

Politics and Society in East Galway, 1914-21

Thesis presented by Conor McNamara to fulfil the requirements of Ph.D in the History Department of St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, December 2008.

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Abbreviations

BMH	Bureau of Military History
CDB	Congested Districts Board
CGFA	County Galway Farmers' Association
CI	County Inspector [RIC]
CO	Colonial Office
DI	District Inspector
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
IFU	Irish Farmers' Union
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IV	Irish Volunteers
NA	National Archives
NGAA	National Gaelic Athletic Association
NL	National Library
NUIG	National University of Ireland, Galway
RIC	Royal Irish Constabulary
SPD	St Patrick's College, Drumcondra
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
TTA	Town Tenants' Association
UIL	United Irish League
UEC	United Estates' Commissioners

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This thesis examines various social and political organisations that represented rank and file nationalists in east Galway from 1914 to 1921 and how they mediated and interpreted the political upheaval of the revolutionary period. The activities of many, perhaps more prosaic movements such as the Town Tenants' League and the Ex-Soldiers and Sailors Federation have received scant attention in the historiography of the Irish revolution which has focused overwhelmingly on the activities of the Irish Volunteers and Sinn Féin and latterly on the demise of the Irish Parliamentary Party and the United Irish League. The historiographical emphasis on the principal political agents has been to the detriment of a full understanding of the complexities of the nationalist response to revolutionary upheaval. To gain a full appreciation of the formative political and social dynamics from which the Irish state emerged, a more comprehensive analysis of the evolution of public opinion is necessary. In a radicalised county like Galway, where local political culture was characterised by the intensity of political rivalries, civic organisations such as the Gaelic Athletic Association played a crucial role in influencing local events as they became conduits for rival groups to garner support and undermine their opponents.

The revolutionaries were a product of their environment and east Galway was a complex and fractious society in which the traumatic upheaval of the independence struggle continually defies a simplistic linear meta-narrative. A comprehensive study of these events reveals many surprising and frequently awkward conclusions for local communities, which in retrospect, could not have been accommodated in the domain of conventional local history. The principal question which this thesis explores is the extent to which people's social and political aspirations evolved during the period and the degree to which they found expression in the respective campaigns of the IRA and Sinn Féin.

Introduction

1. The historiography of the Irish Revolution

Popular perceptions of the independence struggle were heavily influenced in the early decades of the state by the publication of numerous combatants' accounts that tended to focus on what Desmond Ryan termed 'the spirit of the struggle for Independence at the height of its glory, with all the incalculable fire of 1916 behind it and a rose misted future before it'.¹ The accounts of the exploits of officers such as Dan Breen, Tom Barry and Michael Collins displayed similar motifs with a common emphasis on the dangers faced by the Volunteers, the heroism of their sacrifice, the cowardice of the Crown Forces and the magnanimity of a united nationalist people.² The paradigm of 'Ireland's Fighting Story'³ could even rejuvenate the somewhat questionable record of areas which had remained relatively dormant, as districts sought retrospectively to defend their revolutionary credentials in print.⁴

Whilst these works tended towards hagiography, there are many valuable insights to be found in combatants' accounts. Peadar O'Donnell, Liam Mellows and Ernie O'Malley, in particular, left detailed accounts of seminal events, which despite gaining popular appeal, represented nuanced analyses of the society which they had unsuccessfully endeavoured to change.⁵ Based on their own experiences, these writers questioned the common assumptions regarding the degree of popular support the IRA had relied upon, the conservative nature of the republican leadership and the degree to which the Sinn Féin had compromised their principles. Conscious of the inherent divisions in Irish society during the revolution, O'Donnell believed

¹ Desmond Ryan, *Sean Treacy and The 3rd Tipperary Brigade* (Tralee, 1945), p. 5.

² Dan Breen, *My Fight for Irish Freedom*, (Dublin, 1924); Tom Barry, *Guerrilla Days in Ireland* (Dublin, 1949); Batt O'Connor, *With Michael Collins in the fight for Irish Independence* (London, 1929).

³ *Ireland's Fighting Story* was a long running series of articles which first appeared in the *Kerryman* newspaper before being published between 1942 and 1961 as county based histories of the IRA, featuring Limerick, Dublin, Kerry and Cork.

⁴ For two conflicting assessments of the achievements of a single brigade, contrast Jim Maher, *The Flying Column; West Kilkenny, 1916-1921* (Dublin, 1988) and Ernie O'Malley's account of the same brigade in *On Another Man's Wound* (London, 1936), pp 221-35.

⁵ See in particular, Peadar O'Donnell, *There Will Be Another Day* (Dublin, 1963); Ernie O'Malley, *Army Without Banners, Adventures of an Irish Volunteer* (Boston, 1937); *On Another Man's Wound* (London, 1936); *The Singing Flame* (Dublin, 1978); Liam Mellows, *Notes from Mountjoy Jail* (London, 1925).

that the rural poor were exploited by the movement, 'as the tyrannical aspects of the [British] conquest were declared outside the scope of the struggle'.⁶ Likewise, Mellows wrote, 'Sinn Féin, whilst nominally, a nationalist party was, in fact, a bourgeois party.'⁷ O'Malley was later to write bitterly of the lack of support for the republican cause: 'much cannot be expected from a nation of slaves. There is no idea of honour, an indefinite sense of playing the game, no real courage and not sufficient bulldog grit'.⁸ Thus, the historical re-interpretation of the era, which began in the 1960s, had been preceded by writers with first-hand experience, who had already fundamentally questioned many popularly held assumptions.

The academic assessment of the Irish revolution evolved considerably in the 1960s with a number of important reinterpretations published.⁹ Historians such as F.X. Martin, William Irwin Thompson and F.S.L. Lyons questioned the degree to which interpretations of the period had been influenced by retrospective romanticism and the inherent necessities of nation building. The so-called revisionist approach sought to detach, as it was perceived, historical myths from historical reality, irrespective of nationalist sensitivities. The emerging historical orthodoxy fundamentally questioned the *a priori* assumptions surrounding the period, with the reputations, abilities and rationale of the republican leadership subjected to unprecedented historical scrutiny. Thereafter, Irish historians became less deferential, immeasurably more sceptical and fundamentally more dispassionate in their analysis of the republican project. Ernest Rumpf and Anthony Hepburn's pioneering study *Nationalism and Socialism in Twentieth Century Ireland* represented a landmark in the academic investigation of the distribution of revolutionary violence.¹⁰ Rather than analysing Irish nationalism in terms of its own rhetoric, they stressed the diversity of variables: geographic, agricultural, economic and cultural, which accounted for the emergence and pattern of revolutionary violence. While some of their conclusions have since been challenged, Rumpf and Hepburn's approach, along with the bulk of their findings, have had a profound influence on later historians.

⁶ O'Donnell, *There Will Be Another Day*, p. 12.

⁷ Mellows, *Notes from Mountjoy Jail*, p. 9.

⁸ Richard English and Cormac O'Malley (eds.) *Prisoners: The Civil War Letters of Ernie O'Malley* (Dublin, 1991), p. 36.

⁹ See in particular, F.S.L. Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland, 1890-1939* (Oxford, 1979); William Irwin Thompson, *The Imagination of an Insurrection* (Oxford, 1967).

¹⁰ Ernest Rumpf and Anthony Hepburn, *Nationalism and Socialism in Twentieth Century Ireland* (Liverpool, 1977). Their conclusions are discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

The influence of this new historical approach, combined with the pioneering methodology of Rumpf and Hepburn is most evident in the work of David Fitzpatrick. Fitzpatrick's seminal article, 'The Geography of Irish Nationalism',¹¹ expanded the statistical analysis pioneered by Rumpf to examine three major manifestations of nationalism: violence, voting and participation in political organisations. Employing a range of statistical data including judicial statistics, election results and the Crime Special Branch statistics of the RIC, Fitzpatrick provided a more thorough analysis of the variety of republican violence than had previously been produced. He later employed his statistical approach and scepticism of the existing historiography to produce a major account of the revolution in a single county. *Politics and Irish Life 1913-1921: Provincial Experience of War and Revolution*¹² examined the revolution in county Clare and was the first major analysis to challenge the common assumption that the rise of militant nationalism represented a fundamental and radical break with the constitutional tradition of the National Party and the United Irish League. Rather than viewing the period as one of fundamental political transformation, Fitzpatrick highlighted the profound continuity between the manipulation of social discontent and the romantic attachment to violent radicalism of the Parliamentary Party and the complementary tactics of the 'new' revolutionaries which merely represented 'old wine in new bottles'. Michael Wheatley has explored the demise of the Parliamentary Party's local structures in the north west in *Nationalism and the Irish Party: Provincial Ireland 1910-1916*.¹³ Wheatley contends that nationalist political structures were neither in a state of decay nor unrepresentative of provincial nationalism in early 1914. Rather, the IPP's decline after 1914 was inaugurated by Redmond's support for the British war effort.

Fitzpatrick's 'so-called revolution' thesis has influenced a new generation of historians who have emphasised the emasculation of radical social forces within the new militant tradition, which became most obvious in the revolutionaries' commitment to property values and their conservative stance on land redistribution.¹⁴ Fitzpatrick's study emphasised the profoundly

¹¹ David Fitzpatrick, 'The Geography of Irish Nationalism' in *Past and Present*, Vol 78, pp 113-44.

¹² David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life 1913-1921, Provincial Experience of War and Revolution* (Dublin, 1977).

¹³ Michael Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party: Provincial Ireland 1910-1916*, (Oxford, 2005).

¹⁴ See in particular, Joost Augusteijn (ed.) *The Irish Revolution, 1913-1923* (London, 2002); 'Accounting for the emergence of violent activism among Irish revolutionaries, 1916-21' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxxi, (May

local nature of the revolutionary experience and his conclusion that only detailed local studies can determine the relative importance (if any) of the many factors which he had highlighted, was taken up by a number of younger historians.¹⁵ Peter Hart in Cork, Michael Farry in Sligo, Marie Coleman in Longford and Joost Augusteijn in a range of counties, have all examined the nature of political and social upheaval during the period 1913-1923 in one county.¹⁶

Fitzpatrick's conclusions have attracted both supporters and detractors and he has subsequently been critical of historians 'hankering after lost opportunities for social revolution'.¹⁷ Fergus Campbell challenged Fitzpatrick's analysis of continuity and change by examining the intersection between political and agrarian conflict in Galway. He emphasised the key influence of the radical tradition as being of paramount importance in shaping events and public opinion, as opposed to the elitism of the constitutional traditions of the Irish Party.¹⁸ Campbell's study spans the period 1898 to 1921 and his analysis focuses on the revolutionary potential of land hunger and land redistribution. Whilst his work provides an important interpretive paradigm, the key issues surrounding republican and state violence, sectarianism and the fate of minorities and the urban experience of revolution have not been examined in the west of Ireland during the revolutionary period.¹⁹ Thus, despite Campbell's research, east Galway still provides a compelling case study of continuity and change owing to the social, economic and demographic diversity of the region.

2007), pp 237-45; David Fitzpatrick (ed.) *Revolution?: Ireland 1917-1923* (Dublin, 1990); Tom Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics* (Dublin, 1981); Charles Townshend, 'The Irish Republican Army and the Development of Guerrilla Warfare, 1916-21' in *English Historical Review*, xciv (1979), pp 318-45; *Political Violence in Ireland: Government and Resistance Since 1948* (Oxford, 1983).

¹⁵ These factors are discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

¹⁶ Peter Hart, 'The Geography of Revolution in Ireland 1917-1923' in *Past and Present*, Vol, 154 (1997), pp 142-73. Peter Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies: Violence and Community in Cork, 1916-1923* (Oxford, 1998); *The IRA at War, 1916-1923* (Oxford, 2003); Marie Coleman, *County Longford and the Irish Revolution, 1910-1923* (Dublin, 2003); Joost Augusteijn, *From Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare. The Experience of Ordinary Volunteers in the Irish War of Independence 1916-1921*. (Dublin, 1996); Michael Farry, *The Aftermath of Revolution: Sligo, 1921-23* (UCD, 2000).

¹⁷ David Fitzpatrick, 'Review; Fergus Campbell, *Land & Revolution, Politics in the West of Ireland 1898-1921*' in *American Historical Review*, cxii, (2007), pp 281-2.

¹⁸ Fergus Campbell, *Land & Revolution, Politics in the West of Ireland 1898-1921* (Oxford, 2005).

¹⁹ Michael Farry provides some information on Sligo in *Sligo 1914-192: A Chronicle of Conflict* (Sligo, 1992).

The key challenge set by Fitzpatrick, to find out why some areas were more violent than others through a series of local studies which explored various social variables in order to elucidate the key themes of continuity and change, remains an unfinished task.²⁰ The profound localism of the era, the stark differences in popular mobilisation and political organisation, not just between counties, but also between areas within the same county, demands the synthesis of a greater number of regional studies. The conclusions of studies based in one particular part of the country cannot be extrapolated into nationwide conclusions until a greater synthesis of regional case studies has been achieved.

1. Key Thesis Questions

Despite the increasing sophistication of the literature, numerous profound lacunae remain in our understanding of the Irish Revolution. In spite of the range of historical enquiry investigated in Fitzpatrick's seminal work on Clare, many subsequent historians have continued to rely on the collation of statistical data to explain the regional variations of political violence.²¹ This has contributed to a trend, whereby political violence and the IRA in particular, have been analysed apart from the social milieu of nationalist society. The revolution was fundamentally immersed in the under-articulated, yet profound social prejudices of the era and political change was ultimately mediated through notions of legitimacy, deference and respectability. Hart and Augusteijn's seminal approach has elucidated much of our current understanding of IRA violence. However, the evolution of public opinion defies a rigid statistical approach and a firmer contextualisation is required to take account of the many social forces and civic organisations through which both change and stasis were mediated. Hart recognised the importance of these inherent tensions within Irish society and the subsequent need for greater historical analysis of the insecurity created by the defeat of conservative nationalism, noting, 'We do have the materials for a new revolutionary history.'²²

²⁰ Fitzpatrick, 'The Geography of Irish Nationalism', p. 137. Campbell has contested Fitzpatrick's conclusions in 'The Social Dynamics of Nationalist Politics in the West of Ireland, 1898–1918' in *Past and Present*, Vol 184, (2004), pp 175-209.

²¹ See Hart, 'The Geography of Revolution in Ireland 1917-1923'; *The IRA and its Enemies*; Hart, *The IRA at War, 1916-1923*; Augusteijn, *From Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*.

²² Hart, *The IRA at War, 1916-1923*, p. 5.

Political revolutions necessitate a violent and traumatic process of upheaval, and to succeed, require a significant degree of communal solidarity. The brunt of the upheaval was not borne evenly by all sections of society. The national solidarity required by the leadership of nationalist Ireland during the revolutionary era concealed a society that was fundamentally shaped by the divergent hopes and aspirations of various broadly defined social groups, which were often antagonistic or mutually exclusive. The tensions within nationalist society are examined in detail in this study and the degree to which the evolution of the republican movement generated profound insecurity and resentment amongst sections of the community is investigated. The creation of one political tradition required the destruction of another and the tensions within the broader nationalist community are a crucial aspect in understanding the revolution in Ireland. How this resentment manifested itself and how the republican movement eventually accommodated more conservative social forces defines the nature of the Independence struggle and the new Irish state which emerged.

While agrarian unrest in the nineteenth century has received a considerable amount of outstanding scholarly treatment, the agrarian disturbances of the early twentieth century require further analysis. Both Fitzpatrick and Townshend have acknowledged the importance of land in generating violence during the independence struggle.²³ Terence Dooley has elucidated the seminal importance of land hunger as a social and political catalyst for many decades after the founding of the state.²⁴ Nonetheless, the nature of the relationship between agrarianism and political violence during the revolutionary era remains elusive. Fitzpatrick has pointed out that 'rural unrest invites study, not only for its intrinsic value, but also for its significance as the manifestation, result or cause, of more general relationships and processes.'²⁵ This study provides a detailed classification of agrarian unrest during the period which avoids the homogeneity that contemporary labelling of outbreaks inferred, and which historians have at times been too ready to accept. A systematic classification of agrarian unrest and its patterns has been constructed so that more sophisticated problems about political unrest can be answered. The extent to which agrarianism in Galway represented a uniform and persistent manifestation of crisis amongst the poor or simply a collection of localised and contrasting movements confined to specific parts of the county, is of crucial

²³ Charles Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland: Government and Resistance Since 1848*, (Oxford, 1983), p. 238; David Fitzpatrick, 'Unrest in Rural Ireland' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, xii (1985), p. 98.

²⁴ Terence Dooley, *The Land for the People: The Land Question in Independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004).

²⁵ Fitzpatrick, 'Unrest in Rural Ireland', p. 98.

significance to many wider debates.

Arensberg and Kimball's social model of rural society in the west of Ireland highlighted the fundamental social divisions within the world of the rural town, as well as between the small town and its rural environs. These differences were barely concealed and 'there are many kinds of them [townspeople] beneath this sameness and to know them, one must know these variations and what they imply for life.'²⁶ 'For the average small farmer, the town is a strange unfriendly place. Even in the countryside, his security is rooted in his own locality and those living even a few miles away will be strangers to him.'²⁷

While the rural class dimension of the Irish revolution has not been fully explored, the cultural chasm between town and country has merely been alluded to.²⁸ Whilst the militancy of the small tenant farmers during the same period has been the focus of extensive research, the equally valid claims of town tenants has received scant attention. The issue of urban tenants' rights has not been analysed because towns have largely been depicted as adjuncts to the rural world, where the defining national characteristics could be found. Thus, as Susan Hood and Brian Graham have concluded, 'the nationalist rhetoric, which subsumed the labour issue, also absorbed the urban perspective in general and the theme of the small town in particular.'²⁹ By examining the campaigns of the local Towns Tenants' League and other national organisations, this study explores how the cultural chasm between town and country was particularly pronounced during the revolution in east Galway. The IRA's campaign was limited to distinct parts of the county and wholly confined to the countryside. Towns played little role in the independence struggle and remained hostile to the IRA throughout the era.

The chasm between the world of the small town and its rural environs and between tenant farmers and larger landowners was naturally reflected within nationalist discourse and the revolutionary struggle itself, and the attempt to reconcile, at least temporarily, their conflicting political agendas was never fully successful. Sinn Féin and the Volunteers

²⁶ Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland* (Harvard, 1948), p. 316.

²⁷ Arensberg & Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland*, p. 406.

²⁸ See Augusteijn, *From Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 278; Fitzpatrick, 'The Geography of Irish Nationalism', p. 130.

²⁹ Susan Hood and Brian Graham, 'Town Tenant Protest in Independent Ireland' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, (1994), pp 39-58.

continually failed to make any inroads in the county's small towns, and the urban poor in particular, displayed a deep antagonism to the republican movement, which they correctly perceived as a solely rural movement, driven, until 1920 at least, by the agenda of the small tenant farmers. In the small towns of east Galway, the impact of the revolution was minimal at best and all classes of urban society continually turned their face against political change. The rapid advances made by the Irish Farmers Union in the county in the initial years of the revolution was no mere coincidence. The graziers and gentlemen farmers of the county sought to match the organising zeal of their traditional social inferiors by forming their own combinations to stifle the growth and success of tenant agitations. The demise of the local Town Tenants' League and its failure to tackle serious issues around slum housing and exploitation by middlemen was indicative of the stagnant and reactionary political nature of Galway towns.

