fáil, with its mix of labour-friendly populism and nationalism, contested elections from 1927 onwards (Table Five), and AFIL-supporting areas over much of rural Cork and Munster switched their allegiance from Labour to Fianna Fáil from 1927. This dichotomy between labour and conservative nationalists, to some extent, mirrors the AFIL with its spectrum of interests, some of which were irreconcilable. The AFIL, for all its emphasis on conciliation, was still an overwhelmingly nationalist party whose rhetoric, especially at election times, was that of the heroic national struggles of the past. Although both Labour and Fianna Fáil talked of the reconciliation of all the people of Ireland, Catholic and Protestant; in Labour's case this was through working class solidarity and, for Fianna Fáil, by invoking a republican vision of unity (and reclaiming 'The Fourth Green Field'). The nature of the emerging state, however, was testament to the priorities of Fianna Fáil in consolidating and institutionalising Catholic

nationalism. A dialogical politics of the kind that William O'Brien had advocated did not fit within this framework.

Table Five: Labour Vote (First Preferences) in Munster Constituencies outside Cork: General Elections 1923-33

Election Year	Kerry	Limerick	Tipperary	Waterford	Labour's Share of National Vote
1923	6.0%	16.1%	16.8%	18.1%	10.6%
1927 (June)	5.9%	13.9%	20.9%	6.6%	12.6%
1927 (Sept)	NLC	15.3%	18.7%	NLC	9.1%
1932	NLC	10.8%	14.4%	8.9%	7.7%
1933	NLC	8.7%	5.9%	2.1%	5.7%

Given Rebel Cork's reputation as a republican stronghold, the 1922 election, which was seen as a plebiscite on the Treaty, provided a large vote for the Coalition Treaty (Table Six). As several prominent Cork republicans such as Michael Collins, J.J. Walsh, and other local IRA leaders took a robust pro-Treaty stance (many nationalists adopted the view that 'What's good enough for Mick [Michael Collins] is good enough for me'),⁹⁰ this was hardly surprising. Cork Borough and the large constituency of Cork Mid, North, South, South-East and West voted heavily for pro-Treaty candidates. These constituencies included the AFIL-O'Brienite strongholds in the northside and centre of Cork City, and Cork North, Mid and West. O'Brien was by then a spent force and his fervent opposition to partition and the treaty were well known but made little difference to the overwhelming pro-treaty vote in his old heartlands. The pro-Treaty vote, as Peter Hart argues, reflected a general war-weariness.⁹¹ However, it also suggests that support for the O'Brienite cause was always motivated more by social and economic issues rather than O'Brien's views on national causes like partition and conciliation. In Cork city the Labour candidate Robert Day topped the poll and scrupulously avoided the Treaty during the election campaign even though the Labour party had decided to allow each candidate to articulate their position. Michel Collins was elected with a huge majority with Labour winning two seats. Sean Hales, one of a family of legendary IRA fighters

⁹⁰ C. Townsend, *Ireland: The 20th Century* (London, 1998), p. 113.

⁹¹ Hart, *IRA and its Enemies*, pp.51-2.

with strong O'Brienite connections in West Cork, was also elected for the Coalition Treaty.⁹²

Table Six: Pro-Treaty (Coalition Treaty) Vote in Cork City and County: General Election 1922

Cork Borough	Cork East and North-East	Cork Mid, North, South, South-East and West
80.8%	51.5%	77%

In local government, Labour was unable, once again, to make its voice heard above the cacophony of the national question. The county council elections of 1925 were the first to be held under new legislation which abolished district councils outside Dublin. In Cork, Labour managed to take only nine seats against twenty-seven for the Farmers Union, thirteen republicans and eighteen independents, although the latter included several individuals sympathetic to Labour. Labour did best in the old AFIL strongholds of North and West Cork.⁹³ In 1924 the Free State government dissolved Cork Corporation under legislation aimed at anti-Treaty councils and it was not reinstated until 1929 when Labour again only managed to hold two seats.⁹⁴ The Irish Labour party has maintained a strong rural base and it is likely that its close affiliation with the ITGWU which supplanted the LLAs, has been instrumental in maintaining its support.

On economic and social issues Labour, without Connolly and Larkin, was reformist rather than revolutionary, moderate, opportunist, and rooted in the values of rural Ireland. Labour's perennial difficulty however, has been that its electoral support has been primarily the urban and rural working class which, in 1926 comprised only 17% of the employed population.⁹⁵ Fianna Fáil, on the other hand could appeal to a much wider constituency and, as Tom Garvin argues, 'had the advantage of being freed from the incorrigible militancy of the IRA and also from the political dreamers

⁹² Sean Hales' brother Tom took the anti-Treaty side and led the IRA ambush which killed Michael Collins at Béal na Bláth two months later (Coogan, *Michael Collins*, p. 407). Sean Hales was assassinated in December 1922 by members of the anti-Treaty IRA.

⁹³ *Cork Examiner*, 30 June 1925; 1 July 1925.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 8 March 1929.

⁹⁵ P. Mair, 'Labour and the Irish Party System Revisited: Party Competition in the 1920s' in *Economic and Social History*, vol. 9, no. 1 (1977), p. 64.

of purist Sinn Féin'.⁹⁶ Both Fianna Fáil and Labour offered modest economic reform and welfare policies, socially conservative populism and presented themselves as the representatives of the unskilled urban worker, the farm labourer and the small farmer: the ordinary people against the well-off and the periphery over the centre (in 1927, Thomas Johnson, the leader of the Labour party complained that Fianna Fáil's programme was almost identical to Labour's on twelve out of fifteen major points).⁹⁷ But, in spite of a rhetorical egalitarianism, with the Proclamation of the Irish Republic as its notional lodestar, the economic and social policies that Fianna Fáil pursued (with the reluctant collusion of Labour), accepted relatively high levels of inequality and poverty and was reliant both on emigration and the power of the Catholic Church to syphon off and stifle dissent. As O'Mahony and Delanty argue, 'The social question was suppressed: propertied conservatism and social injustice was never to receive a fundamental challenge.'⁹⁸ In essence a new nationalist-conservative hegemony which included the two main political parties, the Church, some business interests, conservative elements of the trade union movement, cultural organisations and arguably, the Labour party, was constructed. Dissenting voices were, once again, stifled.