The issue of sectarianism during the revolution continues to fuel academic and popular controversy and the reputation of the IRA has come under considerable scrutiny. His study of West Cork led Hart to conclude that sectarianism was 'embedded in the vocabulary and syntax of the revolution'.³⁰ Galway has not escaped the attention of historians in this regard and Hart has asserted that 'ethnic cleansing' took place in the east Galway countryside. Noting the 'dreary steeples of Bandon and Ballinasloe',³¹ Hart concludes that Protestants in general were pursued and were targeted with rigour from 1920 onwards. The 'ethnic civil war' thesis highlighted the sectarian nature of the IRA and Hart has focused on the killing of a number of Protestant men in west Cork by the IRA. In areas where the Crown Forces were particularly active, relations between Volunteers and the general population clearly became more strained. This study examines a number of crucial aspects to this debate, in particular: were Galway Protestants more likely to be informers than their Catholic neighbours? and were Protestants consequently pursued by the IRA? Secondly, were 'outsiders' such as ex-servicemen viewed with suspicion by republicans? and to what degree were they consequently targeted?

Despite the body of academic work which has been published over the last two decades, Fitzpatrick's conclusions about separatism and social change merit re-examination in the

³⁰ Hart, *The IRA at War, 1916-1921*, p. 240.

³¹ *Ibid.*

context of the varying degrees of support for political violence which existed in different regions of the country. This study makes a unique contribution to the body of knowledge surrounding one of the most turbulent periods in Irish history by scrutinising a broader range of movements and organisations than have previously been the subject of historical enquiry, in order to contextualise the sheer diversity of nationalist opinion. The major agents of political change can only be comprehensively analysed within the local milieu of conflicting voices, contested interpretations and disparate expectations through which political change and social unrest were mediated. Hence, to study these groups in isolation or simply as components of larger forces of change is to underestimate and misinterpret the true complexity of nationalist opinion and the level of insecurity and hostility which political change generated. The revolution in Ireland did not evolve in isolation from the forces of conservatism and stasis. It had to convince and eventually accommodate entrenched privilege and established power relations.

3. East Galway

East Galway provides a compelling case study of the revolution for a number of reasons.³² The social, geographical and demographic diversity of the county, manifest in the profoundly different regions of the county, contributed to a complex social structure, where intense political cleavages mirrored the diversity of political aspirations in a volatile local political culture. Galway, like most of the country in 1914, was an overwhelmingly rural society and the vast majority of people were either directly or indirectly reliant on agriculture for their livelihoods. This apparent uniformity concealed many contrasting cultural and social communities, reflecting wildly varying ways of life, where, to many ordinary people, other parts of the county could appear strange and perceptibly different from their own communities. Galway, west of the Corrib, comprised a unique landscape and culture, with its flat boggy coastal settlements and uninhabited mountainous centre. Clifden, in the northwest, an English speaking market town, comprised the only town west of the Corrib, while the majority of people, lived their lives in abject poverty in small coastal communities scattered along the shores of Galway Bay. The largest of these, an Spideall, an Ceathur Rua, Rosmuc, Roundstone and Oughterard, remained small Irish-speaking villages, which continued to rely on remittances from overseas to supplement meagre incomes from fishing and the rearing on

³² See Appendix for map of Galway showing main towns and villages.

small farms of sheep and cattle. The uniqueness of these communities and their specific cultural, environmental and economic realities demand a separate study, distinct from the east of the county. For this reason, this thesis focuses on the east of the county, where little or no popular solidarity, concern or interest generally, was commonly felt toward fellow Galwegians in Connemara.

East Galway evades an absolute definition but for the purposes of this study it is taken to be all of the county, to the south and to the east of Lough Corrib and including Galway town. East Galway was overwhelmingly English speaking, despite a small number of native speakers in the Carnmore, Oranmore and Clonbur districts and in the Claddagh village in Galway town. Despite becoming part of the Gaelteacht, these areas did not share the same social structure as Connemara with its extremes of poverty and economic backwardness. East Galway itself is popularly conceived of in terms of the north and the south, with the dividing line generally held to be an imaginary frontier stretching from Galway town, across to the small village of Monivea and on to Ballinasloe and the banks of the Shannon. Ballinasloe, Loughrea and Gort comprised the largest towns in the south of the county, with Tuam, the only relatively large town in the north. Galway town contained the county's only small industries with the urban poor finding employment in the docks, the fertiliser factory, MacDonagh's timber mills and Young's mineral water factory, as well as in the town's relatively large commercial sector.³³

The quality of farmland in east Galway varies dramatically between the rich grassland farms of the limestone plain, which stretches northwards from Gort in the south, as far as south Mayo, and eastwards from Galway town, as far as Loughrea. The centre of east Galway, the hinterland between Athenry and Craughwell, contains highly fertile grassland for grazing sheep and cattle, as well as intensive dairying. To the east and north of the limestone belt, stretching from the north Galway/Roscommon border, inwards from Ballinasloe as far as Loughrea, and south to the Slieve Aughty Mountains, soil becomes perceptibly poorer and wetter, and consequently, far less commercially viable, with sheep more predominant than cattle, cattle sold on at an earlier age, and less dairying activity generally. Thus, the dominant division in cattle rearing nationally, with young cattle reared in the poorer land of the west,

³³ For a social history of the urban poor in Galway town, see John Cunningham, *'A Town Tormented by the Sea', Galway 1790-1914* (Dublin, 2004).

subsequently sold on to be fully reared in the east of the country before being exported, is partially replicated within Galway itself, with cattle reared in the wetter parts of the county, often bought at mart, to be reared in the Athenry or Loughrea districts.

Intense localism was reflected in many other ways, most obviously, but not inconsequentially, in sporting terms. The north of the county was exclusively football territory, the south was exclusively hurling country. This is further complicated by contiguous areas in adjoining counties sharing agricultural, economic and family ties. In the south of the county, the Gort and Beagh districts for example, have strong cultural and kinship ties with neighbouring Clare, with many local people aspiring to educate their sons in St Flannan's College, Ennis. Similarly, on the Galway-Roscommon border, in places like Ballygar and Mountbellew, people naturally orientate towards Roscommon town for commercial and social events, as the boggy land from which livelihoods are eked, recognise no administrative border. In the north of the county, places such as Milltown and Dunmore share many social and economic ties with communities like Ballinrobe in south Mayo, as the flat limestone drained grazing lands stretch northward into south Mayo. Far from being of purely parochial concern, the vast differences in the character of political mobilisation and popular participation between broadly conceived areas of the county, as well as between social interest groups generally, reflected complex internal, social and regional variations.

Galway ranked near the top of all the standard economic indicators of poverty nationwide. The population had dropped dramatically in every census year since 1841, with a total population of 182,224 by 1911.³⁴ A significant minority of 7,811 people, the largest number in any county nationwide, still spoke Irish only, with the vast majority living in west of the county.³⁵ Emigration was also amongst the highest in Ireland with 32,224 people emigrating in 1910 alone.³⁶ In religious terms, Galway had the second smallest per capita number of Protestants, with 3,544 members of the Church of Ireland community, representing only 1.95 per cent of the total population in 1911.³⁷

³⁴ *Census of Ireland, 1911. General Report, with Tables and Appendix, Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of His Majesty* (London, 1913), p. 64.

³⁵ *Census of Ireland, 1911*, p. 291.

³⁶ *Census of Ireland, 1911*, p. 291.

³⁷ There were only 495 Presbyterians and 152 Methodists resident in the entire county in 1911. *Census of Ireland, 1911*, p. 211.

'The Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland noted the poverty that rural tenants continued to suffer in east Galway and the precariousness of their existence:

The Tuam rural tenantry were in great poverty, labour was scarce and many people eked out an existence cutting turf from bogs and selling it in the town. They were industrious but under present conditions, it seemed mockery to exhort them to self help ... In three or four cases there was gombeenism with 100 per cent but was less flourishing then formerly.³⁸

On the topic of the bar on shopkeepers sitting on the parish committees of the Congested Districts Board, the Chairman was unapologetic and referring to the 'mutual suspicions' of 'the small man and his neighbours', he believed, that it was 'these qualities of the poor which prevented the formation of committees':

The shopkeeper might favour his own customer in the selection [of grants] and grants from the Parish Committee for improvements, which the tenant would otherwise have paid for himself, might set free an otherwise unattainable sum for the payment of the shopkeeper ... The shopkeeper might have a collusive interest in where he got his materials.³⁹

Anthony Varley pioneered the study of the social consequences of land reform in the west of Ireland and his work has subsequently been complemented by Fergus Campbell's study of agrarian unrest and the United Irish League.⁴⁰ No comprehensive study of the 1914-1921 period in the county has been published and the IRA campaign in the county has not been

³⁸ *Tenth Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire Into and Report Upon the Operation of the Acts Dealing with Congestion in Ireland: Evidence and Documents 1908-1908*, H.C. (1908) Volume xlii, 4007, (The Evidence of Rev. Macken).

³⁹ *Eleventh Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire Into and Report Upon the Operation of the Acts Dealing with Congestion in Ireland; Digest of Evidence, 1908-1908*, H.C. (1908) Volume xliii, 273 (The evidence of Peter O'Malley).

⁴⁰ Anthony Varley, 'Irish Land Reform and the West between the Wars' in *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol 56, (2004), pp 213-33; Varley, 'A Region of Sturdy Smallholders? Western Nationalists and Agrarian Politics During The First World War' in *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol 55, (2003), pp 127-55; *The Politics of Agrarian Reform; The State, Nationalists and the Agrarian Question in the West of Ireland* (PhD dissertation, Southern Illinois University, 1994).

analysed.⁴¹ Galway was remarkable in the opening decades of the century for both the intensity of agrarian unrest in the county and the volume of land transferred from large landowners to small tenants under consecutive Land Acts. Galway, Clare and Roscommon consistently featured in police statistics as the most violent centres of agrarian agitation. In 1914, Galway was ranked tenth out of forty police districts for indictable offences.⁴² However, when the metropolitan cities of Dublin, Belfast, Derry, Waterford, Limerick and Cork are excluded from the statistics, Galway ranks fourth behind, Kildare, Tipperary south and Offaly. These statistics are revealing however, when the breakdown of offences is further analysed. In terms of crimes against property, from 1908-1912, Galway ranked second nationally, behind Clare, once the major metropolitan centres of Dublin and Belfast are excluded.⁴³ Furthermore, when the exact type of offence committed is contextualised, the remarkable level of a particular kind of violence in the county becomes apparent. In 1914, Galway ranked first nationally for convictions for 'intimidation by threatening letter' with seventy convictions, with Mayo, the second highest having a mere eighteen convictions.⁴⁴ In terms of malicious injury to property, Galway ranked second behind Belfast City with sixteen convictions. In terms of convictions for 'Assaulting Dwelling houses by firing shots into them', Galway ranked first nationally with nineteen of the forty-five convictions nationwide, occurring in the county. These types of crimes were associated with communal agrarian

⁴¹ Some information on the period can be found in Timothy G. McMahon (ed.) *Padraig O'Fathaigh's War of Independence; Recollections of a Galway Gaelic Leaguer* (Cork, 2000). However, O'Fathaigh was quite elderly when his memoirs were compiled and some episodes described are confused. The same problem applies to an account of the 1916 Rising in the county by Matt Neilan published as 'The 1916 Rising in Galway', *Capuchin Annual* (1966), pp 324-27. There is also some information on the Rising in Galway in Desmond Greaves, *Liam Mellows and the Irish Revolution* (London, 1971). There is a chronology of events of the War of Independence in Galway in the appendix of Campbell, *Land & Revolution*. A number of events in the period are also discussed in Chapter Five of the book.

⁴² 'Judicial Statistics, Ireland, 1912.' *Part 1. - Criminal Statistics relating to; Police - Crime and its distribution - Modes of procedure for punishment of Crime - Proceedings in Criminal Courts - Persons under Detention in Prisons and other Places of Confinement for the year 1912.* H.C. (1912), p. xvi

⁴³ 'Judicial Statistics, Ireland, 1912.' Table E. - *Geographical Distribution of Crime - Annual Average (1908 - 1912) and Proportion to Population of Indictable Offences, of Persons proceeded against for Drunkenness, and of Suicides in each County in Ireland* in 'Judicial Statistics, Ireland, 1912. Part 1.- Criminal Statistics.' H.C. (1912), p. xvii.

⁴⁴ 'Judicial Statistics, Ireland, 1914.' Table 23 - *Returns From The Several Counties - Indictable Offences - Nature of Crimes Known To The Police in each County and County City in 1914* in Judicial Statistics, Ireland, 1914. Part 1. - Criminal Statistics. H.C. (1914), p. xv.

agitation and should not be extrapolated into an extraordinary propensity for violence in the county, as for other crimes such as larceny drunkenness, and riot, the figures for the county are relatively unremarkable.

In terms of the amount of land transferred by the state under the 1903 and 1909 Land Acts, Galway ranks a very clear first nationwide, when any number of categories are considered. Under the 1903 Land Act, 166,507 acres of land was transferred in the county by the state to tenants from November 1903 until March 1918.⁴⁵ This equates to just under the entire amount transferred in the province of Munster at 169,988, or the amount transferred in all of Ulster and Leinster combined at 90,138 and 80,774 acres respectively. In terms of allotments of untenanted land, i.e. land previously given over to the grazing of sheep and cattle, the figures are even more remarkable. A total of £731,071 was advanced by the state under the combined 1903 and 1909 Land Acts up to March 1918.⁴⁶ Roscommon, where the next highest amount of money was allocated, does not even compare, with £118,188 spent by the government. In no other county was more than £100,000 spent by the government, other than in Galway and Roscommon, with Galway dwarfing even counties like Clare by a figure of roughly ten to one. (There was £75,229 spent in County Clare, which still exceeded the figure for most counties.) Thus, as an active county in terms of political violence during the revolution, Galway presents a compelling case study. In terms of the nature of the relationship between political violence and land hunger, as an exploration of the rural and urban dimensions to popular mobilisation, and for an inquiry into the nature of the sectional, sectarian and class components to the Irish revolution.

⁴⁵ Table XIII.- Return of Estates Purchased by The estates Commissioners During the Period from 1st November, 1903 to 31st March, 1918 in *Report of the Estates Commissioners from the Year from 1st of April 1917, to March, 1918, and for the Period From 1st November, 1903 to 31st March, 1918*. H.C. (1918), p. 28.

⁴⁶ Table XXI.- Return giving particulars of Allotment of Untenanted Land purchased by the Estates Commissioners under the Irish land Acts, 1903-09 and vested in Purchasers, up to March, 1918. Contained in *Report of the Estates Commissioners from the Year from 1st of April 1917, to March, 1918, and for the Period From 1st November, 1903 to 31st March, 1918*. H.C (1918), p. 44.

4. Methodology and Sources

This study examines the activities of Sinn Féin, the United Irish League, The Irish Volunteers, the National Volunteers, the Gaelic Athletic Association, the National Gaelic Athletic Association, the County Galway Farmers Association, the east Galway Vigilance Committees, the Town Tenants' Association, the Galway Rate Payers Association, the Galway Ex-Soldiers' and Sailors' Federation, local agrarian collectives and the Irish Republican Army. The Trade Union movement has not been examined, other than in passing, as it was so weak and disjointed in the county. Similarly the Gaelic League and the Ancient Order of Hibernians, although strong in neighbouring counties, never had a similar impact in county Galway. (Both are discussed in reference to other aspects of the evolution of nationalist politics in the county.)

The aspirations of the silent majority of people in any historical era are often less tangible than the researcher may wish to admit and interpretations of history are heavily influenced by the written record left by local elites. This study examines the competing narratives of ordinary people, conscious of the obvious prejudices and agendas inherent in the written sources that have formed the bulk of this research. A wide range of sources have been used in this study with the largest number of references coming from the police reports contained in the Colonial Office Special Branch Files, the county's four local newspapers and the Witness Statements of the Bureau of Military History. The RIC County Inspectors' Monthly Confidential Police Reports for Galway form a significant archive of the activities of all local social and political movements during the period. There were two administrative ridings in the county with two police inspectors submitting a large volume of reports to Dublin Castle each month. The reports contained intricate details not just on crime, but a wealth of information on civic and sporting organisations with lengthy reports of meetings, lists of suspects and a whole range of material recorded each month. Furthermore, the deterioration of the force's relationship with the community and their exasperation at the position they found themselves in, is recorded in detail.

The War Office records, WO 35, 'General administration of the army in Ireland', held in the National Archives at Kew have been extensively utilised to build a comprehensive picture of the activities of the Crown Forces in the county. County Galway formed part of the 5th

Division of the Crown Forces during the War of Independence and the War Diary of the Galway Brigade, the civilian court-martial records, intelligence files, individual files on suspects, and a number of other records have been utilised to gain a clear insight into the activities and mindset of the British Military.

The vibrancy of local newspapers in Galway was remarkable, with four papers produced weekly. The *Galway Express* represented the views of the unionist constituency until 1918, when it was taken over by Sinn Féin, becoming the movement's official paper in the county. The *Connacht Tribune*, which was founded by the National Party in 1909, represented conservative nationalist opinion and was the most widely circulated and influential paper in the county. Its editor, Thomas Kenny, promoted the idea of Ireland as part of a British commonwealth as a solution to 'the Irish question'. The paper remained implacably opposed to the republican project throughout the period and it remained convinced of its own moral authority on all developments locally, including promoting the British war effort and recruitment 'to the colours'. Alongside these papers, the *East Galway Democrat* based in Ballinasloe and the *Tuam Herald* contributed to a lively newspaper culture with a wealth of local information published weekly.

Alongside these sources, the minutes of the Galway Urban District Council and the Ballinasloe Rural District Council contain many revealing insights into the colourful nature of local politics. The Diaries of Lady Augusta Gregory and the O'Fathaigh papers, held at the National Library have been used to supplement these sources to provide personal insights from specific political viewpoints. A large number of detailed maps have been used to illustrate the geographical distribution of a number of relevant phenomena including the spatial distribution of political violence, the location of the Crown Forces, the distribution of fatalities and the location of agrarian collectivities. The Appendix also includes the precise details of all fatalities in the county during the War of Independence, as well as details of all attacks carried out by the Crown Forces and the IRA including relevant charts explaining their distribution.

Finally, the problem of definition needs to be acknowledged when one is dealing extensively with agrarian protest and the rural class component of the revolution. No definitive definition of a grazier is possible or even desirable: the term is relative to the local society in which the grazier or strong farmer lives. In this respect, a working definition of a grazier as a grassland

farmer with more than two hundred acres and a large dwelling house has generally been used as a loose rule of thumb. However, Dooley concedes that in many parts of the country, a farmer with much less than two hundred acres would be considered a grazier by the local community.⁴⁷ East Galway falls into the latter category. In terms of peasants and the rural poor, the problem of definition is inherent. Theodore Shanin has noted that European peasants have variously been described by historians as both 'the real autocrats' and at the same time, 'non-existing, historically speaking'.⁴⁸ For the purposes of this study, the term 'peasant' has been avoided, in favour of 'small tenant' or simply, 'the rural poor'. Whilst a strict definition has not been attempted, small farmers and the sons of tenant farmers, the landless and labourers are all included in this category.

⁴⁷ Terence Dooley, *The Land for the People: The Land Question in Independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), p. 30.