In the two and a half years between the Easter Rising and the end of the war, nationalist politics was changed beyond recognition. As Senia Pašeta argues, a university-educated, self-confident Catholic class, who believed they were soon to become the governing elite in an Irish Home Rule government, found not only their ambitions frustrated but their affinity towards British institutions and culture abhorrent to 'Irish-Ireland' which became the dominant strain of nationalist ideology.⁹⁹ The AFIL, who because of its support for the war, lost the ability to distance itself from the Irish party and both lost credibility and moral legitimacy after 1916. David Fitzpatrick has noted that 'the spirit of the constitutional movement did not die with the body,' and many of its supporters were like 'lost creatures whose instincts called them back to constitutionalism but whose common

⁹⁶ Garvin, *Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*, p. 159.

⁹⁷ Michell, *Labour in Irish Politics*, p. 244.

⁹⁸ O' Mahony and Delanty, *Rethinking Irish History*, p. 130.

⁹⁹ S. Pašeta, *Before the Revolution*, p. 3.

sense urged conversion'.¹⁰⁰ As has been demonstrated in this chapter, this was also true of William O'Brien's and Tim Healy's painful conversion to Sinn Féin which fell far short of an endorsement for either separatism or military insurrection against the Crown. For O'Brien, 'It was not Parliamentary methods, but rotten Parliamentary methods which had broken down'.¹⁰¹ The belated conversion of some Southern unionists to Home Rule was a bitter irony in the light of their repeated rejection of his overtures which, had they been less obdurate, could have changed the political trajectory a few years earlier. But for O'Brien, the greatest infamy was partition which, since 1913, he had warned would be an endless cause of division and instability. For a politician whose prophecies were, more often than not, wildly unreliable, this was a prediction which would, unfortunately, prove to be eerily prescient.

¹⁰⁰ Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, p. 99.

¹⁰¹ O'Brien, *Irish Revolution* (13 October 2018), p. 386.

CONCLUSION

The 1918 general election saw a fundamental shift of power from constitutional nationalism to Sinn Féin and physical force separatism. Sinn Féin MPs were presented as being men of the people (and, apart from Constance Markiewicz, they were all men), idealistic and pure of heart. There was also a generational shift, with no less than a third of the new Sinn Féin MPs under the age of thirty-five, and three quarters younger than forty-five. In previous generations, age was associated with wisdom and experience. Now, however, it represented an *ancien regime* associated with failure and a dismal outmoded politics. Those who had been most enthusiastic about the war and recruitment, who had taunted young nationalists as ‘shirkers’, including two AFIL MPs, faced retribution in the new post-war, post-election dispensation.

William O’Brien, embittered by the failure of his All for Ireland vision, still railed against the perfidy of ‘the Mollies’ - the Irish party and the AOH - who he blamed for the destruction of parliamentarianism. In his final years, he turned his restless and obsessive energy against, what was for him, the final abomination of partition, and reconciliation became a secondary concern. However, as F.S.L. Lyons observed, ‘by concentrating attention on physical boundaries and questions of political sovereignty, it postponed almost until our own day any serious consideration of the cultural differences that underlay the partition of the country’.¹ The violent intra-nationalist cleavage, which had given rise to the AFIL, was at last put to rest by a proportionate electoral system which facilitated the emergence of new parties; and emigration, which siphoned off the more troublesome ‘men [and women] of no property’. The post-independence dispensation however, was seen as a betrayal not only by many nationalists but also by many Southern unionists. The consolidation of the Irish Free State and the Northern Ireland regime left Catholic nationalists in the North trapped in a sectarian statelet which successive Westminster governments were content to ignore; and Protestants and dissenters in the South found that the vision of the republic inspired by Wolfe Tone, Thomas Davis and James Connolly was far from the reality of an existence dominated by the Catholic Church and a

¹ Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 147.

narrow and conservative variant of democracy and citizenship. This was a parody of O'Brien's All for Ireland vision.

i

The AFIL was tainted with the rejection of the Home Rule movement by nationalists although it had opposed the Irish party before many of the upcoming generation had entered politics. Following the Easter Rising, O'Brien, now aged sixty-six, signalled his disillusionment with politics and by 1918 was glad to retire from active political life, although such a restless spirit as his could not stop himself from publicly expressing an opinion or attempting to influence the course of events in the tumultuous years which followed. Of the other AFIL MPs, John Guiney, John Walsh and Eugene Crean were also content to depart the political field. Michael Egan, former President of the trades council and an AFIL councillor on Cork Corporation, was elected for the Labour party in the local government elections of 1920, and in 1924, was returned as a Cumann na nGaedhael T.D. at a by-election in Cork city.² Lord Dunraven supported the Anglo-Irish Treaty and accepted the offer of a seat in the Seanad from the Cumann na nGaedhael government. D.D. Sheehan and Maurice Healy did not escape the turbulence of the revolutionary years. Sheehan had built a formidable reputation as a champion of the rural poor and landless labourers, but this was tainted by his energetic recruiting and the traducing of young nationalists who refused to join the colours during the war. His own losses – two of his sons, were killed in action, his daughter was severely injured, and he lost his hearing while serving on the Western Front with the Munster Fusiliers – did little to lessen the animosity of many advanced nationalists. He wrote to O'Brien of 'a purgatory of suffering' and said he considered emigrating to Australia.³ His daughter Mona Barsby recalls that he and his family were forced out of the country after he stood down as an MP in 1918: 'I suppose my father was tipped off something was going to happen. Very early one morning, we were woken, told to get dressed in a hurry, and we left in the dead of night. We drove straight to the Royal Marine Hotel, Dun

² Walker, *Parliamentary Election Results 1918-1992*, p. 116.

³ Sheehan to O'Brien, 19 January 1920 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AT 128).

Laoghaire, and then into our cabin on the mailboat, in secret, a few hours before it sailed. We were gone before anyone knew.’⁴

Maurice Healy also ran foul of the changing political climate. He refused to endorse Sinn Féin when he stood down as the MP for Cork city in 1918. He had earlier earned the enmity of the labour movement when he represented employers in a bitter tram strike in Cork in 1909, and he continued to practice as a solicitor after 1918. During the civil war he gave legal advice to Cork merchants regarding taxes levied on them by anti-Treaty forces, then in control of the city. His brother Tim recalls that Maurice was forced to board the steamer from Cork to Wales at the point of a gun. He returned within a few months but died the following year.⁵

The stance of the two most prominent AFIL figures William O'Brien and Timothy Healy reflected the cleavage which followed the Treaty.⁶ For O'Brien, as it had been in 1914, the issue of partition was one that he could not accept under any circumstances. He attempted to influence events before the outbreak of hostilities in 1919 in a letter to Lloyd George in which he claimed that an anonymous source close to de Valera had told him that 99% of Sinn Féin members were in favour of Dominion Home Rule and would be willing to offer substantial concessions to Ulster unionists; his overtures were ignored.⁷ During the war of independence O'Brien lived quietly in Mallow and, despite his previous opposition to physical force separatism, was unable to suppress his admiration for the IRA campaign, especially given his proximity to Crown forces atrocities in Cork. These included the

⁴ *Irish Times*, 16 February, 2001. Jack Lane of the Aubane Historical Society, disputes the family's claim that Sheehan was driven out by the IRA and Sinn Féin (Letter from Jack Lane, *The Corkman*, 22 November 2002). However, it is difficult to imagine who else could have been responsible. Sheehan stood unsuccessfully as a Labour candidate for Limehouse in London in 1922. He returned to Ireland in 1926 and resumed his previous career as a journalist.

⁵ Healy, *Letter and Leaders vol. ii*, p. 657-8.

⁶ The principal sources of information for this period are O'Brien's correspondence with Healy, and his polemic *The Irish Revolution and How It Came About*, published when the Civil War was still in progress in 1923 (there is a copy of this manuscript in the NLI which Healy read prior to its publication with his annotated notes in the margins, MS 8558). There is also O'Brien's unpublished and dramatically titled *The Irish Free State: Secret History of its Foundation*, written in Sophie O'Brien's hand which failed to find a publisher for the manuscript. There are rejection letters pasted inside the cover; one from the Talbot Press (dated 15 November 1933) states that 'it would not be expedient to publish at the present time' (NLI, Sophie O'Brien papers, MS 4210).

⁷ O'Brien, *Irish Revolution* (18 October 2016), p. 415.

assassination of Tomás Mac Curtain, the burning of the centre of Cork city, and the ‘sacking of Mallow’, by the Black and Tans. His description of IRA volunteers was naively eulogistic, ‘They held their dances in the intervals of their ambushes in their mountain bivouacs and in all those wild years never laid an irreverent hand upon a woman, or tasted intoxicating drink, or bred a single informer in their ranks.’⁸

Tim Healy, who played a self-aggrandising but minor role in the Treaty negotiations, attempted to involve O’Brien; although O’Brien travelled to London, he wisely declined. Sophie O’Brien recalls that he offered his help to de Valera during the negotiations, but this was refused. She says that O’Brien did not understand why de Valera did not go to London, ‘My husband thought a leader had to lead in peace or in war, but he said nothing’.⁹ It was inevitable that O’Brien would oppose the Treaty. He called for unity,¹⁰ but in a letter to Healy, claimed that the Irish delegation should have refused to accept partition and rejected Healy’s faith in the Boundary Commission.¹¹ O’Brien called for a united front by those for and against the Treaty as the only means of ensuring that the British Government could not claim that the truce had been breached.¹² He never lost faith in the possibility of an all-Ireland solution and purported, without evidence, that had Sir James Craig (the Northern Ireland Prime Minister) been allowed to take part in the Treaty negotiations with a generous offer of increased representation for unionists in a Home Rule parliament, this would have been overwhelmingly welcomed by all sides.¹³ However, three years later he concluded that Craig rejoiced ‘at being given the utmost measure of ascendancy they [Ulster unionists] ever aspired to in their wildest dream’. He went on to prophesy that ‘reunion there will be, or everlasting strife’.¹⁴

There was as much prospect of the opposing forces, in the Dáil or outside, putting aside the divisions relating to the Treaty, as there was of Ulster unionists accepting

⁸ Ibid, p. 424.

⁹ 17 January 1932 (NLI, Sophie O’Brien papers, 5924).

¹⁰ *Irish Independent*, 27 December 1921.

¹¹ O’Brien to Healy, 30 December 1921 (NLI, William O’Brien Papers, 8556).

¹² *Sligo Champion*, 20 May 1922.

¹³ O’Brien, *Irish Revolution* (18 October 2016), p. 439.