⁴⁸ Theodore Shanin, 'Peasantry as a Political Factor' in *idem, Peasants and Peasant Society* (London, 1971), p. 239.

Chapter One: Agrarian Unrest, 1914-16

Carla King has noted that, ‘historically in Ireland the relationship between the people and the land has been both complex and intense’.¹ The chapter explores the ‘agrarian disturbances’ for which parts of east Galway had become notorious in the opening decades of the century.² This chapter attempts a precise classification of what was contemporaneously labelled by the authorities as simply ‘agrarian unrest’ without any attempt to analysis the nature, form and root cause of these disturbances and on their frequency in certain parts of the country such as east Galway, Clare, Roscommon and Offaly. Rather than viewing agrarian agitation as simply the opportunism of an avarice peasantry, this study goes beyond the homogeneity with which contemporary commentators labelled these outbreaks and which historians have at times been too willing to accept. These manifestations of crisis amongst the small tenants concealed a level of sophistication, co-ordination and negotiation which cannot simply be dismissed. The sheer complexities of the issues at hand and the range and number of disputes involved can be analysed once they are comprehensively studied.

The fundamental feature of agriculture in Galway has always been the scarcity of economically viable land. Whilst the 1903 and 1909 Land Acts are generally regarded as having resolved the land question, these reforms did not address the prevalence of uneconomic holdings and the persistence of land hunger amongst the rural poor in the west of Ireland. The new legislation did little to further the progress of land purchase and the terms of the 1909 Act actually made land purchase less attractive to both landlord and tenant than it had been under the Wyndham Act.³ Terence Dooley has pointed out that the legacy of the Acts was that farmers did not get what they really required: ‘enough land to make their holdings economically viable.’⁴ Under the new Land Acts, the landed gentry retained vast amounts of land, usually demesne, home farms, woodlands and grazing farms.⁵ After 1909, the land issue

¹ Carla King (ed.) *Famine, Land and Culture in Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), p. 1.

² See Appendix for map showing agrarian collectivities in east Galway, 1914-16.

³ Fergus Campbell, *Land & Revolution, Politics in the West of Ireland 1898-1921* (Oxford, 2005), p. 121.

⁴ Terence Dooley, *The Land for the People, The Land Question in Independent Ireland*, (Dublin, 2004), p. 17.

⁵ By 1923, only 0.5 million acres of untenanted and demesne land had been sold, out of an estimated total of 2.6 million acres. Over 2 million acres of untenanted and demesne land was still being farmed by landlords in

was only reconfigured with a sizable rural proletariat, unable to take advantage of the Acts, being further exploited by the emergence of the new class of grazier farmers. The members of this class were often the agents or middlemen for the remnants of the old gentry who continued to dominate the east Galway countryside. According to the *1906 Return of Untenanted Land in Rural Districts in Ireland*, Galway, with 161 mansions, had the highest number of any county.⁶ Lord Ashtown's estate in east Galway, which was the focus of significant agitation during the revolutionary period, comprised 4,000 acres of grazing land in 1923⁷ and Clanricarde's various estates still comprised 52,000 acres in 1913.⁸ But, as Anthony Varley points out, the problem ran deeper, as much of the transfer of ownership profoundly changed the Irish countryside, the abundance of uneconomic small farms and poor land meant that in the absence of major land redistribution, the benefits would always be heavily restricted in the west of Ireland.⁹

Hence, far from being resolved by the Wyndham Land Act in 1903 and Birrell Land Act in 1909, land hunger dominated rural society in east Galway, where the grazing system predominated. Following the earlier reforms, the social structure of rural society in east Galway altered radically. A society previously united in opposition against landlordism fractured and a tripartite cleavage emerged with the rise of the shopkeeper/grazier. This new agrarian class had the capital to outbid the small farmers each spring for available land under the eleven-month lease system, and thus accumulated large tracts of grazing land. The rural poor blamed graziers for denying them access to land, valuing bullocks over people and they were bitterly resented by the small tenants.

The eleven-month land lease was synonymous with the grazing system and with the gradual process of marginalisation of the rural poor.¹⁰ The regulations of previous Land Acts only

the early 1920s. See, Terence Dooley, 'Landlords and the Land Question, 1879-1909' in Carla King (ed.), *Famine, Land and Culture in Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), pp 131-134.

⁶ Mary Walsh, 'Galway Landlords and Country Houses' in *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol 42, (1989), p. 120.

⁷ Dooley, 'Landlords and the Land Question, 1879-1909', p. 134.

⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 25 April 1914.

⁹ Anthony Varley, 'Irish Land Reform and the West between the Wars' in *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol 56, (2004), p. 211.

¹⁰ The eleven month lease system was particularly dominant in Roscommon, Galway, Clare and parts of the midlands. Occupiers could be evicted without notice, did not gain formal tenancy, and thereby could not

applied to leases of one year or more. Therefore, by leasing land for eleven months, the terms of the lease were excluded from the stipulations concerning fair rent and fixity of tenure. Thus, land under the eleven month system was leased at an inflated rate and since fewer people could afford to purchase a lease, more people were excluded from access to the land. A process of economic marginalisation based on access to land led to an increasing concentration in the hands of a relatively small number of grassland farmers, commonly referred to as ranchers or graziers.

In 1915 Meath had the most land rented under the eleven-month system nationwide with 73,038 acres but Galway was a close second with 72,801. Crucially, Meath did not have anything like the same number of small holders as Galway and agrarianism did not feature strongly in the county. Better comparisons with similar sized counties like Mayo with 30,449 acres and Tipperary with 20,146 acres highlight the dominance of the grazing system in Galway with over twice that number of eleven-month leases.¹¹

The dominance of this system in Galway, which excluded thousands of small tenants from access to land, had historically been a major source of turmoil, violence and desperation. Campaigns of mass agitation aimed against graziers were a recurring phenomenon in Galway during the opening decades of the last century.¹² These campaigns frequently involved considerable violence, including intimidation, the maiming of both beasts and people, burnings and shooting, and were a major cause of concern for the police in east Galway.

The Chief Secretary's intelligence notes for 1915 recorded the situation in Galway East Riding:

Speaking generally the Riding was in an unsatisfactory state during the year owing to agrarian agitation. The parts principally affected were the Athenry and Loughrea districts, where unrest was due to the greed for land, the jealousies existing over the division of lands after sale, and the influence of secret societies.¹³

avail of the rent fixing terms of the previous Land Acts.

¹¹ 'Return Showing the Results of Agitation against the Grazing System in May 1915' in Brendan Mac Giolla Choille (ed.) *Intelligence Notes 1913-1916* (Dublin, 1966), pp 194-5.

¹² For a discussion on the Ranch wars in Connacht, see Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, pp 85-166.

¹³ 'Chief Secretary's Office, Judicial Division, Intelligence Notes, 1915' in Mac Giolla Choille, *Intelligence*

A common theme of the literature on peasant societies is that rural communities experience severe dislocation with the advance of agricultural commercialisation, which undermines traditional institutions including bonds between peasants and their masters. The period covered in this study should have been one of immense opportunity for the small tenants but ultimately it became one of heightened disappointment. This disappointment was compounded by the economic benefits of the Great War, as the agricultural boom was confined to those with access to enough land to be able to sell surplus produce. The dislocation of the small tenants, so obvious during the earlier Ranch War, had both economic and institutional aspects. This alienation and acute disaffection with the state was summed up by the banners of the Tullycross agitators, 'The road for the bullock and the land for the people.' This alienation was most obvious in the widespread dissatisfaction of the small tenants with the established state mechanisms for land redistribution: the United Estates Commission and the Congested Districts Board.

In understanding changes in popular collective action in Western Europe over the last three centuries, Tilly analysed the effect on collective violence of major structural transformations such as urbanisation and industrialisation.¹⁴ As a result of these structural transformations, the social organisation of groups contending for power in western European countries has changed over the past several centuries and the nature and targets of their goals has altered accordingly. There has been a decline in collective violence by small communal groups, either struggling for power with one another or trying to resist the centralisation of power in nation states, in favour of a transition to collective violence that erupts as broadly based interest groups, organised associationally and seeking to influence the state and make claims to rights not previously enjoyed. In the case of Galway, local collectivities sought to regain access to land popularly perceived to have been enjoyed prior to the Cromwellian confiscations and the Williamite victory. In the peasant imagination, grazierism and landlordism had no legitimacy whatsoever and the community was simply righting an historical injustice perpetrated on their ancestors by an alien oppressor.

Writing about the Irish Land War of 1879-82, Clark applied Tilly's model to rural unrest in

Notes, 1913-1916, p. 151.

¹⁴ Charles Tilly, *Rebellious Century, 1830-1930* (London, 1975), pp 17-23.

nineteenth-century Ireland.¹⁵ He concluded that collective action had begun to change significantly in Ireland several centuries before the Land War. Nevertheless, a crucial part of the total transformation occurred in the nineteenth century. Active collectivities had become less local and more often national in their scope, less often re-active and more often pro-active in their aims, and less communal and more often associational in their organisational basis and structure.

Whilst both collective and communal action can be found in Ireland throughout the nineteenth century, a gradual movement toward broader associational action and away from more localised communal action is clearly detectable. The oath-bound agrarian combinations and feuding factions of the pre-Famine period tended to be highly localised and confined to one county or one area of a county. There is a noticeable transition away from this type of local collective action to broader national collective action involving national movements such as the fenians and the Land League as the century progresses.

George Rudé made a distinction between ‘forward looking’ and ‘backward looking’ crowds involved in popular disturbances.¹⁶ Tilly reformulated this distinction into one between pro-active, re-active and competitive collective actions.¹⁷ Pro-active collective action refers to campaigns by a group to claim rights, privileges or resources, not previously enjoyed. Re-active collective action refers to collective action defending rights, privileges or resources already enjoyed by the group but now under threat. Competitive collective action involves two or more groups in a struggle over access to resources or recognised rights and privileges.

Numerous examples of all three categories of collective action identified by Tilly: associational, communal and competitive are evident in the widespread agrarian unrest between 1914 and 1916 in east Galway. Anti-grazier campaigns such as those in the hinterland around Athenry, rested on local communal bonds, especially those of bordering townlands with inevitable overlapping bonds of kinship. However, larger agitations that were associational in character were prominent in the hinterland of Ballinasloe, Loughrea and

¹⁵ Samuel Clark, *Social Origins of the Irish Land War* (Princeton, 1979), pp 350-71.

¹⁶ George Rudé, *The Crowd in History, A study of popular disturbance in France and England, 1730-1848* (New York, 1964), pp 48-55.

¹⁷ Charles Tilly, *Rebellious Century, 1830-1930* (London, 1975), pp 17-23.

Portumna, further east in the county.¹⁸ Here a number of different large scale, well organised agitations were ongoing for many years against landlords and graziers, with the largest campaign centred on the Ashtown, Clanricarde and Clonbrock estates, which were divided into numerous dispersed portions. These campaigns were organised by the local United Irish League branches and co-ordinated by their regional executives with parish priests and local MPs occupying central positions as spokespersons and lobbyists. Whilst both of these modes of collective action involved cattle driving and boycotting as a key tactics, communal collectivities were characterised by their frequent use of violence against landlords and their employees. The violence involved in associational campaigns, on the other hand, whilst often involving crimes against property, such as the knocking of walls, remained largely sporadic and impromptu, such as when a cattle drives were forcibly disrupted by the police.

Competitive actions involving local, often semi-political factions engaged in violent feuding which had its origins in competing interpretations of rights and entitlements over access to land were also significant sources of unrest in the county. Feuds between organised factions took place at Boyhill and Graige Abbey near Athenry, in Lackagh village in the parish of Turloughmore, around the village of Craughwell, and in the Riverville and Bookeen districts that previously comprised the Dunsandle estate.¹⁹ These feuds over how land was to be divided, or had already been divided to the dissatisfaction of local parties, involved the most violence, possibly aggravated by the fact that there were usually significantly more perceived legitimate targets than in anti-grazier campaigns. Thus, agrarian unrest that was competitive in nature could clearly be defined as reactive, rather than pro-active in nature.

The suspension of land division by the CDB for the duration of the European conflict inflamed an already dissatisfied tenantry who already resented the slowness with which estates were being divided. The small tenants were incensed by the widespread practise of renting land to graziers on the eleven-month system whilst division was pending. In June 1914, the Tuam District Council passed a resolution noting 'Bullocks seem to get more consideration in this part of Ireland than people.'²⁰ After being released from custody in Galway jail for a riot during an anti-grazier demonstration near Clifden, P.J. Wallace

¹⁸ These will be discussed in detail in this Chapter. See Appendix for map of agrarian agitation in East Galway, 1916-16.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Connacht Tribune*, 7 June 1914.

announced, 'All the CDB succeeded in doing was giving jobs to broken down military colonels and land agents and sending ladies around to teach people how to cook eggs, paying more attention to bulls, boars and rams than poor people.'²¹

Discontent with the established state mechanism for land division was universal in the county. A resolution by the north Galway UIL, passed unanimously in June 1914 noted that:

Tenants whose cases are complained of, have been treated unfairly and we believe in some cases this is because they took an active part in the land question. We consider such action unfair and vindictive and we cannot condone such treatment as partisan [sic] and if such conduct is allowed to continue and the influence of the landlord, his agent and bailiff is taken as to who will get extra land and in what proportion: we call for the abolition of the Estate Commission.²²

William O'Malley, MP for Connemara, had been a trenchant and very public critic of the CDB's activities. In November 1914, when the new members of the Board were being considered for their five-year term, he wrote to the CDB requesting that a Galway member be appointed. (O'Malley was hoping the Board would approach him to be their Galway representative.)²³ Decrying the difficulties faced by tenants in what it described as the 'agricultural slums' of Galway, the *Connacht Tribune* echoed Wallace's earlier sentiments, with the editor complaining that the tenants were 'too often made pawns of purely experimental measures by the Board'.

1.1 Communal Collectivities

Communal collectivities were organic communal groups which were organised on the tight bonds between neighbouring townlands and overlapping kinship. They sprang up on specific estates in frustration at local landlords' refusal to sell up under the terms of the Land Acts. Thus, as in the case of a single parish such as Athenry, there were numerous different active communal agitations with the tenants targeting different landlords in their respective vicinity. The bounds of the communal collectivities never extended beyond neighbouring townlands

²¹ *Connacht Tribune*, 28 March 1914.

²² *Connacht Tribune*, 20 June 1914.

²³ *Connacht Tribune*, 16 January 1915.

and there is no evidence of co-operation between groups. Thus, the various 'neighbourly' campaigns, though all active within a single parish, were separate campaigns fought by different groups, sometimes only comprising a small number of families in one very small area.

Communal anti-grazier agitations in the years 1914-16 in county Galway were concentrated in the hinterland around Athenry with agitations active at Moorpark, Tiaquin, and Colemanstown. The police noted the tension in the area in the summer of 1914: 'Land hunger is very keen around Athenry and the forces of disorder there are thoroughly organised and quite unscrupulous.'²⁴ The police noted 'the unsettled state of these places is due to the existence of secret societies, members of which will resort to the use of firearms at the slightest pretext.'²⁵ The source of this unrest was obvious: 'there is much greed for land about Athenry where the forces of disorder are thoroughly organised with the result that much dissatisfaction exists over the division of land in that neighbourhood by the CDB and Estates Commissions.'²⁶

Fergus Campbell has written extensively of the existence of a centralising secret society, the 'Galway Secret Society' which co-ordinated agrarian unrest in the county in the early years of the century.²⁷ Agitations clearly had the support of the local IRB and clear overlaps in terms of membership existed. The police noted in February 1915, 'these secret societies around Athenry and Loughrea, if not actually IRB circles, are believed to be under the control of that organisation and work in connection with the UEC and UIL in furthering agitation.'²⁸ That there were connections with the IRB is undoubted but as the police continually pointed out, the secret societies also worked closely with other groups when it was to their advantage, such as the local UIL and Estate Commissioners.

²⁴ CI monthly report, east Galway, July 1914, CO 904/94.

²⁵ CI monthly report, east Galway, March 1914, CO 904/92.

²⁶ CI monthly report, east Galway, June 1914, CO 904/93.

²⁷ Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, pp 174-7.

²⁸ CI monthly report, east Galway, February 1915, CO 904/92.

Moorpark

A long running communal agitation had been active in Athenry against local landlord Frank Shawe-Taylor of Moorpark. In March 1913, a deputation including the local parish priest requested a meeting to 'convey the strength of feeling' amongst the local small tenants that he should surrender his three hundred acres of untenanted grazing land to the CDB, in order that it be divided amongst them. He subsequently consented to sell two hundred and forty-nine acres of the farm to the Board. This offer was not accepted by the tenants who were resolute that the whole of the farm be given up. The police noted at the time that 'the people feel it wasn't really a genuine offer, but made for the purpose of trying to fool them, hence his unpopularity.'²⁹

Shawe-Taylor's determination to resist the demands of the local tenants led to repeated threats against him and he was placed under constant police protection. As no local would enter his employment, his staff had to be brought in from outside the area and police were forced to keep track of all changes of personnel on the farm. The threats of the local agitators were no idle rhetoric and in April 1914, a malicious fire destroyed several out-houses and farm equipment on his property.³⁰ The subsequent claim for compensation, for what the local people claimed was not a malicious but an accidental fire, heightened the ill-feeling in the district and in June he sought £600 compensation at Tuam quarter sessions for losses sustained. The court was told that a man who sold oats to the landlord a couple of years previously had subsequently had his house burned down and his brother's home fired into.³¹

In March 1915, a herd in Moorpark was brutally assaulted in Athenry and a local man was subsequently sentenced to six months in Galway jail for the attack.³² The judge noted that he would have got twelve months but for the character reference provided for the defendant by

²⁹ CI monthly report, east Galway, January 1914, CO 904/92.

³⁰ The police report of the incident noted 'numerous outrages have been committed in connection with this dispute, 'Broderick, the steward, is not above suspicion and if he succeeded in driving his master out of the place, he would be sure of getting a good share of the land. £600 compensation is sought.' CI monthly report, east Galway, April 1914. CO 904/93.

³¹ Shawe-Taylor was eventually awarded £450 compensation as the fire was deemed to be malicious. *Connacht Tribune*, 20 June 1914.

³² Thomas Duggan, herd to Shawe-Taylor was walking home from Athenry, when he was repeatedly struck on the head with stones. CI monthly report, east Galway, March 1915, CO 904/96.

the RIC sergeant in Athenry.³³ The willingness of the local police to stand as character witnesses for a defendant in an assault case where the victim sustained brain damage is remarkable and indicative of the sympathy on the part of the local police. Four months later, another of the Moorpark workmen was viciously beaten whilst attending a hurling match in Athenry, being struck about the head repeatedly by a group of men with hurls while lying defenceless on the ground.³⁴ Following these two assaults, the agitation died down for some time. However, workmen at Moorpark remained under police protection and Shawe-Taylor continued to be boycotted.