¹⁴ *Irish Independent*, 8 February 1926.

an all-Ireland parliament, and O'Brien's grasp of political reality, which at times in the past had been tenuous, became even more detached after his withdrawal from public life and isolation in Mallow. The outbreak of Civil War drove him almost to despair. He blamed the duplicity of the British Government, and especially Lloyd George and Churchill;¹⁵ he repudiated the legitimacy of the Free State government, but also condemned the anti-Treaty forces who 'often reached a pitch of folly that might well be mistaken for dementia'.¹⁶ Although he expressed admiration for the IRA during the struggle against Crown forces he was horrified by the disorder that the Civil War unleashed and thought that the priority 'must be the prompt restoration of order' and 'a firm stance against the murderous robbers and Bolsheviks will command universal adherence - the firmer and more thorough-going the better'.¹⁷ Tim Healy took a similar view: 'We are dealing with reckless lads who know or care nothing for History or the reputation of this country. Statesmanship is as foreign to their thought as Theology.'¹⁸ Both however, had widely divergent views concerning the Treaty and partition although O'Brien was at pains to ensure that this did not destroy his friendship with Healy,¹⁹ who based his support for the government and his high standing with leading Tories in Westminster, was appointed the first Governor General of the Irish Free State.²⁰ Healy's antagonism towards de Valera,²¹ Sinn Féin and especially the anti-Treaty forces was visceral, but his friendship with O'Brien endured, although he became closer to the Cumann na nGaedhail government and especially to Kevin O'Higgins, the Minister for Home Affairs, his wife's nephew.

¹⁵ O'Brien, *Secret History*, Chapter xviii.

¹⁶ O'Brien, *Irish Revolution* (12 October 2016), p. 450.

¹⁷ O'Brien to J.R. Kelly, 23 May 1922 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AT 92).

¹⁸ Healy to O'Brien, 11 December 1922 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556).

¹⁹ O'Brien to Healy, 8 March 1923 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556).

²⁰ Bonar Law objected to Healy's appointment because 'he was impulsive and drank too much whiskey at night' (Tom Jones Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet Secretariat, quoted in Callanan, *Healy*, p. 598).

²¹ Healy maintained a cordial relationship with de Valera up to the outbreak of the Civil War. He recounts a meeting with him in March 1922, 'I told him he would be a sorry man in twelve months' time if he lent himself to force. He replied that he didn't think so. I remarked "I am an expert in 'splits' and I believe I can forecast the result better than you" (Healy, *Letters and Leaders vol ii*, p. 652).

O'Brien never lost his faith in the power of round table conferences, believing, as with the Land Conference of 1902, that people of widely divergent views could reach an agreement if there was goodwill and a willingness to compromise. He wrote to Colonel Maurice Moore, the former Inspector General of the National Volunteers, recently appointed to the Seanad, advocating a conference of reconciliation to include, in addition to himself, Thomas Esmonde (son of the former Irish party MP), Professor Alfred O'Rahilly (of University College Cork), Mary Mac Swiney (sister of Terence Mac Swiney), Count Plunkett, and Major W.A. Redmond (son of John Redmond). However, goodwill and a willingness to compromise were in short supply, and O'Brien's initiative was no more successful than his previous attempts.

O'Brien maintained contact with De Valera and their views aligned, most significantly, on partition. Also, they had a natural affinity on social and economic issues and Fianna Fáil appealed to the same constituency from which the AFIL drew its support. As O'Mahony and Delanty argue:

Fianna Fáil in the late twenties and thirties appealed once more to the national 'opposition', those who were excluded or less well looked after following the social cleavage of Irish society into the more prosperous propertied strata and the rest, a division which became apparent for the first time at the end of the first phase of Home Rule and land reform.²²

During a by-election in Leix-Offaly, shortly before Fianna Fáil was launched in March 1926, O'Brien wrote a stinging repudiation of the Free State's government's policy on partition. De Valera sent his thanks for O'Brien's intervention,²³ however, he was taken to task by Martin Egan, the Chairman of Galway County Council, who wrote, 'He [O'Brien] worries much about the "bargain with England" and the "oath of allegiance", but carefully ignores the fact that in his whole political life he was engaged in an effort to 'bargain with England', and that he had been taking oaths of

²² O'Mahony and Delanty, *Rethinking Irish History*, p. 148.

²³ De Valera to O'Brien, 22 February 1926 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AU 10).

O'Brien also received the thanks of John O'Donnell, the son of the former MP for Mayo South of the same name who had been a long-time friend and ally. O'Donnell expressed delight at O'Brien's letter and hoped he would once again come out and 'lead the country as in the old days'. (O'Donnell to O'Brien, 8 February 1926, UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AU 30).

allegiance through all that time.²⁴ O'Brien declined an offer from Fianna Fáil to stand as a candidate for Cork city in the general election of 1927,²⁵ but to the end, he continued to try and influence the course of events relating to the Treaty and partition. He wrote to Healy in the summer of 1927 with proposals that he wanted him to recommend to W.T. Cosgrave. Healy, citing the restrictions of his role as Governor-General, refused and advised him to send his proposals directly to the Taoiseach.²⁶ O'Brien also wrote to the former Cork Sinn Féin leader J.J. Walsh, now Minister for Post and Telegraphs, asking if he could record a talk on national radio relating to the current political situation. He received a reply from an anonymous functionary indicating that this was not feasible.²⁷ O'Brien's biographer Michael MacDonagh spoke to him a couple of days before his death in London in February 1928.²⁸ He told him that his two proudest achievements were the abolition of landlordism and his policy of Conference, Conciliation and Consent. His most passionate ire was directed against partition which, he said, had resulted in an outcome in which 'the Orange Ascendency in the Six Counties have triumphantly achieved the Home Rule they never had the audacity to demand, and under which six hundred thousand of the most historic nationalists of our race are sold into the status of political bond-slaves'.²⁹

The conundrum that constitutional nationalists who were unwilling to accept partition faced, however, was formidable: if Ulster unionists would not accept Irish self-government, even with all the concessions and safeguards that O'Brien was willing to offer, and coercion was deemed to be both politically and morally indefensible, what was the alternative? Even at the end of his life O'Brien still struggled with this dilemma and his less than credible answer was what he called a

²⁴ *Irish Independent*, 11 February 1926.