Unlike the larger associational campaigns in the east of the county, there was no clerical involvement in the Moorpark agitation, despite a priest being involved in the initial delegation and the UIL did not lobby on the tenants' behalf. The dispute was noteworthy for its duration, which ended with the murder of Shawe-Taylor in March 1920, a full six years after the boycott commenced. In the ensuing period, the boycott was rigidly observed by the local community and the Shawe-Taylor family remained protected by a constant police escort. Their land could only be farmed with the assistance of the Property Defence Association, which provided workmen from the north of Ireland who lived constantly on the farm protected by a police hut. The boycott was punctuated by sporadic acts of violence and the grim determination of the local agitation left the landlord in no doubt about his isolation and vulnerability.³⁵

1.2 Associational Collectivities

There were three major associational agitations active in east Galway in the period of this study. These were directed against the county's three major landowners, the Marquis of Clanricarde, Lord Ashtown of Woodlawn, Kilconnell and Lord Clonbrock of Ahascragh. All three agitations were supported by the local United Irish League, even though they involved low-level intimidation and sporadic battles with the police. It is instructive to examine the common features of associational collectivities and the extent to which the impact of their protest was augmented by the threat of the unseen forces of disorder, which they were keen to

³³ William Broderick, a steward for Shawe-Taylor, *Connacht Tribune*, 27 March 1915.

³⁴ CI monthly report, east Galway, July 1915, CO 904/97.

³⁵ The murder of Shawe-Taylor is fully discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

be regarded as holding in check. For the purposes of this study the campaigns against Clonrock and Clanricarde are sufficient to demonstrate the key aspects of associational collectivities. It is important to note that as the three largest land owners in east Galway, Ashtown, Clonrock and Clanricarde were all held in low popular esteem with Ashtown and Clonbrock held in particular infamy. Ashtown earned the contempt of the whole spectrum of Irish society for his many character flaws, the nature of his political views and his refusal to divide his estate amongst his tenants.³⁶

Ashtown

Frederick Oliver Trench, Third Baron Ashtown (1868-1946) remained a vociferous opponent of Home Rule, land reform and all facets of Catholic nationalism generally at a time when many of his peers recognised the legitimacy, or at least the wisdom, of a more conciliatory approach to modernisation. As L Perry Curtis has noted, ‘controversy followed him as closely as the police escort that kept would-be assassins at bay.’³⁷ In 1900 he sacked all of his Catholic herdsmen, replacing them with Scottish planters.³⁸ Nominally one of the hundred wealthiest landowners in the country, Ashtown still owned over 24,000 acres across various counties in the early decades of the twentieth century. Over 8,000 acres of his estate was situated in east Galway, around the family’s large Italianate house, Woodlawn, situated at Kilconnell, twelve miles from Ballinasloe. His extensive ranching operation in County Galway consisted of a herd of cattle and sheep on a farm of over 4,000 acres, whilst he rented the remainder to graziers on the eleven-month letting system.³⁹ As a champion of local graziers generally, Ashtown was the subject of an agitation for the break up of his estate during the ranch wars and his estate was the centre of agitation once again from 1918 onwards.⁴⁰

Clanricarde

Herbert George de Burgh, the second Marquis of Clanricarde, succeeded to the title of the third Earl of Clanricarde in April 1874, following the death of his father. Clanricarde was a

³⁶ See L. Perry Curtis Jnr, ‘The Last Gasp of Southern Unionism; Lord Ashtown of Woodlawn’ in *Eire-Ireland* (Vol 40), Winter/Fall 2005, pp 140-188.

³⁷ Perry Curtis Jnr, ‘The Last Gasp of Southern Unionism’, p 141.

³⁸ Perry Curtis Jnr, ‘The Last Gasp of Southern Unionism’, p 150.

³⁹ Perry Curtis Jnr, ‘The Last Gasp of Southern Unionism’, p 143.

⁴⁰ This will be fully discussed in Chapter Four.

figure of intense hatred in county Galway, where his vast estate of 49,741 acres was divided across 128 separate plots, stretching from the Shannon to the sea. Clanricarde had never set foot in the county but his name remained infamous since the Plan of Campaign and the notorious Woodford evictions. The *Connacht Tribune* published 'sensational shots' of the 'man behind the mask' under the banner 'Two Snapshots of the Loneliest Landlord Peer of the Realm' in April 1914 proclaiming:

The studies are as remarkable as they are pathetic, although throughout Ireland, little sympathy will be felt... Still standing aloof, defiant, possessing not even the relenting powers of the pharaohs of old... He has driven a coach and horses through all laws, human and Divine.⁴¹

Clanricarde's notoriety was due to his dogged refusal to sell any portion of his vast estate to the CDB for division. Between 1886 and 1914, one hundred and eighty-six tenants on the estate were evicted for non-payment of rent. One hundred and twenty were reinstated in their old holdings or given new holdings with sixty-six of the evicted tenants never re-instated.⁴² In December 1914, the House of Commons unanimously dismissed without costs, his final appeal against an order by the CDB for the purchase of his estate under the compulsory purchase clause of the Land Act. Clanricarde had sought to have it declared that the proceedings of the CDB to purchase his estates in Galway were invalid and, as such, did not entitle them to acquire the land under their statutory powers. Their decision concluded a bitter struggle which had begun with the original Plan of Campaign in October 1887.

The primary object of the compulsory purchase clause in the 1909 legislation had been the acquisition of the Clanricarde estate, after prolonged pressure from the Irish Parliamentary Party for additional legislation. The Portumna branch of the Clanricarde tenants had first written to the CDB in February 1910, accompanied by a memorial signed by four hundred and forty-eight tenants, requesting that the compulsory powers of the Act be put into effect. In December, the board authorised its members to take all necessary steps to initiate proceedings for the compulsory purchase of the estate and in 1912, they sent a final offer of £269,115. They received no co-operation from the marquis but Clanricarde was finally defeated and the

⁴¹ *Connacht Tribune*, 25 April 1914.

⁴² *Connacht Tribune*, 2 May 1915.

court of appeal eventually fixed the price at £228,000.⁴³

Following the victory, the *Connacht Tribune* noted Clanricarde's legal team's claims of 'cruel, unmerciful and unjust attacks on this man,' pointing out that Clanricarde's intransigence had led to a scenario in parts of east Galway where 'the state of unrest and disaffection constantly hovered on civil war and rebellion. The unfortunate mystic, hated by his own class in Ireland' was:

A standing menace to the peace with 56,000 acres including the town of Loughrea and other villages that he has never visited. Between 1879-83, 239 families were evicted, and his agent Joyce even went to court to clear his name of the stigma. At a time when nearly all the landlords of Galway were endeavouring to do their duty to the people, Clanricarde was issuing processes and ejectments and preparing the way hard and fast for another campaign.⁴⁴

Clanricarde, through his agent Edward Shawe-Tener had spent the year in advance of the outcome of his appeal to the House of Lords, pursuing back rents and going to the courts for notices of eviction. Some tenants on the estate had been withholding rent for some time, in anticipation of a successful outcome for the CDB in the courts. At Derrybrien, near Woodford in south Galway, a combination withheld the rent and tenants were under notice of eviction, yet by February, the agitation had collapsed with the majority deciding to settle.⁴⁵

Whilst the agitation against Clanricarde did not involve as much violence as the communal campaigns further west in the county, there was widespread low-level intimidation. In early 1915, a process server was visited by masked men and ordered not to deliver anymore writs or processes on the Clanricarde tenants. The police noted 'thirteen writs which were in his hands have since been served by a sheriff's bailiff. He is now under constant police

⁴³ The price offered by the CDB of £228,000 was increased to £233,517 for the tenanted land and £4,694 for untenanted land, meaning a total increase of £238,211 and the estate passed into the hands of the CDB. CI monthly report, east Galway, July 1915 CO 904/97.

⁴⁴ *Connacht Tribune*, 2 May 1915.

⁴⁵ The County Inspector of the RIC noted in April 1914 that there were four evictions, but 'there was no excitement and everything passed off quietly, the tenants took repossession of their houses that night. It is expected that a settlement will be made in this case and as a settlement had been made against twenty out of thirty six tenants for two years rents on the Looscaun estate'. CI monthly report, east Galway, April 1914, CO 904/93.

protection.⁴⁶ Clanricarde's land agent, Shawe-Tener had also been under constant police protection until his death in October 1915.⁴⁷

The decision of the House of Lords in late 1914 was greeted with jubilation in east Galway. The tenants had been organised on the basis of the local UIL cumainn, as well as the much larger 'Loughrea Clanricarde Tenants Committee' and the 'Portumna Clanricarde Tenants Committee'. Following the announcement, a large meeting of tenants was held in the Portumna Hibernian Hall. Father Corcoran thanked the leadership of the Irish Parliamentary Party, whom he noted had so successfully lobbied for the Land Acts in the first place. The question of having an estate committee formed embracing Portumna, Killimore, Eyrecourt and Laurencetown was adjourned for the next meeting.

January 1915 saw a new phase of organisation in east Galway with the former tenants of Clanricarde organising themselves prior to the CDB beginning the process of division. Outstanding issues included the status of town tenants in relation to the distribution, the position of evicted tenants and their eligibility for inclusion in the division, and conversely, the status of 'the Clanricarde planters' who had taken evicted farms on the estate over the previous thirty years. Many tenants were still deep in debt from the original Plan of Campaign and it was these old debts that Clanricarde was pursuing through the courts. An impending division generated a new phase of organisation within communities and the potential for further conflict between tenants over entitlements began to loom. The purchase of an estate by the CDB was a cause of celebration but it also generated uncertainty and even paranoia, which, as will be discussed later in the chapter, could erupt into violence and recriminations.

A crucial and under-appreciated aspect of the land issue in Galway was the extent to which towns were affected by the sale of estates, as the ground rents in many towns were still owned by the gentry. Ballinasloe was owned by Lord Clancarty, Headford by the McDonnells, Loughrea by Clanricarde, and Ahascragh and Cappataggle by Clonbrock. Whilst the town tenants had achieved a strong degree of security thanks to the 1907 Town Tenants Act, municipal property such as town halls and fair greens became contentious once the estates to which they belonged were sold to the state. In May a meeting of the Loughrea Town Tenants

⁴⁶ CI monthly report, east Galway, January 1915, CO 904/96.

⁴⁷ CI monthly report, east Galway, November 1915, CO 904/98.

was held to secure grazing lands for the tenants of the town. However, it was announced the following week that town tenants would be excluded from the sale. The proliferation of Town Tenants Associations in the county at the time attests to the capacity of urban areas to organise in order to lobby for grazing rights with the expectation of the sale of large estates.

The issue of outstanding rents was complicated and problematic. In September, the police noted that:

A certain amount of tension exists at present amongst the tenants on the Portumna portion of the Clanricarde estate. They have in the last few days been called upon by the CDB to pay one year's rent, due last May. They consider this a hardship as they expected they would not have to pay any rent until the purchase annuities.⁴⁸

Progress was evident on the issue of 'planters' whom the Board clearly did not wish to include in the division. 'Most of the planters on the estate have just received a printed notice from the CDB asking if they would now accept compensation for surrendering their holdings, which the majority of them promised the Estate Commissioners they would accept in 1908. Only a few planters have so far replied, expressing their willingness to accept compensation but the others have not yet fully considered the matter.'⁴⁹ It was noted that 'the planters will accept the compensation offered by the Board, but of course they will try and get the best possible terms before giving up their holdings. Some of the planters are anxious to leave and no difficulty is expected.'⁵⁰ The extent to which 'the planters' of 1886 still remained outside of the pale of local society and their own compliance in excluding themselves from the final division of the estate reveals the depth of local historical memory over the estate.

The prominent role of the local clergy, political representatives and the UIL which co-ordinated the campaign for the division of the Clanricarde estate prevented the violence and intimidation associated with the Moorpark agitation in Athenry. The striking difference between how both campaigns were organised reflects the contrasting tactics employed by the UIL and the communal collectivities. However, in the face of a determined landlord, buffered by numerous graziers on dispersed farms, a unified campaign was difficult to organise and

⁴⁸ CI monthly report, east Galway, September 1915, CO 904/98.

⁴⁹ CI monthly report, east Galway, October 1915, CO 904/98.

⁵⁰ CI monthly report, east Galway, October 1915, CO 904/98.

maintain. The difficulty that even the most well organised or most violent campaigns faced when landlords refused to give in to them was in stark contrast to the scenario which later existed from 1919 onwards when landowners involved in similar disputes were in a far more dangerous situation owing to the collapse of the RIC.⁵¹

Clonbrock

Luke Gerald Dillon, 4th Baron Clonbrock (1834-1917) had inherited a sprawling estate scattered across north-east Galway. Due to falling income, he had no alternative but to sell up in 1909 and he sold the majority of his tenanted lands for which he received £250,000.⁵² The agitation on the Clonbrock estate demonstrates the sophistication of associational agitations and their unwillingness to settle until their full demands had been met. As in the agitation against Shawe-Taylor, the local community in the Ahascragh-Caltra district refused to accept the initial offers made by the landlord and were determined not to settle until Clonbrock had been stripped of all his land and the graziers who rented from him forced into giving up their leases. They continually refused to accept any offers short of their full demands and were quite willing to maintain their campaigns for a number of years rather than opt for a quick settlement. The complexities involved in these campaigns demanded huge organisational work as portions of the estate were spread across many different parts of the county, with numerous graziers leasing farms.

The sale of most of the Clonbrock estate did not lead to a reduction of unrest in the district. A key feature of collectivities was their capacity to evolve their demands by 'raising the stakes' if their preliminary agenda was not met in full. In the case of the Clonbrock estate, the bulk of which was sold to the CDB by 1914, the local tenants under the leadership of the UIL carried out a campaign to force the remaining graziers on the estate to give up their farms, whilst refusing to agree to negotiations with the CDB until the remaining portions of the estate were included in the sale. The militancy of the tenants in pushing for all of the Clonbrock estate resembled that of the communal agitation at Moorpark where the boycott remained in place after Shawe-Taylor agreed to sell all but fifty acres of his farm.

⁵¹ This is fully discussed in Chapter Four.

⁵² Terence Dooley, 'Clonbrock; History of a Big House', an online document available as a PDF on 'The Big House Experience', at www.askaboutireland.ie/bighouse/introduction/introduction.html

In February 1914, an Estate Commissioners meeting for tenants of Clonbrock at Kilconnell was attended by delegates from Fohenagh, Ahascragh, Kilrickle, Mullagh, Killure, Quansboro, and Cappataggle.⁵³ At the Quansboro estate in Mullagh, a large meeting was attended by ninety-nine tenants to discuss the terms of sale of the Abbeygormican and Gurtymadden farms which consisted of five non-resident grass farms. The Mullagh UIL leaders advised tenants not to sign any agreement until they got all the grassland on the estate and the tenants unanimously agreed to a united policy.⁵⁴ Later that month, the grazing farm at Abbeygormican had all its stock driven off and the police subsequently arrested twenty-five local men who were returned for trial.⁵⁵ The arrest of the Abbeygormican cattle drivers did not deter the agitation and the following month at Lonmore near New Inn, stock was driven off the grassland farm of Joseph Colohan at Ballyeighter.

In March, a second drive took place at Toormore following which five young men were arrested. Colohan was one of the biggest graziers in the east of the county with large grazing farms at Ballyeighter, Killure, Toormore and Bellvue. Clonbrock had previously offered the Toormore farm to the tenants in 1907 but Colohan had prevented it.⁵⁶ Later in the month, his stock was driven at Bellvue with ten local men bound to the peace.⁵⁷ During the same month, the Killoran and Mullagh Estates Commissioners wrote to the owners of the Mullagh and Poppyhill farms asking if they were prepared to let these farms to the committee pending their sale to the UEC or CDB.⁵⁸

The agitation on the Clonbrock estate soon spread to nearby farms. On 29 April, fifty men armed with sticks drove one hundred sheep off the grazing farm of Thomas Finn at Poppyhill, eight miles from Loughrea. As the arrested men were being led away to Galway Gaol, a party of 170 Irish Volunteers lined the platform at the railway station and jeered at the police.⁵⁹ In June, in a significant local victory, Poppyhill farm was given over to the agitators on their

⁵³ *Connacht Tribune*, 14 February 1914.

⁵⁴ *Connacht Tribune*, 14 February 1914.

⁵⁵ CI monthly report, east Galway, February 1914, CO 904/92.

⁵⁶ *Connacht Tribune*, 11 April 1914.

⁵⁷ CI monthly report, east Galway, April 1914, CO 904/93.

⁵⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 11 April 1914.

⁵⁹ CI monthly report, east Galway, April 1914, CO 904/93.

own terms by the owner but the agitation on the adjoining land continued.⁶⁰ In August 1915, shots were fired into the home of a grazier who was holding a farm of 185 acres at Poppyhill. He had previously surrendered fifty acres to the agitators in 1914 but the agitators were holding out for the entire farm. Throughout the agitation, the Loomore farm at New Inn and the Abbeygormican grazing farm at Gurtymadden remained under constant police protection. The local pressure was effective and January 1915 marked another significant victory for the agitators as Colohan had his police protection lifted after surrendering his farm to the CDB.⁶¹ In April, the Seagriff estate was also sold to the CDB and the trespassing sheep removed, 'signalling another major victory for the local people.'⁶²

The Clonbrock agitation continued to spread to neighbouring districts and at a public meeting held in Laurencetown in July 1915, over six hundred tenants vowed to commence an agitation. The speakers urged that vigorous agitation on the Lawrence and Pollock estate should not to cease until the landlord and the grazier were driven from their midst. In November 1915, the Estates Commissioners divided nine-hundred acres of grazing land on the Clonbrock estate at Aughrim. The Toormore farm of 115 acres occupied by Joseph Colohan, which was driven several times during the previous four years, was also included in the division, with Colohan allotted a farm of 130 acres in lieu.⁶³

The agitation surrounding the Clonbrock estate highlights the complexity of agitations on large estates and how the announcement of a sale to the CDB did not signal an end to agitation but rather the beginning of a new phase, if the terms of the sale did not meet the expectations of the local people. Furthermore, the use of intimidation, cattle drives and adverse publicity could be successfully allied to constitutional pressure to force graziers to give up their leases. The fluidity and adaptability of tenants' campaigns continually forced the agenda for change upon a startling array of graziers across sprawling dispersed portions of the estate. Some graziers were more determined than others but by applying pressure on the most vulnerable and varying their tactics where necessary, tenants could successfully intimidate numerous different graziers into giving up their leases.

⁶⁰ CI monthly report, east Galway, June 1914, CO 904/93.

⁶¹ CI monthly report, east Galway, January 1915, CO 904/96.

⁶² CI monthly report, east Galway, April 1915, CO 904/96.

⁶³ CI monthly report, east Galway, December 1915, CO 904/98.

1.3 Competitive Communal Agitations

Local violent feuds between small tenants over land in Galway during 1914-15 were generally characterised by the willingness of semi-organised factions to resort to extreme violence including the widespread use of firearms to settle disputes. These competitive agitations were reactive and can be further classified into:

1. Disputes within localities in advance of a division of land, where one party was perceived by another of making an unfair claim. A dispute of this kind was ongoing on the Perse farm at Boyhill, Athenry.
2. Disputes between parties following a division of land made by the CDB, to the dissatisfaction of certain parties who perceived that they had been treated unfairly in the distribution. Agitations of this nature existed at Graige Abbey in Athenry, on the Skehard portion of the Pollock estate in Creggs and in the Riverville and Bookeen districts that previously comprised the Dunsandle estate in Killimordaly.

The Dunsandle Dispute

The Dunsandle estate had been the seat of the Daly family in County Galway, located equidistant between Loughrea, Athenry and Craughwell, in the area where secret societies were most active. The Dalys had been the dominant political faction in the county during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. With the social and political transformation of Ireland in the latter half of the century, the family's influence had waned.⁶⁴ Along with Clanricarde, their name lived in infamy amongst the rural poor and local folklore attests to the disdain with which they were held. After the death of Captain Daly, the Dunsandle estate was sold to the Estates Commissioners with large portions of the district divided up amongst the local tenantry. Colonel Daly remained on at the family seat where he retained considerable demesne land which was given over to grazing.