²⁵ Unsigned letter from Fianna Fáil North-West Cork city Cumann to O'Brien, 12 May 1927 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AS128).

²⁶ O'Brien to Healy, 16 and 18 June 1927 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556); Healy to O'Brien, 17 and 20 June 1927 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers, 8556).

²⁷ Unsigned letter from the Department of Post and Telegraphs to O'Brien, 21 June 1927 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AU 84).

²⁸ Sophie O'Brien bitterly recalled that on that final journey to London while she and her husband stayed at the Royal Marine Hotel in Dun Laoghaire, de Valera and his entourage also stayed at the same hotel, and although she thinks he knew her husband was close by, he made no effort to see him. (17 January 1952, NLI, Sophie O'Brien Papers, 5924).

²⁹ MacDonagh, *William O'Brien*, pp. 257-60.

policy of 'Compulsory Attraction' which appeared to contradict his long-held principle of conciliation. 'Protestant Ulster' he claimed 'driven perforce by folly of her own, will have to be peacefully dissolved in the English and Scottish, the Episcopal and Dissenting elements of which it was only yesteryear composed, or rather will have to be builded [sic] again into the fabric of the generous Irish nation'.³⁰ In the end, O'Brien, like other nationalists, was unable to square the circle of nationalist aspiration and unionist obduracy.

William O'Brien's nationalism was rooted in his two great heroes, Thomas Davis and Charles Stewart Parnell (On hearing of his death Tim Healy wrote to his daughter that, although 'O'Brien was a great chap, devotion to Parnell blurred his historic vision').³¹ This was a vision which encompassed the reconciliation of the two traditions. In his polemic *An Olive Branch for Ireland and its History* he asked, 'Is it a dream to hope that the Protestant minority in Ireland can be brought to sympathise with the national aspirations of their fellow-countrymen?'³²

The position of Protestants in the Irish State is often viewed in comparison to Catholics in the North and the Free State is usually judged to have a better record.³³ This was emphasised by Lord Dunraven who was one of the government's seventeen Southern unionist appointees to the Seanad. He was generous in his assessment of the new state that had emerged from the recent conflict. The government he said 'have made the law respected, have to a large extent reconstituted the country, and have administered it with strict impartiality towards minorities.'³⁴ However, although the Irish state was not a theocracy it was dominated by the Church and a 'Catholic habitus' was consolidated in the years after independence.³⁵ This fell far short of the lofty aspirations of the 1916 Proclamation and, as Terence Brown has argued, 'The new Ireland, convinced of its Catholic nationalist rectitude on social issues was prepared to grant Anglo-Ireland the right to remain in the country but neither to be

³⁰ Quoted in *ibid*, pp. 254-5.

³¹ Healy to Maev O'Sullivan, 27 February 1928 (Healy Transcripts, U.C.D., P6/A/78).

³² O'Brien, *Olive Tree* (3 May 2018), p. 110.

³³ For example, Elliott, *When God Took Sides*, pp. 215-56.

³⁴ Letter to *The Times*, 18 September 1924.

³⁵ T. Inglis, 'Individualisation and Secularisation in Ireland' in S. O'Sullivan, (ed.) *Contemporary Ireland: A Sociological Map* (Dublin, 2007), p. 70.

cajoled or browbeaten into great regard for the values of a defeated caste.'³⁶ W.B. Yeats, during a Seanad debate on divorce, spoke for many Southern Protestants:

I think it is tragic that within three years of this country gaining its independence we should be discussing a measure [a ban on divorce] which a minority of this nation considers to be grossly oppressive. I am proud to consider myself a typical man of that minority. We against whom you have done this thing, are no petty people. We are one of the great stocks of Europe. We are the people of Burke; we are the people of Grattan; we are the people of Swift, the people of Emmet, the people of Parnell. We have created the most of the modern literature of this country. We have created the best of its political intelligence.³⁷

William O'Brien, almost completely obsessed by partition, was uncharacteristically reticent regarding the nature of the Free State that evolved after 1922. He died before Fianna Fáil ascended to power, but there is little doubt that he would have found de Valera's Ireland, narrow in vision, insular and confessional, anathema to his All for Ireland dream.

ii

In many general histories of the period, the AFIL's espousal of conciliation is seen as its lodestar, eclipsing other elements of its identity or the underlying reasons why it came into being in the first place.³⁸ It is a compelling narrative: the juxtaposition of a powerful but narrow-minded nationalist movement that lacked the courage to embrace a vision of a new and inclusive Ireland which the end of the land conflict might have facilitated. This is contrasted with a small but visionary party which offered hope of finally bringing to an end an epoch-long struggle between the two traditions. Whilst there is some truth in this account, conciliation was a noble but unpopular aspiration but would not, on its own, have given the AFIL any chance of electoral success. Strategically then, it was necessary for the party to harness working class support by offering alternative policies to the Home Rule movement on issues which the Irish party had failed to address, especially its indifference to labour, the working class and the alleviation of poverty.

³⁶ Brown, *Social and Cultural History*, pp. 132-3.

³⁷ Seanad Debates, 11 June 1925, Vol 5, no. 7 (oireachteas.ie) (9 March 2918).

³⁸ For example, Jackson, *Home Rule*, p. 110; English, *Irish Freedom*, pp. 257-8; Maume, *Long Gestation*, p.110.