Discontent over the manner in which the Dunsandle estate was divided by the UEC led to a bitter and lengthy feud in the area between semi-organised factions bonded by kinship and a shared conviction that they had been discriminated against by the local Estates Committee

⁶⁴ John Cunningham, *'A town tormented by the Sea' Galway 1790-1914* (Dublin, 2004), pp 212-25.

who had favoured members of their own extended family in the division; giving them 'more land than was good for them'. The Dunsandle dispute exposed the deep flaws in the workings of the Estates Commissioners whose unsatisfactory handling of the division of land in Galway frequently led to violence and feuding. Due to the machinations involved, rather than being directed at the state, discontent over land division was internalised within local districts. The nature of the division process favoured by the UEC differed significantly from that of the CDB. In divisions carried out by the UEC, local 'upstanding and impartial' farmers were selected by popular election to sit on local Estates Committees which decided on the allocation of plots locally. Problems frequently arose when the deliberations of the committee were perceived to have been unfair. In the Athenry region, the police continually alleged that secret societies worked hand in hand with both the local UIL and the Estate Committees and that they favoured local organised secret factions in their allocations.

Between 1913 and 1919, seven of the ten-man, Dunsandle Grazing Land Committee were wounded in separate gun attacks.⁶⁵ Throughout the period, seven former members of the Killconieron and Killimordaly United Estates Committee, plus two of their supporters remained under constant police protection.⁶⁶ The fact that so many people in such a small area were accompanied by police patrol twenty-four hours a day and that even these drastic measure failed to prevent attacks, attests to the determination of the agitators.

The best known incident of the agitation occurred in February 1914 when Brian Uniacke, of Riverville, was shot on his farm on the old Dunsandle estate, by his young neighbour Michael Malone. Uniacke had previously received a house and a thirty acre farm from the division by the Committee, of which he was treasurer. Malone's father, who had a tiny holding of ten acres, received only six additional acres from the Committee. At his trial in June, Malone was convicted of attempted murder and later sentenced to four years in jail.⁶⁷ Initially the Jury

⁶⁵ Anthony Varley, 'A Region of Sturdy Smallholders? Western Nationalists and Agrarian Politics During The First World War' in *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol 55, (2003), p. 127.

⁶⁶ Peter Fahy, James Ward, Patrick Lally, Dermot Dempsey, Michael Kennedy, John Broderick, Bernard Ward and Mary Finn, see, CI monthly report, east Galway, July & August 1914, CO 904/94. There were two categories of police protection available at the time, protection by patrol and constant protection. Constant protection involved the individual being accompanied at all times by two or more policeman.

⁶⁷ The evidence presented to convict Malone caused a sensation because of the nature in which the defendant inadvertently incriminated himself. Malone's conviction rested on graffiti that he had scrawled on his cell

could not agree, forcing the Judge to move for a retrial in Dublin. This prompted the judge to remark that, 'it is a disgrace to the jury system', and his sincere hope 'that there would be a jury of fair-minded and intelligent people in Dublin to try the case.'⁶⁸ A similar sentiment was later uttered by Judge Boyd at the Summer Assizes in Galway in July 1915. Noting that there were thirty-four cases of threatening letters, sixteen cases of incendiary fires, and seventeen cases of crops being set alight, he concluded that 'Galway juries have a fatal faculty for not acting according to the evidence.'⁶⁹

The police concurred with the view that the division at Dunsandle was unjust and noted that violence 'is likely to continue until there is a proper division of the lands by the Estates Commissioners or the CDB.'⁷⁰ The sheer volume of violent incidents in the district connected directly to the dispute clearly illustrates the depth of ill-feeling in the district and the passions provoked by hunger for land.

The readiness to resort to violence to resolve disputes was so widespread in this area, that it is often difficult to conclude with certainty to what dispute particular outrages were connected. In the Killimordaly and Kilconieron districts, the police were virtually powerless to prevent violence and intimidation and secret communal collectives exercised a control and authority which the law was simply unable to prevent. Whilst intimidation in the form of threatening letters, malicious damage to property and serious assault were tactics common to most communal agitations, the number of shootings and attempted murders during the Dunsandle dispute was remarkable. The propensity for these disputes to become significantly more violent than anti-grazier or anti-landlord agitations highlights the unsuitability of the United Estates Commission as a mechanism for distributing land. Small tenants were also much more vulnerable than large landowners who belonged to the elite of local society. For the small farmers who travelled the local bye-ways on foot or by cart, the eyes of their neighbours were never far away and local jealousies and resentments could explode at any time.

wall whilst in custody. The court heard that the prisoner had scratched a message during his incarceration which read, 'I will be out in five years time and then, will be in again before I'm 26, unless I get a sudden death, or God forbid, until some other one gets a sudden death first.' The prosecution alleged that this was an admission of guilt, as well as an admission of Malone's intention to get his revenge on Uniacke, whether he was found guilty or not.

⁶⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 20 June 1914.

⁶⁹ *Connacht Tribune*, 17 July 1915.

⁷⁰ CI monthly report, Galway, June 1915, CO 904/93.

Pollock Dispute

A similar dispute on the Pollock estate on the Galway-Roscommon border near Creggs illustrates that not even the clergy were exempt from the ire of local congests when a division was deemed unsatisfactory. Friction had arisen in the area after the division of the local portion of the Pollock estate, with tenants divided into two factions, one under the Parish Priest, Canon Geraghty, and one under local farmer William Naughton. The latter group were disgruntled because they felt that the Canon had been improperly favoured in the distribution made by the local Estates Committee. As in the Dunsandle dispute, the division was clearly unfair, with the Canon getting an incredible three hundred acres, prompting even the Glenamaddy Board of Guardians to call for an inquiry into the sale.⁷¹ The local police concurred with this view also, noting 'three large farmers who purchased their holdings on this property some years ago have been requested to surrender portions of their lands for division among the local people. The priest pretended he wanted to keep the land to re-divide it but kept it for himself.'⁷²

Local outrage at the division led to repeated cattle-drives on the land belonging to Canon Geraghty at Skehard. On one occasion in May 1914, three hundred men and women, along with a fife and drum band, drove the Canon's stock as far as Glenamaddy where the police baton charged the crowd, injuring several. As a consequence, constant police protection was necessary at the farm and twelve locals were prosecuted. Following the incident, a meeting of Skehard tenants at Kilbegnet chapel where the Canon explained that he had agreed to take the land in the division in order that it might then be divided up amongst the local poor. However, pending this division, he was entitled as the legal owner to set the farm to grazing.⁷³ The situation remained tense in the area until the CDB took repossession of Canon Geraghty's farm later in the year. The dispute at Creggs was not the only time the traditional authority of the clergy was challenged in such a fashion in a local dispute over land. Stock was driven off the land of the Franciscan monks at Newtown in Dunmore and shots were fired at the back door of the Monastery in March 1915. A further attack took place later in the year after 'one

⁷¹ CI monthly report, Galway, east February 1914, CO 904/92.

⁷² CI monthly report, east Galway, March 1914, CO 904/92.

⁷³ CI monthly report, east Galway, May 1914, CO 904/97.

of the monks had called to the homes of local people unpopular with the local secret society asking for assistance with bringing in the harvest'.⁷⁴

1.4 The County Galway Farmers' Association

The local combinations of the rural poor influenced the formation of the County Galway Farmers' Association (CGFA) in April 1914.⁷⁵ The organisation represented the dominant rural class of large landowners and graziers in the county and was affiliated to the national Irish Farmers' Union. Their official view was that survival in the present war circumstances depended on the formation of a powerful all-farmer organisation, capable of resisting a state intent on dictating what farmers should produce, how they should treat their employees and interfering with the rights of private property in a range of other unacceptable ways.⁷⁶ In reality, the movement was established to protect the property rights of strong farmers from the state and local congests and the association lobbied the government on behalf of graziers and landlords.

The association did not project an image of looking after the interests of the farming elite alone and were at pains to convey the notion that all farmers were being victimised by the state and that the war-time disruption of agriculture, due to the increasing regulation of the sector, needed to be addressed by all sections of the farming community. In reality, the leaders of the organisation were keenly aware that they needed the numerical strength of the small holders, backed up by a countywide organization, to make a compelling case. If the leadership of the movement believed they could recruit the small tenants as the foot soldiers of their organization, however, they clearly underestimated the suspicion with which they were perceived by the rural poor.

The first president of the movement was J.J. Smyth of Masonbrook, Loughrea. He was a member of a prominent landlord family, who owned a number of large grazing farms in the south of the county. Among the first vice-presidents were Frank Shawe-Taylor and Martin

⁷⁴ CI monthly report, east Galway, March 1914, CO 904/96.

⁷⁵ The initial reason for the formation of the movement was the imposition of government restrictions on the movement of cattle following an outbreak of foot and mouth disease in March 1914.

⁷⁶ Anthony Varley, 'The Politics of Agrarian Reform', p. 169.

Mor McDonagh. Frank Shawe-Taylor's 'appeal to the farmers of Galway' in October 1915 was a typical example of how divorced from the reality on the ground the organisation really was. Shawe-Taylor, who was the subject of a long-running boycott in his own locality, wrote to the *Connacht Tribune* to appeal to farmers of Athenry to give up one sheep each to the Red Cross public auction for wounded soldiers. In his appeal he stated that 'he was sure that the response will be both generous and liberal and he had no doubt but that a special train will be required to convey them [the donated livestock] to Dublin.'⁷⁷ The prospect of the farmers of Athenry responding to the appeals of a local boycotted landlord to give away stock to help the British war effort was farcical.

The growth of the movement was slow and their initial activities few. After four years, membership still stood at only two hundred and fifty-four.⁷⁸ However, the organisation continued to demand to be acknowledged by the state as a recognised representative group and be accorded consultative status by the government. Central to this policy was the belief that, by virtue of representing the most prominent farmers in the county, the organisation was lobbying responsibly in the best interests of the farming community as a whole, including the small tenants.

The achievements of the association were few despite the movement claiming it had wrung concessions from the government on a range of issues including store cattle prices. They never actually succeeded in achieving anything close to consultative status and the roots of the movement in the farming elite hampered the organisation from the start. Despite their claims to represent the rural community as a whole, local congests and the landless were never recruited into the movement and the conflicting agenda of the poor and stronger farmers ensured that the notion of cross-class solidarity projected by the movement remained a transparent fiction, designed to buttress the inherent inequality in land ownership. The question of tillage, security of land tenure and a whole range of other issues were far too contentious. The organisation simply could not counter claims that it was a grazier movement and the group never took up the case of the halting of estate purchase by the state, which remained the central grievance of the small tenants. James Finn, the grazier at the centre of a major dispute at Lisduff, which resulted in the arrest of twelve local men following a cattle

⁷⁷ Varley, 'The Politics of Agrarian Reform', p. 170.

⁷⁸ Varley, 'The Politics of Agrarian Reform', p. 174.

drive, was actually a former treasurer of the movement and the case was a *cause célèbre* in the county for a number of months.⁷⁹

Another spur to the growth of the movement was the declining local power of the UIL which, although clearly acting on behalf of congests on most occasions, also served as a restraining force on the more violent and conspiratorial elements of the rural poor. With the UIL in place, the large farmers at least had an 'honest broker' to mediate with, protecting them from the worst excesses of the peasantry. However, with the UIL almost moribund, a dangerous political vacuum existed. The rise of Sinn Féin and the Volunteers in the intervening period simply made the formation of the organisation inevitable as the profoundly small tenant nature of that movement became increasingly obvious. If the CGFA could influence the Congested Districts Board, who were already perceived as being class biased, then the organisation would have achieved something.

Conclusion: *A War of Poverty Against Property?*

The agrarian disputes which dominated life in many parts of east Galway conformed to the modes of reaction to economic crisis and exploitation observed in other contemporary transitional peasant societies around the world, as they found themselves increasingly excluded, once land became a commoditised resource, rather than a fundamental right.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the forms of association, violence and moral justification used by local collectivities in the county form part of an historical continuum of agrarian violence, which predated the Great Famine in the west of Ireland. What is remarkable about the situation in east Galway is the sheer ferocity and persistence of such violent agitations, that to many commentators were a feature of the previous century, an historical residue of more primitive economic conditions. Galway was, nonetheless, the most disturbed county in Ireland due to agrarian unrest throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century, with Clare and parts of Roscommon experiencing similar, though less numerous, outbreaks of agrarianism. Just as the growth of ranching and the resultant expense and difficulty involved in obtaining conacre in pre-Famine Connacht was responsible for violence in the 1830s, and the persistence of

⁷⁹ Varley, 'The Politics of Agrarian Reform', p. 190.

⁸⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, 'Peasants and Politics' in *idem*, *Uncommon People, Resistance, Rebellion and Jazz* (New York, 1998), pp 146-66.

uneconomic holdings and fundamental lack of security fuelled the Land War in the 1880s, so the persistence of the grazing system under the eleven-month system, severely limited the amount of land available to the small tenants, and was responsible for agrarian violence in the twentieth century. The temptation to view these local collectives as irrational or anarchic is too simplistic and in the context of transitional peasant communities worldwide, the modes of resistance used in east Galway are clearly rational survival mechanisms frequently employed by rural communities which find themselves excluded from the capitalist market for land.⁸¹

Agrarian crime in the pre-Famine era in the west of Ireland was underpinned by the distribution of land and the economic structure of local society where the grazing system had taken hold.⁸² A local magistrate summing up the crisis pertaining to land in Roscommon in 1846 noted:

A very fearful system of combination among the peasantry exists directed almost exclusively against the holders of the land, more particularly the large grazing farmers who abound in it and who the people complain on, generally regardless of their condition; In fact it is a war of poverty against property.⁸³

Conacre became increasingly contentious as the poor were forced to compete with one another for a scarce resource that was increasing in price as new petty landlords played an larger role in the market for land. As land became scarce, outrages aimed at inducing farmers to make land available increased. The dynamics of the pre-Famine conacre violence in places like Roscommon bear remarkable similarities to the agrarian violence of the twentieth century in east Galway, with the issues only slightly reconfigured. In 1914, an already alarming economic environment of exclusion was further exacerbated by the rising prices during the War which inevitably increased unrest and further accentuated social divisions.

It is clear that as a class, the rural poor had a low sense of 'classness' compared to the 'high classness' of the urban poor of the large cities. The rural poor were intensely aware of their distinction from, and their subalternity to, the urban poor, whom they generally treated with distrust. This was most obvious in interaction with townsfolk, shopkeepers, the gentry, and of

⁸¹ Hobsbawm, 'Peasants and Politics', p. 157.

⁸² Anne Coleman, *Riotous Roscommon, Social Unrest in the 1840s* (Dublin, 1999), p. 18.

⁸³ Coleman, *Riotous Roscommon*, p. 27.

course, graziers themselves, all of whom were perceived of belonging to a conspiracy to oppress the small tenants and who stood above them in any social hierarchy.⁸⁴ Whilst examining the political relations of transitional peasant communities world-wide to groups and institutions outside of their local community, Hobsbawm has noted the much higher degree of collectivity, which tends to inhibit permanent social differentiation within the peasantry, which in turn facilitates or even imposes communal action on the group or sub-group.⁸⁵ This was clearly the case with the local collectivities in east Galway, who, despite the best efforts of the police and elements of civil society, always maintained a collective silence over acts of violence committed as part of their campaigns, and it was extremely rare that any transgressors against this code of silence ever came forward to the police. Criminal convictions were notoriously hard to secure and this aspect of agrarian violence remained unchanged since the 1830s, even in the face of the most heinous and indefensible crimes involving the elderly or the vulnerable.

The 'little world' of the townland with its overlapping kinship bonds conforms to the model of peasant organisation world wide, as the rural poor belong primarily to the local, rather than the national. In Galway, the scattered communal collectivities, despite Campbell's claims for an overarching co-ordinating structure, always acted autonomously, rather than as a component of a larger movement or ideal.⁸⁶ The capacity or willingness of these isolated groups to even accept or submit to outside leadership is questionable and this later became most apparent during the years 1919-21, when the rural poor rejected participation in the national struggle, in order to continue their campaigns against local landowners.⁸⁷ The localised nature of the unit of identity and organisation was ultimately both a strength and a weakness. As already noted, the closed nature of these communities facilitated their frequently violent campaigns, frustrating both the police and outsiders, who may have wished to penetrate the local organisation. On the other hand, the failure of the rural poor to form broader based organisations to represent them ultimately precipitated their failure to achieve reform in land redistribution. With the decline of the UIL, whose semi-constitutional campaigns, harnessed the sheer force of the local community for cattle drives, land occupations and the knocking of stone walls, the small tenants lost a crucial arbitrator

⁸⁴ Hobsbawm, 'Peasants and Politics', p. 149.

⁸⁵ Hobsbawm, 'Peasants and Politics', p. 149.

⁸⁶ Campbell, *Land & Revolution*, p. 174-7.

⁸⁷ This is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

between them, the state and local graziers. Whilst the associational campaigns drew the line at violence against the person, the communal collectivities, were not bound by such concerns and tended to be far more violent, with arson, assault and even murder employed. The small scale of these groups and their isolation from each other meant that they could at least be contained, if not defeated by police, and hence these struggles tended to be ongoing over a number of years, with low intensity violence and local boycotting occasionally punctuated with violence. It was only with the collapse of the RIC in 1919, that many of these long running campaigns became very effective.⁸⁸

Very large landowners, such as Ashtown and Clonbrock were shielded from the ongoing land agitations on their estates, as their land was parcelled out to numerous graziers in different parts of the county. Hence, there were no estate-wide campaigns against the very large landlords; instead, smaller, isolated campaigns against local graziers on specific portions of estates existed in different parts of the county. The sheer size of these estates and the nature of tenant organisation militated against any larger campaigns, which would have represented a much more serious threat to the landlord. The aim of these agitations was to make a particular portion of an estate impossible to lease, and if no grazier was willing to take on a farm, in the face of a determined local community, the landlord was eventually left with little option but to apply to the CDB for sale and subsequent division.

There was little that was random about the violence of agrarian collectivites and a progressive escalation of hostilities would have been clear to all parties as disputes wore on. Agitations began with a delegation from the local community visiting the landowner to 'ask him to consider' offering his land for sale to the Congested Districts Board, so that it could be divided up amongst local congests.⁸⁹ Delegations always consisted of representatives of the immediate community around the disputed farm, rather than a parish-wide representation. This intense 'smallness' of the community was a key feature of the campaigns, as larger units of association were problematic; there would simply be too large a number of competing claims for inclusion in the division. Hence, only tenants whose plots adjoined the estate were considered as legitimate claimants. If the landowner consented to having his land divided up,

⁸⁸ This is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

⁸⁹ Priests were often part of tenant delegations, although their influence was usually minimal if violence became a feature of the campaign.

he was generally feted for his generosity as a friend of the community.

If landowners refused to give up their land, a choreographed escalation of events, which sometimes lasted for ten years or more ensued. The first step in any campaign involved the invoking of an immediate boycott of the landowner, including his workmen, his family and anyone who dared interact with them. The wider community generally observed these boycotts, forcing the landowner to import Property Defence Association workmen and farm supplies from outside the county. Cattle/sheep drives then formed communal events that frequently resembled festive occasions with 'rough music' or a local fife and drum band accompanying the drivers, who frequently dressed in costume. Repeated cattle drives generally provoked a permanent police presence on boycotted farms which made open confrontation more difficult. At this point, the knocking of stone walls, the spiking of meadows, the gouging of animals and the arson of outhouses or farm equipment was carried out under the cover of darkness.

Whilst associational collectivities usually refrained from more serious violence, communal collectivities generally escalated their campaigns at this point, with threatening letters, the digging of graves outside homes and assault and even murder. Gun attacks were far more frequent in competitive agitations between small tenants and the standard practice in the county was to fire into houses at night with a shotgun. This practice was widespread in the county and even endemic in certain districts.⁹⁰ The doggedness of landowners was severely tested by the ferocity of the sustained campaigns directed against them and many disputes were resolved when landlords agreed to give up substantial portions of their estates, whilst maintaining a portion for themselves. Landowners such as Shawe-Taylor, who held out indefinitely, were faced with an infinitely more dangerous situation by 1919 and the consequent rush by graziers to give over their farms in early 1920 reflected the increased threat they now faced with the collapse of the RIC.

The normality of 'criminal deviance' in Ireland, relative to the rest of the United Kingdom has been well established. Mark Finnane has recently argued 'that in spite of the frequent political and social turmoil of Ireland in the nineteenth century, there is much evidence of Ireland's

⁹⁰ The feud between semi-organised political factions in Turloughmore is discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

“normality” as a society in the post-Famine period.⁹¹ The violent crimes against the person in Galway were limited to spasmodic bouts of unrest in specific local districts. Whilst the feud at Dunsandle clearly revolved around land division and two other very violent feuds existed at Turloughmore and Craughwell between organised semi-political factions, violent feuds also existed at Clonboo and Cummer in north Galway.⁹² There were two murders and one attempted murder case tried in the county between 1914-15. The first violent death occurred as a result of the mental illness of a deranged man and was not agrarian in origin,⁹³ and an attempted murder occurred as part of the Dunsandle dispute, previously discussed. The second murder is significant in terms of the saliency of land hunger, the power and intimidation practised by communal collectivities and the ruthlessness of their methods. In March 1915, the house of John Kelly, an eighty year old farmer, from Ballinderreen, was attacked with gunfire. Nine shots were fired into the cottage and the old man was shot and subsequently died from his wounds. The estate on which Kelly lived was in the process of being divided up by the CDB and he had surrendered twenty-three acres and in return obtained six acres from the division. The police noted, ‘It was probably thought that he still held the twenty-six acres or someone coveted the six he received in exchange.’⁹⁴ Three young men were remanded to Galway jail for trial; however, the police noted ‘there is a difficulty in getting evidence, as even the relatives of the deceased may be described as hostile.’⁹⁵

A week after the murder, Dr O’Dea, Bishop of Galway, addressed a public letter to Father Walsh of Ballinderreen to be read out at all masses in the parish. Anticipating a lack of local co-operation with the police, the Bishop condemned the perpetrators as:

Outlaws worse than the blacks of darkest Africa. If any of your people who know the perpetrators of this shocking crime, they should at once hand in their names to the police and give evidence against them in court. I repeat that I hold your parish responsible until they show that they are Christians by protesting publicly the horror that they feel at such an outrage

⁹¹ Mark Finnane, ‘Irish Crime without the Outrage: the Statistics of Criminal Justice in the Later Nineteenth Century’ in N.M. Dawson (ed.) *Reflections on Law and History, Irish Legal History Society Discourses and Other Papers, 2000-2005* (Dublin, 2006), pp 201- 22.

⁹² These are examined in detail in the Chapter Three.

⁹³ In Athenry, John Murphy of Bellville stabbed his wife to death before fatally turning the weapon on himself. The police concluded that the tragedy was caused by temporary insanity.

⁹⁴ CI monthly report, west Galway, February 1915, CO 904/96.

⁹⁵ CI monthly report, west Galway, February 1915, CO 904/96.

perpetrated in their midst.⁹⁶

Despite the Bishop's threats, there was no subsequent meeting of protestation at events in the area and the accused were released the following month due to lack of evidence. Another case, only a month after the murder of John Kelly, bore similar characteristics of communal violence including widespread intimidation and the violation of taboos on the use of violence based on bonds of kinship, gender and age. In Loughgeorge in the parish of Claregalway, the house of Mrs Fox, a widow with a large family of young children, was fired into and her thirteen-year-old son wounded. Mrs Fox had been in financial difficulties following the death of her husband and was in danger of having to sell her small plot of land. To relieve the situation, it had been arranged to marry the eldest of the Fox daughters to a neighbouring farmer, who agreed to provide financially for Mrs Fox and her young children, with her small farm constituting the dowry. The marriage was originally to take place the week after the shooting. According to the police the arrangement 'did not suit the views of certain neighbours who expected, through her difficulties, to eventually secure the lands for themselves.'⁹⁷ Threatening letters to Mrs Fox had earlier been signed by 'Captain Moonlight'. A local tenant farmer with thirty acres was arrested and charged with the shooting. He was a cousin and close friend of Mrs Fox's late husband. During the trial a neighbour who had initially claimed to have seen the accused fleeing the scene, gave evasive answers to evidence and retracted his earlier statements. The case now rested on the circumstantial evidence including Mrs Fox's young son's testimony that he had recognised his cousin on the night he was shot. Forde had hoped to come into the farm after the death of his cousin and was apparently angry at the arrangement made by Mrs Fox. However, with the withdrawal of the key witness, the accused had to be released because of lack of evidence.

Both of these cases highlight the difficulties that the courts had in gaining convictions even for the most heinous of crimes committed against the most vulnerable, due to the unwillingness of local people to testify in court or offer help to the police. It was clearly not unique for bonds of kinship to be over-ridden by desire for land and in one case police recorded in early 1915 that Thomas Hartigan, a publican from Ballinasloe received through the post a bullet accompanied by a threatening notice and a picture of two coffins. Hartigan

⁹⁶ *Connacht Tribune*, 13 March 1915.

⁹⁷ CI monthly report, west Galway, March 1915, CO 904/96.

was due to receive a farm from his deceased father's will and the letter was signed by his brother.⁹⁸

The critical functions performed by priests and townsmen in national movements in Ireland during the nineteenth century has frequently been observed by historians. Whilst the role of the local clergy was central to popular mobilisation during the O'Connell era, the influential role of the 'shopkeeper/publican/politician' has frequently been noted as the post-Famine, Land War equivalent. The key positions in the broader associational campaigns in the east of the county were often occupied by prominent local UIL members as well as local priests, and they generally demonstrated the support of the broader community with large, well-attended public meetings whose official resolutions and deputations to the relevant state bodies received extensive local press coverage. In contrast, the key positions in the various communal campaigns, principally in the hinterland around Athenry, were believed by the police to be held by local fenians, and much of the sporadic violence that characterised their campaigns went unreported in the local press. The complete absence of public demonstrations of support by the community at large or by traditional local elites in communal campaigns, is indicative of the divisive nature of agrarian agitation in the complex and highly fractured social structure inherent in the grazier belt of east Galway. The lack of deference to social elites was a key characteristic and compounded the insecurity that land agitation generated amongst the traditionally stronger elements of rural society who had every reason to resent the stridence of their perceived social inferiors. Whilst collectivities are clearly not themselves social groups, nonetheless their composition is determined by the social groups from which they are drawn and these social groups were a product of the integrative bonds and social cleavages in the overall social structure.

Whilst there was an obvious spatial dynamic to the concentrations of both associational and communal collectivities, these divisions were far from absolute. The most striking rejection of traditional social authority occurred well outside of the Athenry hinterland, where secret societies were most active. On the Roscommon border near Creggs, when the local Canon was perceived to be taking advantage of congests to secure a grazing farm for himself, the tenants were quick to assert their grievance in the traditional manner. Similarly, in Cummer, in the north of the county, the traditional deference to the clergy counted for little when the

⁹⁸ CI monthly report, east Galway, February 1915, CO 904/96.

local Franciscan monastery tried to hire boycotted men to help save the hay. Hence, in this district the traditional law of the land took precedent over institutional or even traditional deference to the clergy.

It would be an exaggeration to conceive of communal collective action, admittedly primitive at times, as being simply the inherent greed of a backward peasantry. As Clark pointed out in his study of agrarian unrest:

Since the most powerful active collectivities in modern society are associational, we have a tendency to assume that people in collectivities are 'better' organised than people in communally based collectivities.... What does appear true is that communal organisation is invariably stronger when it remains local than when it extends over wide areas. But it is simply ethnocentric for us to dismiss communally based unrest as unorganised turmoil.⁹⁹

The extent to which communal collectivities required associational assistance, be it from the UIL or the Catholic Church, is difficult to answer with any conviction. The character of collective action varied significantly according to whether or not the tenants had formed alliances with established elites in the church or national politics. The tenants on the Portumna portions of the Clanricarde estate, for instance, were represented in negotiations with the Congested District Board by the local clergy. When the Marquis's appeal was finally rejected in 1914 and the estate set to be divided, a resolution of thanks to the parish priest, Father Corcoran, was unanimously passed at a meeting of the local tenants.

The factors that compel collectivities to reject integration with local and national institutions are unclear. The social structure in both the communal groups in the centre of the county and the associational groups to the east were composed from similar if not identical social groups. The reason collectivities chose to form alliances with the physical force/Whiteboy tradition, as opposed to the nationalist/constitutional tradition, are not readily apparent. The presence and numerical strength of the Fenians and secret societies around Athenry is clearly an important factor.¹⁰⁰ However, the absence of any obvious committed underground network in the county, east of Loughrea, overlaps with the districts where major associational collectivities were active on the anti-grazier issue and where constitutional tactics generally

⁹⁹ Clark, *Social Origins of the Irish Land War*, pp 350-77.

¹⁰⁰ This will be fully discussed in the next Chapter.

prevailed.

Clark distinguished two approaches to assessing the impact of social change on rural communities, the 'mobilisation' and the 'break-down' models.¹⁰¹ He treated the action of collectivities as the assertion of power and solidarity by upwardly mobile communities, mobilising in search of economic advancement. Alternatively, in the 'break-down' model, unrest can be attributed to the collapse of some mutually tolerated relationship where tenant farmers in the post-Famine economy, mobilise in self-defence when their continued advance is perceived to be under threat by the withdrawal of privileges. The diversity of collectivities in Galway and their disparate nature, in terms of organisation, evolution and adaptation, aims and composition, is such that no one model of structural dislocation can account for the diversity of processes at play and this study shows that distinct forms of unrest were fostered by equally different processes.

¹⁰¹ Clark, *Social Origins of the Irish Land War*, p. 353.

Chapter Two: Popular Mobilisation & Political Organisation, 1914-16

1914 witnessed the pivotal developments that were to transform nationalist Ireland and lead to the emergence of the physical force tradition and the consequent collapse of the Irish Parliamentary Party. The outbreak of the First World War in the Summer of 1914, coupled with the militant resistance of northern unionism to the Home Rule Bill, created the conditions in which radical ideas, previously discredited by the overwhelming majority of nationalists, gained credibility and support previously unthinkable. One of the many repercussions of the First World War was the demise of the Irish Parliamentary Party. With the enactment of Home Rule in 1914, the party's *raison d'être* no longer existed and the War years saw a steady decline in the party's credibility. As the War dragged on and Home Rule began to look more uncertain, many people began to believe that they had been misled by Redmond and the Party.

Nonetheless, the revolution in Ireland was neither inevitable, nor, in retrospect, could it have been predicted. The political climate of nationalist Ireland in the opening decade of the century was primarily characterised by the absence of internal political debate due to widespread consensus on the national question and the overwhelming approval of the tactics and leadership of the Irish Parliamentary Party. As Charles Townshend has stated:

At the commencement of the third Ulster crisis in 1912, Irish public opinion was remarkably inert and unconcerned. In retrospect, advanced nationalists remembered this time as one of 'de-nationalisation'. Irish farmers were interested (as they had always been, it may be suggested) above all in the transfer of land and increasing agricultural prosperity. At this level, the 'knife and fork' philosophy of constructive unionism seemed to have worked.¹

In this atmosphere of consensus, the words Sinn Féin 'tended to generate ridicule rather than admiration or fear amongst ordinary nationalists.'² Republican opposition to constitutionalism

¹ Charles Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland: Government and Resistance Since 1848* (Oxford, 1983), p. 237.

² David Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands, 1912-1939*, (Oxford, 1998), p. 16.

was ineffectual and diffuse. This chapter examines the political culture of east Galway before 1916 and the extent to which the potential for revolutionary upheaval existed in any obvious sense prior to the Rebellion and how these factors may have influenced the later evolution of the revolutionary movement. Revolutions are not monocausal and the emergence of militant nationalism after 1916 emerged from the fissures of a society defined by visceral social and economic cleavages. Rather than consensus, in east Galway, the bitter rivalry between nationalists and republicans dominated politics in a political culture of radical extremes. The violent nature of local rivalries was a frequent source of concern for the authorities with large scale faction fights and gun attacks between supporters of the National Volunteers and the Irish Volunteers in the villages of Turloughmore, Craughwell and Loughrea, as well as what was described as ‘guerrilla warfare on a small scale’³ breaking out in Galway town. The militancy of the small tenant farmers discussed in Chapter One was not matched by the political organisations representing the urban poor of the towns. The ineffectual and diffuse branches of the Town Tenants’ League, which were consciously modeled on the Land League of the previous century, tended to be dominated by a conservative urban elite whose concern for the rights of property frequently overrode their concern for the welfare of the urban poor. The movement was dominated on a local level by the merchant elite of the towns who frequently lobbied against other progressive organisations such as the co-operative movement and they were derided by the local press as being corrupt and purposely self-defeating.

Whilst the Irish Volunteers flourished in the rural parts of Athenry, Clarinbridge and Kinvara, the towns in the east of the county remained resolutely pro-British as the European conflict progressed. The antipathy towards Sinn Fein, particularly amongst the urban proletariat, remained profound throughout the period and local Fenians on occasion had their homes attacked in both Loughrea and Galway town. Martin O’Regan joined the Irish Volunteers in Loughrea despite the fact that ‘Loughrea was one hundred per cent anti-national at this time’.⁴ Thomas Courtney, who fought in the IRA, later told the Bureau of Military History, ‘thinking back over the years, I have come to the conclusion that Galway town was, and in my opinion, still is, the most *Shoneen* town in Ireland.’⁵ William Duffy MP, on the other hand, chastised local land agitators from outside the town as ‘our ungrateful country neighbours’ who would not join with the urban tenants to help them fight their own ‘Land War against baliffism and

³ *Connacht Tribune*, 17 October 1914.

⁴ BMH, WS 1,202 (Martin O’Regan).

house-lordism'.⁶

To extrapolate the consensus between elites into a similar political docility at a local level represents a distortion of the intensity of political sentiment, an underestimation of the bitterness which political change engendered and a failure to recognise the polarity of political opinion within nationalist Ireland. The social fault lines of rural Ireland, though under-articulated, were obscured by the failure of the political elite to reflect the common culture of ordinary people, the unchallenged hegemony of the Irish Parliamentary Party and the distaste for sectional politics which the desire for nationalist solidarity inculcated. Contrary to often made assertions about the consensual nature of nationalist discourse therefore, there were in fact clear indicators of widespread social and political disillusionment with the political establishment in a society characterised by violent political extremes. The Galway MPs' growing contempt for the common culture, their attitude to recruitment in particular, allied to social disaffection generated by a land hunger fostered deep social division, and an urban culture which clung to a vague conception of nationalism, buttressed by an ambivalent allegiance to the British state, fostered an increasing cultural chasm between the urban world of the town and its rural hinterland. The simmering resentments between town and country were not new. They were, however, to be greatly exacerbated as a result of World War One and the rise of militant nationalism.

To dismiss the years leading up to the Rebellion as simply being part of a larger era characterised by political complacency and general consensus represents a simplistic analysis. The motivation for political participation and the visceral nature of popular mobilisation reveals the stark wounds of a society where social inequality nurtured deep resentments and it was inevitable that these would be reflected in the popular movements of the time. The social disaffection that generated the widespread land agitations discussed in the Chapter One was mirrored by the influence wielded by the IRB and the Irish Volunteers in certain parts of the county. In the world of the town, the potential for revolutionary upheaval simply did not exist owing to the conservative nature of the urban proletariat and with the reactionary instincts of the local merchant elite. The latter effectively stifled any progressive movements such as the first co-operative society in Galway town.

⁵ BMH, WS 447 (Thomas Courtney).

⁶ *Connacht Tribune*, 5 June 1915.

The electoral collapse of the Irish Parliamentary Party in the county in the 1918 general election had its origins in the party's growing alienation from the mass of its constituents, and this estrangement was apparent long before the national advance of Sinn Fein. The obvious gulf that existed in terms of the social and political outlook of the local party elite and the aspirations of the rural masses, simply discredited the party in the eyes of too many ordinary people. This phenomenon was further aggravated by local representatives' unwillingness or inability to reflect the prevalent urban or rural sentiment as expressed through local protest movements at the time. This failure on the part of the National Party contributed to a situation where a party that was increasingly divorced from the day-to-day concerns of its constituents was ripe to be rejected by the electorate once a credible alternative, more reflective of popular sentiment, emerged after 1916. Rather than looking to post-Rising Ireland, a close analysis of the pre-1916 period and in particular the early years of the War, is crucial to any clear understanding of social dynamics which fostered revolutionary change.

2.1 The Political Culture of East Galway

Michael Wheatley has described the political culture of the National Party at the beginning of the revolutionary era as being eminently respectable, conservative and un-revolutionary with distinctly local political horizons.⁷ The craving for respectability by small town conservatives, which Wheatley has identified, is broadly analogous to the local political culture of the UIL in east Galway, with one significant difference. In the five counties of Roscommon, Leitrim, Westmeath, Longford and Sligo studied by Wheatley, systematic land purchase and rising farm incomes had taken the steam out of the land agitation that had driven nationalist activity for many years and this was a direct cause of political apathy amongst the rural masses.⁸ In east Galway, on the other hand, the situation was radically different as land hunger continued to dominate both politics and local society in many parts of the county. As a result, politics in east Galway was characterised by a greater degree of polarisation and radicalisation than other counties where land hunger and agrarian agitation was no longer a major factor. Although the UIL was in decline in other parts of the country, it was still

⁷ Michael Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party: Provincial Ireland 1910-1916* (Oxford, 2005), p. 252.

⁸ Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party*, p. 253.

representative of rural society. In a more complex social structure like Galway's, the natural conservative instincts of the party tended to manifest themselves at times of local political crisis or unrest as reactionary outbursts aimed at local political rivals and their supporters. Whilst the secret society tradition was radicalised by the dominant system of land tenure, the political outlook of the local respectable elite was similarly radicalised by the strident militarism of their traditional social inferiors.