O'Mahony and Delanty note that 'the Home Rule party was only interested in as much social change as was compatible with its social base'.³⁹ The leadership and the principal backers of the AFIL were equally unwilling to challenge a conservative consensus that suited its own interests. O'Brien's political ideology, which also became that of the AFIL, of paternalistic populist conservatism, was little different from that of his hero and mentor Parnell, or from that of the Irish party. However, in the second decade of the twentieth century, this came under severe strain on two fronts. Firstly, changes brought about by land purchase resulted in an end to the Land War. The land question had a clear-cut Anglo-Irish enemy which could harness a deeply-held land-hunger: 'We will take back what has been taken from us'. However, this powerful rallying-cry only rhetorically included the rural poor: agricultural labourers, small tenant farmers and evicted tenants. In practice, the Land War was primarily focused on the overthrow of landlordism and the transfer of land. Following the 1903 Land act, the issue of the rural working class was cast into sharp relief, and both O'Brien and Redmond promised to put this to the fore of the nationalist political agenda. However, as land reform made proprietors out of tenants without addressing the betterment of small farmers and agricultural labourers, the potentially destabilising dynamics of labour issues had to be obfuscated by both the Irish party and the AFIL as many in both parties were strong farmers or landlords whose interests collided with the alleviation of rural poverty by higher wages or through initiatives such as direct labour schemes funded by taxation and local rates.

Secondly, although the AFIL managed to co-opt disaffected sectors of the rural and urban working class, the labour movement was suspicious of the new party, and some trade unionists saw little difference between it and the Irish party which promised much to the working class but delivered little. Nationalists of O'Brien and Redmond's generation had more of an affinity with rural agitation than with urban labour and, as the focus of social agitation moved from the countryside to the towns and cities, they found themselves on unfamiliar ground they were ill-equipped to

³⁹ O'Mahony and Delanty, *Rethinking Irish History*, p. 70.

deal with. The AFIL's urban electoral base was predominantly working class Catholic nationalists in Cork city, alienated by conservative nationalism and a labour movement unresponsive to their needs. The AFIL's stance on the National Insurance act and its indolence during its brief period in control of Cork Corporation from 1911 to 1912, exposed its contradictions on labour issues and the alleviation of poverty.

Although working class discontent in urban and rural Cork had been unable to find expression, it had not disappeared. Many voted for the AFIL in the absence of a more coherent ideological alternative to the Irish party; as the prominent Cork trade unionist William Kelleher commented after the Trades Council endorsed the O'Brienite Maurice Healy in a 1909 by-election, 'If we cannot get a labour man we must get the next best thing.'⁴⁰ The outbreak of industrial unrest precipitated by Jim Larkin's attempt to organise unskilled workers in Cork into the ITGWU in 1908-09, shows that there was a latent militancy which could have been mobilised under the right circumstances. The success of the ITGWU in replacing the Land and Labour Associations in 1918, and labourers' support for farm strikes to gain wage increases and better working conditions indicated that once again, when given the opportunity, workers were willing to back militant action.⁴¹ Working class support for the AFIL also dissipated because of its failure to support the third Home Rule bill, and its support for the war and recruitment. Although the party managed to avoid significant public divisions, the irreconcilability of AFIL political imperatives with the needs of its electoral base became increasingly apparent.

A *leitmotif* of Irish nationalism is that in every generation a cadre of inspirational young men and women will emerge to carry on the fight for freedom. As Pádraig Pearse, in a furious denunciation of the Home Rule movement, declared: 'There has been nothing more terrible in Irish history than the failure of the last generation', and pleaded 'let our generation not shirk its deed, which is to accomplish the

⁴⁰ Quoted in McQuay Reddick, 'Political and Industrial Labour in Cork', p. 138.

⁴¹ Bradley, *Farm Labourers*, pp. 31-55.

revolution'.⁴² William O'Brien called this the 'Banshee's Kiss': a seductive, but deadly invitation to each new generation to carry on the struggle for Irish independence which, although inspired by high ideals, runs the risk of descending into a narrow ethnic nationalism that wilfully ignores those who do not share the aspirations of those who take up the struggle. However inchoate and flawed the enterprise, O'Brien and the All for Ireland League hoped to replace this cycle with a more life-affirming and inclusive vision which sought to bring nationalists and unionists to a shared purpose through dialogue, compromise and the building of trust. But he was only too aware of the darker forces that ran deep in the waters of Irish nationalism: a narrow confessional strain that gave little priority, or even thought, to how Catholic and Protestant, nationalist and unionist could live together (this was, of course, mirrored by a Protestant unionist mindset which often held Irish nationalism, and Catholicism in contempt). Nationalists may have paid lip service to addressing unionist fears of Home Rule, but often their policies wilfully ignored the fundamental question of unionist consent.

The AFIL came into being at a time of enormous political and cultural ferment in that 'long gestation' between the death of Parnell and the Easter Rising, with different variants of Irish nationalism, unionism, radical trade unionism, socialism and feminism, vying for political space – change was in the air. The AFIL vision however, was different from these other movements because it proposed as its *raison d'être*: reconciliation between the two traditions in a bi-confessional, self-governing Ireland in which both nationalists and unionists were asked to venture forth from their political and cultural *laagers* and recognize that there was more that united than divided them.

When he launched the AFIL in 1910 William O'Brien would have profoundly disagreed with F.S.L. Lyons' pessimistic conclusion that the two cultures in Ireland were incompatible, 'an anarchy in the mind and in the heart, an anarchy that forbade not just unity of being, an anarchy that sprang from the collision within a small and intimate island of seemingly irreconcilable cultures, unable to live together or to live

⁴² P. Pearse, *Ghosts* (Dublin, 1916), p.1.

apart, caught inextricably in the web of their tragic histories'.⁴³ However, when he finally stepped aside from active political involvement eight years later, exhausted, bitter and disillusioned, O'Brien's views had become distinctly more pessimistic, although his analysis did not extend far beyond laying the blame for the failure of constitutional nationalism on the perfidy of the leadership of the Irish parliamentary party and the Ancient Order of Hibernians. The principal aspiration of the AFIL was to attract both young nationalists disillusioned by the Irish party's narrow and uninspiring version of nationalism, and unionists and Protestants who saw the advantages of a self-governing Ireland if their rights and traditions could be assured. However, it faced significant obstacles and resistance from the beginning, and a man of less adamant determination, and perhaps, better political judgement would have baulked at the task.