The National Party was only partially representative of rural society in Galway and their rivals from the Fenian tradition undermined the more conservative local elite by eschewing the support of the local National Party representatives or the guidance of local clergy in their campaigns against the grazing system. The consequent insecurity of the local leadership of the UIL and their antipathy towards republicans was fuelled by the fear of violent local secret societies and a natural rural/urban cultural chasm, as much as by the political threat of Sinn Féin. Whilst the party was clearly an umbrella organisation for many strands and classes of society, in Galway, there were in effect, two UILs in existence. The UIL of the towns tended to be conservative, socially respectable, vociferously pro-War and at times, reactionary. They dominated local groups such as the Town Tenants' League to stifle any progressive movements such as the co-operative societies gaining a foothold in the county. They campaigned and canvassed the towns of the county with vigour to recruit soldiers for the War effort and they frequently resorted to condemning the farming community as a whole for lacking the moral courage to fight in the European conflict. Local urban elites tended to be educated, mercantile and self consciously cosmopolitan and the fawning reception given to Lord Wimborne, the lord lieutenant in Galway town in January 1916 defined their self conscious sense of loyalty and subservience to the political establishment.⁹

The rural UIL, on the other hand, tended to spring up around associational land agitations, particularly in the east of the county and represented a clear welding of the rural tradition of mass agitation and the threat of violence to semi-constitutional campaigns directed against grazierism. Although these campaigns were frequently led by local priests and MPs, they were content to employ intimidation and the threat of force by the rural poor where necessary. Cattle drives, the destruction of property and the boycott of local farmers and their families formed part of an intricate web of rural intimidation aimed at individual ranchers. The rural

⁹ See *Connacht Tribune*, 5 February 1916.

UIL shared none of the jingoism of their urban counterparts in relation to the War and tended to a large extent to avoid national politics and focus on infinitely more local concerns. Crucially, the rural wing of the party tended to co-operate with the local secret societies in powerful local alliances against large farmers. In contrast to their urban counterparts, they were content to employ the obvious threat that the secret society represented whilst acting as the respectable brokers in any potential settlement. It was a tactic that gave the local party powerful leverage without incurring the censure that direct involvement in violence would draw from the party elite. The rewards that a successful division brought gave the party a relevance they might otherwise have struggled to assert.

Galway had a parliamentary representation of five MPs with Stephen Gwynn, representing Galway town, Richard Hazelton, north Galway, William O'Malley, Connemara, William Duffy, south Galway and James Cosgrave representing Galway east. Of the two strands within the party, Galway MPs Stephen Gwynn, William Duffy and William O'Malley belonged to the urban UIL tradition and James Cosgrave to the rural. The county's public representatives at Westminster during this period shared the party's more conservative instincts, but they differed significantly in both background and approach to their profession. In different measures and for different reasons, at least three of Galway's MPs remained in both political outlook and cultural leanings, significantly divorced from the culture of the vast majority of their constituents. In retrospect, these were obvious factors in their electoral collapse in 1918, when all the party's incumbents failed to hold on to their seats.

William O'Malley was born in Ballyconnelly, near Clifden, on Connemara's north western shore. He moved to England in his late teens to attend the Hammersmith Training College for Teachers but spent his working life as a journalist in London, Brighton and Hove, before becoming manager of *The Star* newspaper.¹⁰ He married Mary O'Connor, the sister of T.P. O'Connor. Their only son William was killed in action in France in 1917. He became chairman of the *Connacht Tribune* shortly after it was founded in 1909, to which he contributed a weekly article, *Letter from Westminster*. O'Malley expressed himself in his articles through English, rather than through Irish, the first language of the majority of those

¹⁰ For biographical details of O'Malley's life see, William O'Malley, *Glancing Back, 70 years: Experiences and Reminiscences of a Press man, Sportsman and Member of Parliament* (London, 1933).

of whom he represented in Parliament and it is not clear if he could actually speak the language. From a well-known and relatively powerful local merchant family, O'Malley was, for all intents and purposes, an absentee representative for Connemara, preferring to spend his time at Westminster rather than in his impoverished constituency with its chronic problems of congestion and backwardness. First elected in 1895, his main political gripe was the Congested Districts Board and its perceived inefficiency was the subject of consistent and sustained criticism throughout the county. Whilst he was genuinely echoing the feelings of his constituents on this matter, O'Malley's oratory may also have been influenced by his very public disappointment at not having been selected as a representative of the Board when its trustees were selected for their seven-year term in 1915.

Settled permanently in England, O'Malley crucially underestimated the strength of local feeling in a famous local dispute over grazing land at Tully, near Clifden in 1915. His initial condemnation of the Letterfrack UIL over the agitation, whilst a number of local members were incarcerated in connection with the dispute, indicated just how divorced he became from local sentiment. His failure to support the local community over such a major *cause célèbre* provoked a stinging rebuke from local UIL representatives and forced him to travel to Galway to explain his remarks before a meeting of the Connemara executive of the UIL.¹¹ Unlike his colleague James Cosgrave, in the east of the county, he did not campaign directly on behalf of his imprisoned constituents, nor did he attend any of the many demonstrations connected with the dispute.

A moderate, cultural nationalist, Stephen Gwynn constituted an uncharacteristically cosmopolitan figure in the somewhat dour local political scene in Galway town. The son of a Church of Ireland clergyman and a grandson on his mother's side of the nationalist William Smith O'Brien, Gwynn entered politics in 1906 when, after a decision that was not universally popular within Galway political circles, he was imposed on the local party organisation by the leadership, who it seems, feted him because of his cultural leanings.¹²

Gwynn had grown up in Dublin and Donegal and had studied literature at Oxford. He published on an array of Irish topics including history, biography, travel guides, personal

¹¹ CI monthly report, west Galway, January 1914, CO 904/92.

¹² He was the only nationalist candidate in the election, defeating his opponent, an independent unionist

recollections, novels and literary criticism. His political writings are fewer, but he did outline his personal views in a review article entitled *An Argument Against an Irish Republic* in 1918, having been asked by John Redmond to write *The Case for Home Rule* in 1911. In a later collection of 'colourful anecdotes,' he described canvassing for election as 'a disgusting job' and his successful election for Galway borough as a 'comic saga.'¹³ Like his colleagues, Hazleton and O'Malley, Gwynn chose not to live in his constituency and spent much of his time in London. Gwynn was extremely active in the recruitment campaign for the British army. Regularly appearing on platforms in the town, Gwynn was amongst the most active recruiters in the west of Ireland. The extent to which his political outlook differed from that of his constituents can be gauged by a speech he gave in Loughrea in July 1915, in which he outlined his views on the issue of conscription:

While you and I would prefer to serve in an army voluntarily recruited, I would sooner have conscription than national defeat, humiliation, ruin and disaster. If men could not be got by voluntary appeal, they would have to be got by compulsion and I would not oppose it, if it came of necessity.¹⁴

Gwynn was eventually rewarded for his endeavours by being made the western representative on the government's ill-fated Recruitment Board. He was one of only five Irish MPs to enlist, serving on the Western front with the Connacht Rangers, even though he was, by then, well into his fifties. His constituency was abolished following the boundary changes for the 1918 election and he failed to be elected in the Dublin University constituency.

William Duffy represented grassroots political leadership and as MP for south Galway since 1900, he controlled a large local political organisation from his base in the town of Loughrea. South Galway IRA officer Patrick Coy recalled that 'Duffy had a big following composed of a mixture of the well to do and the stone and bottle throwing type.'¹⁵ Through trusted local lieutenants such as Martin Ward, Duffy's organisation dominated local civic bodies, such as the local Town Tenants' League and the Urban District Council and ensured that when the Volunteer movement split in 1914, all but a handful from the town stayed loyal to John

J.L. Wanklyn from Bradford, who lost with 203 votes.

¹³ Stephen Gwynn, *Experiences of a Literary Man* (London, 1926), p. 273.

¹⁴ *Irish Times*, 5 July 1915.

¹⁵ BMH, WS 1,203 (Patrick Coy).

Redmond. In this context, Loughrea represented the antithesis of its neighbour Athenry, from where the IRB and the physical force tradition dominated local politics in the surrounding countryside. The rivalry between the two towns was bitter and lay at the heart of a number of other seemingly unconnected controversies.¹⁶

Duffy also became extremely active in the recruitment campaign and he held many public meetings across the county. The antagonism between his organisation and the local separatists in Athenry was intensified by his frequently biting remarks on the perceived moral cowardice of the farming community. Following his failure to gain re-election in 1918, rioting erupted in the town as ballot boxes were brought in from outlying areas, necessitating the drafting of troops to protect local republicans from mobs of Duffy's supporters.¹⁷ After the split in 1914, the main National Volunteer parades were generally held in Loughrea and organised by Duffy himself, often in direct response to parades by the Irish Volunteers, which were usually held in Athenry. Later, when the GAA in the county split along political lines, the new Redmondite, National Gaelic Athletic Association, held its meetings in Loughrea and were chaired by UIL councillor Martin Ward, whilst the original county board of the GAA, which was dominated by IRB men, continued to meet in Athenry and was chaired by local Fenian leader, Tom Kenny.

Remarkably, Duffy secured a small farm from the CDB in the Closetoken area in 1915, when a farm was redistributed by the local branch of the UIL. Duffy had personally handled the transfer of the land from the state on behalf of the tenants and his subsequent acquisition of the farm was severely criticised by Sinn Féin supporters. So incensed were some locals that Duffy's property was attacked and walls knocked down in a series of night raids in 1915. Duffy was unrepentant and claimed that he left it to the Closetoken UIL Committee to decide what to do with the land and that only after satisfying the needs of local congests, did he come into possession of the farm.

James Cosgrave won his seat in east Galway in a by-election in 1914 caused by the death of the sitting MP, the old Land Leaguer, John Roche. Roche was a tenant farmer from the

¹⁶ The split in the GAA is discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

¹⁷ See BMH, WS 1,203 (Patrick Coy). Despite his failure to be re-elected in 1918, he was one of the few representatives of the National Party to be re-elected to the Dail in 1927 as a National League Party representative.

Clanricarde estate and a revered local figure, having been jailed for his activities in the original Land War. He, in turn, had been preceded by another famous Land Leaguer, the Fenian Matt Harris, who had been a close associate of Michael Davitt. Hence, unsurprisingly, unlike William O'Malley, Cosgrave was very active in the campaign in east Galway to have the estate of the Marquis of Clanricarde divided up amongst the tenants. This campaign was the struggle that his predecessors had fought and it was the issue that defined politics in the countryside south of Portumna and Loughrea, The east Galway seat essentially remained a 'Land League seat' until 1915 and politics was centered around lobbying the Congested Districts Board for the break up of the estate, as well as other smaller grazing farms.

A native of Portumna, Cosgrave appeared on several platforms addressing tenants' meetings and acted as secretary to the Portumna Clanricarde Tenants Association. While he never actively advocated civil disobedience in public, he did not condemn the cattle drives that were an important feature of the campaigns that he led. He was also predictably vocal in the campaign for the release of a number of local prisoners arrested after a riot in Loughrea, when cattle drivers fought a pitched battle with police in 1915.¹⁸ Along with Duffy, Cosgrave was also very active in recruitment to the armed forces in the east Galway area and this may have undone much of his hard earned popularity with the local small farmers, as the tone of recruitment meetings became more and more scathing of their perceived cowardice. Nevertheless Cosgrave was genuinely committed to his constituents and their needs, and he elevated local politics with his genuine efforts on behalf of Galway tenants. His decision not to stand in the 1918 general election was a major blow to the party and left a void in local politics. Following his decision, the Parliamentary Party was unable to persuade anyone else to stand for the constituency, leaving Liam Mellows to take the seat unopposed.

Richard Hazleton, MP for North Galway was first elected in 1906 and spent an inordinate part of his tenure, defending his reputation and livelihood through the courts.¹⁹ He did not confine his political interests to Galway alone and he did not actually live in the county, continuing to live in Blackrock, county Dublin, where he chose to stand in the 1918 election. He also stood unsuccessfully in the north Louth constituency in the 1910 election, where he was defeated by T.M. Healy by just over one hundred votes. Following the result, Healy managed to petition

¹⁸ See *Irish Times*, 7 May 1914.

¹⁹ *Irish Times*, 18 July 1914.

Hazleton for his costs and in the process tried to force him to retire his seat due to his bankruptcy.²⁰ A claim for £2,000 in costs was made and Healy and his followers started proceedings in the English courts with the objective of making him bankrupt, and therefore unable to continue as an MP. In anticipation of the court's findings, Hazleton decided to retire his seat in Galway in June 1914. The English courts subsequently overturned the original bankruptcy decision, which had forced the subsequent by-election and he once again secured the support of the party and was automatically re-elected unopposed. Whilst he made frequent speeches on the land situation in the north of the county, Hazleton seems to have involved himself less in his constituency as his financial problems mounted, and he was not as prominent in the recruitment campaign as his colleagues, opting not to defend his seat in the 1918 election.

The complacency of the National Party elite and the disconnection that this fostered with the local UIL and people in general is borne out by the history of the Galway borough. Stephen Gwynn was the only candidate, of the five Galway MPs, that had ever actually beaten an opponent in an election in the county. On both occasions, he successfully defeated two unionist candidates, J.L. Wanklyn, a Bradford industrialist and a local unionist John Shawe-Taylor. The borough had not been represented by a native Galwegian since Martin Morris, later Lord Killanin in 1901 and Gwynn's two predecessors were actually both foreign nationals, with Arthur Alfred Lynch, the Australian anti-Imperialist succeeding Charles Ramsey Devlin, who was later elected to Parliament in his native Canada.

Complacency also characterised local elections in Galway and in the 1914 elections eighteen of the sitting candidates were re-elected in Galway town with 'no unusual heat shown in the town at any time'.²¹ With no Sinn Féin representatives standing, only two Labour candidates were elected, with the UIL providing the remaining seats.²² The *Galway Express* referred to Sinn Féin supporters at the time as 'the pro-German section of our community' and expressed surprise at Labour's electoral efforts, noting that leading local merchant Martin McDonagh 'was the best commercial friend of the worker in Galway' and 'that traders were the backbone of the country'.²³ The small signs of Sinn Féin growth, however, did not escape the paper's

²⁰ *Irish Times*, 18 July 1914.

²¹ *Connacht Tribune*, 17 January 1914.

²² Martin Halloran and William O'Halloran.

²³ *Galway Express*, 7 November 1914.

attention and the editor noted early in 1916 that 'there is today a spirit to be noticed growing amongst the people, like the weed which insidiously grows and if not dealt with, destroys the crop'.²⁴ The editor of the *Galway Express*, local unionist, F.H. Fischer, later noted 'Sinn Féin cannot be tolerated, they must be absolutely put down ... if traitors are in the country, they can only expect the fate of same'.²⁵

Despite the fact that there was only one branch of Sinn Féin in the whole county, the local political domination by the UIL was not as complete as it might seem. The police constantly warned the authorities that there were well-organised and dangerous secret societies in the Loughrea and Athenry districts that worked in conjunction with the UIL and United Estates Committee. Commenting on the state of the IRB nationwide, the authorities in Dublin Castle noted that 'the IRB and Sinn Féin have very little weight just now except in Galway, where they are formed into secret societies which are mainly responsible for the violence of local agitation'.²⁶

1914 began on an ominous note in the county with shots being fired into the parochial hall in Gort on the night of the 14 January. The local Ancient Order of Hibernians were holding a dance in the hall at the time and the police reported that, 'this society has only recently been started in Gort and is backed up by the priests, but the secret society men are opposed to it. The police know who fired the shots on this occasion, but they have no evidence'.²⁷ The particular source of antagonism on this occasion is not recorded. The AOH were closely connected with the United Irish League in terms of an overlap of members and mutual support. Firing into houses was a common tactic in cases where feuds and disagreements developed between semi-organised groups in the county and was frequently resorted to in a number of violent disputes between various political factions in the county.²⁸

Whilst the IRB and the local secret societies in Galway were initially separate organisations, the IRB had been closely involved in land agitation for many years. The police described the main area of influence of the secret society at this time as 'all along the Railway line right up

²⁴ *Galway Express*, 1 January 1916.

²⁵ *Galway Express*, 29 January 1916.

²⁶ Chief Inspector's monthly report, May 1914, CO 904/93.

²⁷ CI monthly report, west Galway, January 1914, CO 904/92.

²⁸ The violent feuding following the split in the Volunteers is discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

to Tuam and for a few miles on each side of the line. Then again in Galway, just touching places along the line to Clifden and fairly active at Leenane and Letterfrack.²⁹ Fergus Campbell has stated that the Galway secret society owed its origins to an offshoot of The Invincibles started in Galway in 1881 and was blamed by police for a number of agrarian murders in the county in the 1880s.³⁰ Under Thomas Kenny, the society grew to have a presence throughout the county and its influence clearly became considerable as, in the early part of the 1900s, it became closely associated with the IRB. However, the society's main aim remained the redistribution of grazing land among the rural poor and such was its prestige that the IRB apparently allowed the organisation to continue its agitation and still be subsumed into the movement. Through all manner of intimidation, including attacks on property and animals, and frequent assaults and even murders, the society exercised a great deal of control in the east Galway grazier belt, particularly in the hinterland between, Athenry, Craughwell and Loughrea.³¹ Whatever about the exact chronology of events, Kenny's society represented a continuum in the centrality of agrarian secret society influence in Galway from the land struggle in the nineteenth century through to the struggle for independence in the twentieth. Mick Newell from Castlegar recalled that when he joined the IRB, 'the principal matters discussed at meetings were the recruiting of new members and land division... The IRB took a leading part in agitation and carried out numerous cattle drives, also the breaking down of walls on the farms of landlords and grabbers, whose houses were fired into also.'³²

The *Connacht Tribune*, which constantly denounced secret societies in Galway, whilst supporting the United Irish League's campaign against ranching, conceded that land agitation was the source of much unrest, but warned against the mixing of agrarian and separatist sentiment:

The second main factor [after drunkenness] that leads to unrest in the county is the delay in the agrarian settlement of certain districts. Unfortunately this leads to evils by no means directly connected with the land problem, for there is no disguising the fact that instances have occurred where reckless, irresponsible men, have made so-called agrarian emancipation, the

²⁹ CI monthly report, west Galway, November 1914, CO 904/95.

³⁰ Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, p.175.

³¹ Tom Kenny aligned himself with the IRB sometime in 1909 with regular visits by Major MacBride and Sean MacDermott to Athenry at this time. See Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, p. 175.

³² BMH, WS 342 (Michael Newell).

cloak for acts of outrage that bring disgrace and shame upon the whole community.³³

Every locality in east Galway had a local branch of the United Irish League, with many parishes having several, that were, in theory at least, active. The overwhelming dominance of the UIL in the county had remained unchanged for many years and, possibly as a result, the party structures had become increasingly dormant in many districts. At the beginning of the year, the United Irish League existed throughout the county but was completely inactive in most districts. The districts that comprised the Clanricarde and Ashtown estates in the hinterland between Portumna, Loughrea and Ballinasloe remained the exception. In areas where there were ongoing associational campaigns, the UIL tended to be resuscitated by local activists.³⁴

The gradual decline of the party had become a source of concern for the party leadership and a national re-organisation commenced in August 1915. As part of the initiative, a national committee was to be formed with each area nominating representatives. As ever, William Duffy MP of Loughrea led the crusade, noting at a meeting in his home town that ‘a mild form of coercion would be needed’ as the party was now in a ‘moribund condition in some places as people were inclined to be apathetic’ owing, he believed, ‘to the feeling created in the county by the War’.³⁵ The Loughrea meeting was the first in a series of meetings of local branches throughout the county that, judging from the tone of the local press, were at best, embarrassing for the party leadership. At a meeting in Kilkerrin, for instance, the local parish priest, Fr Colgan, described the party as being ‘in a state of suspended animation’.³⁶ The Galway town branch, however, remained busy with sports days, daily excursions and amateur dramatics, ensuring, if nothing else, that the organisation continued to provide social events for its members and their families.