The forces arrayed against any party whose central aim was the reconciliation of the two traditions in the first two decades of the twentieth century were formidable. Firstly, the AFIL faced significant opposition from the Catholic Church, whose overarching aim was to consolidate a pre-eminent position in the self-governing state which most believed was imminent. The AFIL's policy of conciliation towards Protestants, with its offer of shared political power, parity of ethnic esteem and confessional equality was in direct conflict with the Church's ambition to align Irish identity, the Irish state and Catholicism. Secondly, in attempting to offer an olive branch to unionists O'Brien came into direct conflict with the Irish party. The Home Rule movement was a formidable organization, well-versed in the tactics of self-preservation and the mobilisation of its powerful affiliates and allies in its defence. With the goal of a Home Rule act in sight, the Irish party ruthlessly used the AFIL's opposition to the Home Rule act to depict the O'Brienites as unionist dupes and traitors to nationalism.

The AFIL was left vulnerable to accusations of betrayal from its nationalist opponents with O'Brien's erstwhile ally, the old Parnellite Augustine Roche, accusing him of being 'the senior unionist member for Cork City'.⁴⁴ Some

⁴³ Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 177.

⁴⁴ *Cork Free Press*, 18 March 1911.

constitutional nationalists agreed with O'Brien's opposition and dissenting opinion within the Home Rule movement was widespread;⁴⁵ however, the punishment for breaking communal solidarity at a time of crisis was severe. Potential rebels would need to be assured that to cross that bridge, an insurgent party might at least have some hope of challenging the dominance of the Irish party. As David Fitzpatrick notes, 'the scarcity of dissenting nationalist candidates should largely be ascribed not to intimidation but rather to the heretics' belief that they could not win majorities'.⁴⁶ The AFIL's failure to extend its electoral support beyond Cork, and its inability to make common cause with other dissidents, meant that it never presented a serious challenge to the Home Rule movement. Those who might have been attracted to the AFIL noted its irrelevance in Westminster and looked elsewhere for inspiration.

The AFIL existed in the most turbulent political waters and recurrent crises which, in quick succession, included the People's Budget, the Lords veto, the Home Rule bill, the outbreak of war and the Easter Rising. These were all divisive issues which had the effect of further limiting the already narrow space for conciliation. When the AFIL was launched it hoped, that with the land question mostly settled, it would attract unionists who accepted that Home Rule was on the way and would want to play an active role in forging a new Ireland. This was not an unrealistic aspiration, for, as Ian d'Alton argues, the Protestant population was far from being monolithic and, in Cork:

By the end of the [nineteenth] century urban and landed Protestants were heading in economically different directions. On the one hand, the economic interests of the urban classes had perforce to lie with Ireland, on the other, the centre of economic gravity for the depressed gentry, especially after the 1903 and 1909 Land Acts, increasingly lay with Great Britain. It is hardly surprising that this led to a clear divergence of political attitudes, actions and aspirations as well.⁴⁷

The AFIL in Cork managed to attract a sizeable number of the Protestant commercial classes. However, both the internal contradictions between their

⁴⁵ Fitzpatrick, 'Geography of Irish Nationalism', p. 123.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ D'Alton, 'Keeping Faith', p. 761.

interests and the needs of the majority of the more impoverished AFIL supporters, in addition to the external pressures of the Home Rule crisis and the war, dissipated Protestant support. O'Brien also woefully underestimated the social and cultural gulf between Catholics and Protestants. As Marianne Elliott argues, Irish Catholic identity was deeply influenced by a sense of victimhood, a folk memory of penal laws, loss of land and famine which gave rise to a resentment of Protestant privilege.⁴⁸ On the other side there existed a belief 'at almost every level of Irish Protestant society in every century since the Reformation[...]that Roman Catholicism shackled the mind, inducing lack of spirit, indolence and poverty'.⁴⁹ This was a chasm that could not be bridged and the prospect of embracing self-government with Catholic nationalists was beyond the Pale for most Protestant unionists. As F.S.L. Lyons noted:

The ascendancy at large could not be persuaded that change was their only salvation. On the other hand, those with whom the progressive unionists might have wished to cooperate were never convinced that "progressive unionist" was not a contradiction in terms and so could not bring themselves to bathe in the healing waters sprung from such a tainted source.⁵⁰

A Sicilian aristocrat in Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's *The Leopard*, laments his fate during the *Risorgimento*, 'I belong to an unlucky generation, astride between two worlds and ill at ease in both'. This was a sentiment familiar to many Southern Irish Protestants, especially those sympathetic to conciliation. As Lord Castletown, one of O'Brien's allies, noted, 'I think I am too advanced for the party of the unionists and insufficiently so for the other side.'⁵¹ This was one of the most significant dilemmas that O'Brien and progressive unionists faced following the Wyndham Land act. Although he persistently exaggerated unionist support for the AFIL, privately, his views were less sanguine. Writing to Lord Dunraven in 1920 as the country descended into war, O'Brien bitterly noted, 'Had the Irish unionists evinced a few years ago the zeal for Home Rule they are protesting now it would have been still possible to retain our hold on the popular forces which alone would

⁴⁸ Elliott, *When God Took Sides*, pp. 154-82.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 183

⁵⁰ Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy*, p.75.

⁵¹ Castletown to O'Brien, undated, probably September 1904 (UCC, William O'Brien Papers, AN 145).

have made an Irish settlement an effective one'.⁵² However, O'Brien's erratic behaviour and his intemperate attacks on the nationalist leadership did little to foster the spirit of reconciliation which he regularly called for. As Alvin Jackson notes, O'Brien, in common with other apostles of conciliation, have themselves been 'unusually intense, angular or even volatile personalities'.⁵³

William O'Brien, like many figures from the Victorian and Edwardian Home Rule movement, has largely been forgotten by contemporary Ireland, and even in his own time dismissed as representing a political tradition that had failed nationalist Ireland. However, apart from Sinn Féin, who took a robust anti-partitionist line, O'Brien was one of the few nationalist politicians to warn in 1914 that a temporary Ulster opt-out was a convenient illusion eagerly grasped by a desperate Irish party, and partition would prove to be a permanent parody of Home Rule. 'Instead of "Ireland a nation" they would have only two miserable English provinces, one Redmondia and one Carsonia.'⁵⁴ He also predicted that the border would introduce a destructive dynamic and instability into Irish life and politics leading to an endless cycle of conflict. However, although O'Brien's arguments stand the test of time and analysis, prescience in a politician may be lauded by historians but is rarely rewarded by electorates who do not have the advantage of a retrospective view of history and are more concerned with immediate and temporal concerns.

The two recurring themes of this study have been an attempt to reconcile the two traditions in Ireland; and the harnessing of working class support by conservative Irish nationalism and a concomitant obfuscation of class conflict and the marginalisation of labour militancy. Both these imperatives were the driving forces of the AFIL, the first explicit, the second implicit; and both contained the seeds of two incompatible dynamics which resulted in the eventual demise of the AFIL. Firstly, the cultural and economic interests of the landed and commercial Protestant unionists (and also that of the Catholic business and strong farmer classes) that the AFIL attracted were in direct conflict with the demands of its Catholic nationalist

⁵² O'Brien to Dunraven, *William O'Brien Papers*, 31 August 1920 (NLI, William O'Brien Papers 8554/18).

⁵³ Jackson, *Home Rule*, p. 377.

⁵⁴ O'Brien quoted in *Cork Free Press*, 16 March 1914.

working class electoral base. For example, as Ian d'Alton claims, many Cork Protestants supported the AFIL in the two 1910 general elections, not because of its policy of conciliation, but because of the party's trenchant opposition to Lloyd George's budget which benefitted many working class Catholics.⁵⁵ Secondly, Irish nationalism's primordial sense of grievance and victimhood meant that for many nationalists the ancestral enemy was still the Anglo-Irish ascendancy. At a time of national crisis, it proved impossible to overcome this barrier to reconciliation, especially as many Southern unionists remained hostile to Home Rule and the acceptance of Catholics as equals in a self-governing Ireland. The AFIL reached the limits of populism in failing to persuade its nationalist supporters of the necessity of reconciliation and was unable to find another narrative in which to frame it.

The legacy of the AFIL has been ephemeral, determined by its internal contradictions, primarily the conflict between the conservative ethos of the leadership of the party and the social and economic demands of its supporters, and its failure to react and adapt to the political upheavals which engulfed it. The party, whose focus was all too frequently a scrupulous attendance on the aspirations and anxieties of unionists, was curiously out of touch with the changing *zeitgeist*: failing to understand the emerging importance of cultural nationalism and to make an accommodation with it and other heterodox nationalists which collectively, could have challenged the Irish party. Other competing versions of the new Ireland focused on more secular and egalitarian models, but the AFIL was never able to compete with the great primordial passions, both nationalist and unionist, stirred by the Home Rule crisis and the Easter Rising. At a time of great upheaval and crisis, there was a communal need for solidarity and cohesion. As D. George Boyce has argued, the fear of fragmentation obliged nationalist politicians 'to stress, not the pluralism of Ireland, but the homogeneous nature of those Irishmen whose loyalty and support were essential to the realisation of their political programme'.⁵⁶ The fear of centrifugal forces, of encouraging further divisions, was a significant factor in enforcing homogeneity and adherence to nationalist principles. Within the narrowed

⁵⁵ d'Alton, 'Cork Unionism', p.158.

⁵⁶ D. George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (London, 1991), p. 388.

bounds of that conformity at a time of national crisis, there was no room for the AFIL and its message of reconciliation.

The attempt to build bridges, to reach across the sectarian divide, did not begin or end with the AFIL. Wolfe Tone, Thomas Davis, Sir Samuel Ferguson, Isaac Butt and Charles Stewart Parnell saw no contradiction between being Protestant and Irish. The practical solutions to entrenched social and economic problems of Horace Plunkett's Recess Committee prefigured O'Brien's vision of nationalists and unionists working together, building a bond of trust on smaller matters which could later pay dividends on the grand national issues. Alvin Jackson, one of the more insightful historians of Home Rule, emphasises the continuities between generations of those who advocated conciliation and centrist politics. As an example, he argues that the successful Land Conference in 1902 may have been a distant ancestor to the Good Friday agreement of 1998.⁵⁷ There is also an echo of the O'Brienite doctrine of the 'Three Cs' – Conference, Conciliation and Consent, embodied in the agreement's central concept of power-sharing, with a call to nationalists and unionists to compromise and to build trust; and in its intricate architecture of safeguards, assurances, rights, co-sovereignty and the rejection of compulsion. Despite his political misjudgements, O'Brien's fundamental belief that Protestant unionists could not be forced into an all-Ireland settlement against their will has stood the test of time. The former Fine Gael Taoiseach, John Bruton, in a spirited defence of John Redmond and the Home Rule movement, recently claimed that 'Coercion of North East Ulster was never a viable option, but it took some people longer than others to accept that'.⁵⁸ Reconciliation, traduced, misunderstood and fragile as it has been, is a vision that has endured, an invitation to finally reject the curse of the Banshee's Kiss.

⁵⁷ Jackson, *Home Rule*, pp. 373-82.

⁵⁸ *Irish Times*, 8 April 2014.

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