The visit of the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Wimbourne to Galway in January 1916 provided a much-needed boost to the organisation. With the main streets of the town suitably bedecked in red, white and blue, the procession of dignitaries was received at the train station by a guard of honour from the Craughwell Company of the National Volunteers, from where they

³³ *Connacht Tribune*, 27 March 1915.

³⁴ See section on communal collectivities in Chapter One.

³⁵ *Connacht Tribune*, 10 August 1915.

³⁶ *Connacht Tribune*, 10 August 1915.

proceeded under the royal standard and union jack flags that bedecked Eyre Square. With a banner proclaiming 'One Life, One Navy, One Throne' holding pride of place, the dignitaries were officially welcomed at a reception attended by an exhaustive list of local prominent citizens.³⁷ There is no evidence of any local discord surrounding the visit and the occasion represented a massive boost to the United Irish League and its supporters in the town. As ever, the *Connacht Tribune* was on hand to record the event. The tenor of its coverage left the reader in no doubt of the majesty of the occasion:

The event made a curious appeal to the public and for some weeks, strenuously, for some days, all classes of the community contributed intelligent effort and hearty goodwill toward making it a success, whatever their private leanings. Is there something in the people of Galway, which easily disposes them to a deferential recognition of the claims of high authority and glittering prerogative?³⁸

2.2 Popular Mobilisation

The Galway section of the Volunteers were founded at a public meeting in late November 1913.³⁹ Following the customary speeches and the election of a provisional committee, local men were invited to enroll in the organisation. Frank Hardiman later estimated that over six hundred men promptly joined up, noting, however, that most of these new recruits never became active. Thomas Hynes later recalled 'that was all we ever heard of them'.⁴⁰ In the New Year, a series of meetings was held around the county to organise local companies and a notable feature of these public occasions was the large number of men who signed up on each occasion with the vast majority never actually taking their involvement any further.⁴¹ The new

³⁷ *Connacht Tribune*, 5 February 1916.

³⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 5 February 1916.

³⁹ Roger Casement and Eoin MacNeill were sent from headquarters and the night provided quite an occasion for the small band of local IRB men. A procession of students with torches accompanied by the brass Band of the St Patrick's Society along with the Bohermore Fife and Drum Band met the Dublin leaders at the train station in Eyre Square and escorted the group through the town.

⁴⁰ BMH, WS 714 (Thomas Hynes).

⁴¹ In January 1914 over 200 men were enrolled at a meeting in Athenry, 350 at Tuam, 150 at Loughrea and over 600 men at Ballinasloe. However, John Broderick from Athenry estimated that his company had only about seventy members at this time and Micheal O'Droighneain recalled having only twenty-four active members in Spiddall.

movement's rural roots in the secret society/IRB tradition was obvious, however, as the organisation flourished in the very districts where communal land agitations were ongoing and where there was a strong local fenian organisation. Peter Howley later noted that he had little trouble in recruiting eighty men from around the Ardrahan district for the new force as 'there was a continuous war being waged against the landlords and the RIC in county Galway, right up to the formation of the Volunteers in 1914.'⁴² These rural companies were generally formed by senior local IRB men who travelled into neighbouring districts and set up meetings with other IRB contacts to enroll new members, with drill and training almost universally carried out by ex-servicemen. There was little that was actively conspiratorial about the new organisation's activities and all training exercises were carried out in full view of the authorities. It is probable that many of the ex-servicemen saw their efforts as a way of persuading local men into eventually joining the British army.

The most active IRB men in the county at this time were in the Athenry area, with Dick Murphy the acting head centre for the county.⁴³ Along with Murphy, Jack Broderick, Larry Lardiner and Stephen Jordan from Athenry were very active in setting up companies around the south and east of the county. Also prominent at this time, was Tom Kenny, who had been replaced by Murphy as head centre, who along with Eamonn Corbett and Patrick Callanan from Craughwell, Tom Ruane and Mick Newell from Carnmore, Michael O'Droighneain from Spideall, Liam Langley from Tuam, Joe Howley from Oranmore, and George Nicholls from Galway town, comprised the county's leading IRB men. Gilbert Morrissey of the Rockfield Company explained how the local IRB operated:

I think Kenny's main concern was to keep the spark of nationality alive in us until the opportunity came. This was not so difficult in county Galway, as in a sense, arms were never put away. If people were not fighting against the British Forces proper, they were making a fair stand against its henchmen, the tyrant landlord class, their agents, and bailiffs, who were backed up and protected by the R.I.C.⁴⁴

The strong concentration, in terms of the centre and south of the county and local involvement at both a leadership and grassroots level with the GAA, and hurling in particular, was

⁴² BMH, WS 1,379 (Peter Howley).

⁴³ BMH, WS 714 (Thomas Hynes).

⁴⁴ BMH, WS 1,138 (Gilbert Morrissey).

apparent even at this stage of the organisation's development. Another striking feature at this time was the small number of clergy who played significant roles in organising local companies. At Kinvara, Fr Ó'Meehan was central to the formation of the local company and whilst not officially a member, went so far as to supply the company with caps and suitable reading material at his own expense. Fr Feeney of Clarinbridge was central to the organisation of the company in his area, with his parochial house used on many occasions for IRB meetings. Fr Connolly of Garbally College, Ballinasloe was also frequently consulted by the IRB leadership in the county regarding their plans.⁴⁵

The local companies at this time began to occupy themselves with route marches at weekends and drill generally practiced on weeknights. The movement still had practically no arms and this led to frequent problems with boredom and indiscipline as recruits quickly found the excitement that they had anticipated simply not materialising. Officers were elected by the rank and file and this may also have contributed to incompetent or uncommitted men being elected for reasons of popularity rather than suitability. In March 1915, the IRB decided to send Liam Mellows, with Alfie O'Monacháin as his assistant, to the county to help organise and train the Galway Volunteers. Predictably, Mellows took lodgings in the town of Athenry, the heart of the land agitations and set about organising the Volunteers on a more professional basis.

The police only began to take serious notice of the Volunteers in Galway in May 1914 when the movement was subsumed by the Remondite organisation, and even then their opinion of the force was not high. At a grass roots level, the Redmond take-over involved local AOH and UIL members joining their local Volunteer branches and in most cases, taking over the running of the branch or setting up new ones. In Galway town, the *Connacht Tribune* announced in early May that a meeting had been held in order to 'to devise a means of placing the movement in the city on a more sound basis'.⁴⁶ The Volunteer committee now attained a vastly different character, with leading local merchants, prominent citizens and members of the Galway Corporation among the new leadership and at the next council meeting a resolution was unanimously passed that the council was sympathetic with the aims of the new movement.

⁴⁵ See BMH, WS 383 (Fr Fahy).

⁴⁶ *Connacht Tribune*, 23 May 1914.

In the countryside, as ever, the situation was somewhat different. The existing companies in the county were dominated by Fenians who were not going to be dislodged by the local UIL, who in many cases, were either sympathetic with their aims or under their control anyway. The militant companies in Clarinbridge, Athenry, Castlegar, Killeeneen, Ballycahalan, Ballinderreen, Tuam and Ardrahan remained under secret society control throughout the period. The next two months saw the rapid expansion of new companies as the movement began to spread like wildfire. New companies now sprang up in every parish virtually overnight and all under the guidance and leadership of the local UIL. Within a few weeks of the initial re-organisation process, the police noted that the movement now had a strength of 3,033 men across thirty branches, and was spreading rapidly.⁴⁷ The police noted: 'In the towns, the ranks are recruited from shop assistants and labourers with a small proportion of shopkeepers and tradesmen, and in the country localities, farmers and farmers' sons dominate the ranks.... The force is badly organised however and with not much discipline.'⁴⁸ The rapid expansion of the movement was suddenly becoming a major source of concern and in a far-sighted note of warning, the Chief Inspector of Police for Ireland, noted, with concern, the enlargement of the movement following its endorsement by Redmond in May 1914:

The rank and file of the Irish Volunteers are drawn from the very class with whom the police have frequently come into collision during agrarian disturbance. In Ireland the training and drilling of the male population is a new departure, which is bound, in the not too distant future, to profoundly alter the existing conditions of life. Obedience to the law has never been a prominent characteristic of the people. In times of passion or excitement the law has only been maintained by force and this has been rendered practicable owing to the want of cohesion among crowds hostile to the police. If the people become armed and drilled, effective police control will vanish. Unless the population which is now being drilled and armed is placed under some responsible leadership or control, these trained bands of men will be used for cattle-driving or other similar illegalities.⁴⁹

The enlargement of the Volunteers brought individuals into the movement who would previously have made extremely unlikely supporters and who took differing motives and

⁴⁷ CI monthly report, east Galway and west Galway, May 1914, CO 904/93.

⁴⁸ CI monthly report, east Galway, May 1914, CO 904/93.

⁴⁹ Chief Inspector RIC, monthly report, May 1914, CO/904/93.

agendas with them into the organisation. Two groups who appear to have exercised a significant role during this brief period in the county were the younger clergy and the remnants of the landed gentry. Following the public approval of the movement by the Archbishop Hoorer of Tuam, the authorities believed that the clergy were joining the movement in order to moderate the organisation.⁵⁰

The role of the Galway gentry in this phase of the movement was not insignificant. A number of Galway's old landed families were either members or active supporters of the movement and at least two companies were captained by members of the old landed elite. Colonel Phillips, late of the Connacht Rangers, was captain of the Dunmore Company and James Reddington of Clarinbridge and Kilcolgan was captain of the Ballycahalan Company. Frank Shawe-Taylor, Henry Grattan-Bellew, Captain Cheevers and even the Earl of Clancarty, all publicly gave their support to the new force and were often prominent in attendance at Volunteer reviews. The police reported in July that, 'members and leaders of the local gentry in Athenry and Mountbellew who were formerly looked upon as unionists are foremost members and leaders and have subscribed large sums of money towards the purchase of arms and equipment.'⁵¹ The gentry may have seen the movement as a possible future component of the British war effort and their attempts to influence the movement in that direction were quite obvious, if their views were not widely shared.

The rapid rise of the Volunteers had other unexpected consequences, with the police recording that the county was becoming more peaceable. This was partially attributable to 'the national Volunteer movement which has given the people something else to think about'.⁵² The police cautioned that the riding cannot be described as peaceable as it was 'in the grip of the Volunteers movement recruited in nearly every branch by moonlighters and other seditious and undesirable characters'.⁵³ In July, police were fired at on three separate occasions at Clarinbridge.⁵⁴ The authorities noted 'these people seem to be under the impression that all law has been abrogated in this area because they are Volunteers and that

⁵⁰ CI monthly report, east Galway, June 1914, CO 904/93.

⁵¹ CI monthly report, east Galway, July 1914, CO 904/94.

⁵² CI monthly report, west Galway, July 1914, CO 904/94.

⁵³ CI monthly report, west Galway, July 1914, CO 904/94.

⁵⁴ CI monthly report, west Galway, July 1914, CO 904/94.

they can indulge in the amusement of firing at the police without fear of consequences.’⁵⁵ An extra police hut was eventually placed near the village and manned by twelve police. The violence and intimidation of the police at Clarinbridge was replicated in Athenry where ‘dangerous criminals’ carried their rifles openly in defiance of the RIC. Both cases served to highlight the fact that while the Volunteer movement may have taken on an entirely new character in the county, in the areas dominated by secret societies, the old ways and threats remained the same. By August the growth of the movement had clearly reached its limits and the dire lack of arms remained a key problem. Only a small minority of companies had even wooden rifles to practice with and very few recruits ever got their hands on an actual weapon, let alone fired one. By the time of the eventual split in September, only five companies at Cullaigh and Creagh, Portumna, Loughrea, Athenry and Woodford had actually obtained any firearms at all.⁵⁶

June and July of 1914 marked the highpoint of the enlarged Volunteer organisation in the county with rapid progress having been made in terms of numbers and companies. The public reluctance of some sections of nationalist opinion to openly support the movement had now passed and the Redmondite element had completely eclipsed the separatist influence nationwide. The Volunteer review at Athenry in July 1914 represented the high point of the organisation and gave the newly organised companies a chance to compete with one another in terms of numbers and equipment. The *Connacht Tribune* called it ‘unquestionably the most historic and impressive event that has taken place in Connacht in the last fifty years with 5,000 men present to watch the 2,000 Volunteers’.⁵⁷ The overwhelmingly rural character of the organisation was obvious, with the paper noting that, ‘Galway city was well represented but when the question of population is considered, it lost badly in comparison with the county contingents and in fact the little village of Craughwell had as many members.’⁵⁸

There was now a nominal command structure set up in the county consisting of ten battalions: Galway city, Tuam, Loughrea, Ballinasloe, Gort, Athenry, Portumna, Clifden, Mountbellew and Glenamaddy.⁵⁹ In theory at least, these battalions consisted of seventy-eight companies,

⁵⁵ CI monthly report, west Galway, August 1914, CO 904/94.

⁵⁶ CI monthly report, east Galway, September 1914, CO 904/94.

⁵⁷ *Connacht Tribune*, 4 July 1914.

⁵⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 4 July 1914.

⁵⁹ *Connacht Tribune*, 4 July 1914.

with the company based on the parish or the half-parish. However, it is obvious that these figures were aspirational rather than a reflection of the reality on the ground. For example, only twenty-eight of these areas were actually represented at the county review at Athenry and it is likely that most existed only on paper.

2.3 The Split in the Volunteer Movement

The national split in the Volunteers resulted in the immediate and spectacular collapse of the movement in Galway. The overwhelming majority of companies in the county declared in favour of their leader. However, they also voted in favour of not joining the War effort by immediately leaving the movement in such vast numbers that the larger National Volunteer force collapsed virtually overnight. Following Redmond's declaration, most Galway Volunteers ceased drilling almost immediately and where drilling was still carried out, the numbers greatly diminished. The situation was not helped by the fact that most experienced drill instructors had rejoined their regiments in the British army. Only weeks after the split, the police estimated that drilling was continuing at a rate of only fifteen per cent of its previous level.⁶⁰ A number of parades were held in the county during September but the numbers were so low as to serve only to embarrass the leadership of the organisation. The police noted:

The extraordinary falling off of enthusiasm, with which the Volunteer movement was conceived, is undoubtedly due to the fact that the members will not enlist in the army and they believe that if they go on drilling, they will in some way or another be forced to enlist for services at the front. They make a great parade of their eagerness to defend the shores of Ireland, knowing that there is very little danger of them being called on to do so, but their warlike ardour vanishes rapidly at the idea of fighting against Germany abroad or indeed against anybody else.⁶¹

The decline of the Volunteers resulted in a scenario where the original IRB, controlled companies at Athenry, Clarinbridge, Castlegar, Killeeneen, Ballycahalan, Ballinderreen, Tuam and Ardahan remained intact, as the ninety or so new companies quickly disappeared. These companies were 'bitterly opposed to Redmond's announcement and are bitterly

⁶⁰ CI monthly report, west Galway, September 1914, CO 904/94.

⁶¹ CI monthly report, east Galway, September 1914, CO 904/94.

disloyal and will do all in their power to prevent recruiting'.⁶²

The National Volunteers now became dramatically less active as each month passed and, tellingly, the police now listed their membership figures as nominal only. By October, every Volunteer company in the west Riding, comprising 4,892 men, had declared for Redmond; compared to only six hundred and eighty-five Irish Volunteers.⁶³ In the east Riding, fifty-six branches of the movement, comprising 4,712 men declared in favour of Redmond, with only three hundred and sixty 'known Sinn Féiners' remaining, and the bulk of the minority group coming from the Athenry district.⁶⁴

The split in the Volunteer movement in October 1914 in Galway town became particularly unpleasant. A tense meeting to respond to the dilemma now facing the national movement which the war created was held in the Town Hall. The power lines to the hall were cut the previous night by members of the IRB and the meeting itself quickly degenerated into mayhem. As people arrived at the hall, they were heckled by republicans outside and several serious scuffles had to be broken up by the large body of police called in to keep order. As soon as order was restored again, the room was plunged into darkness as the electricity was again cut and sulphuric stink bombs set off, sending the hall into a panic, with people charging out through the doors and windows.⁶⁵

The meeting was eventually reconvened on a makeshift platform outside, and after hurling William O'Halloran, the secretary of the local Labourers' Union off the platform into the crowd, Stephen Gwynn MP addressed the meeting. After denouncing 'Eoin MacNeill and the self-elected leaders of the provisional committee of the Volunteers,' the speaker declared the allegiance of the Galway Volunteers to Redmond and the War effort. Amid raucous scenes, Gwynn closed the meeting by 'asking the assemblage to repeat after him, God save the King, and this was done with spirit and gusto and a voice in the crowd echoed, God save Ireland.'⁶⁶ Following the affair the *Connacht Tribune* announced:

⁶² CI monthly report, east Galway, September 1914, CO 904/94.

⁶³ CI monthly report, west Galway, October 1914, CO 904/95.

⁶⁴ CI monthly report, east Galway, October 1914, CO 904/95.

⁶⁵ *Connacht Tribune*, 3 October 1914.

⁶⁶ *Connacht Tribune*, 3 October 1914.

Sinn Féin has hitherto been treated with generous tolerance in the city; it has grossly abused that tolerance and the great majority who consider themselves free to act as sane and practical men, in order that they may reap to the full the benefits which the Irish Parliamentary Party has won, now take the attitude that tolerance has reached its limit. The puny plotters have only themselves to blame.⁶⁷

This display of republican contempt for the town's elite could not be let pass unchallenged, however, and it ultimately precipitated the collapse of the Irish Volunteers in the town. The next week, the Irish Volunteers were drilling in their hall in Williamsgate Street when an angry mob gathered outside. As men arrived for drill practice, they were subjected to abuse and threats and by nine o'clock the crowd had swollen to over three hundred people. Determined not to be intimidated, about sixty Volunteers emerged in formation from the hall with dummy rifles on their shoulders and marched toward Shop Street, where a riot duly erupted. Many Volunteers received beatings with the fighting raging up and down the town's main thoroughfare. The angry crowd then turned their attention to premises connected with individuals with republican sympathies. Windows were smashed all along the street and shops looted, before the rampaging mob moved out of the town centre to attack the homes of known republicans. Describing the event as 'guerrilla warfare on a small scale,' The *Connacht Tribune* reported 'Every house in the city, the occupants of which were known to have been in sympathy with the Sinn Féiners was visited and had its windows put in by stones.'⁶⁸ Volunteer John Hosty recalled 'After this, the remnants of the Galway company as a unit, ceased to function.'⁶⁹ The small local republican element struggled on but they never recovered their strength in the town and often had to rely upon the neighbouring Castlegar company for much needed muscle in their frequent clashes with their rivals.

The enmity between the two sides continued to manifest itself over their opposing positions on recruitment to the British army. Volunteer Thomas Courtney recalled, 'the whole town went recruiting mad, it wasn't a case of whether you were joining up, but when.'⁷⁰ The Irish Volunteers concentrated their energies on an anti-recruitment drive, while the National Volunteers led a vigorous campaign of propaganda and they continued to attract the support

⁶⁷ *Connacht Tribune*, 3 October 1914.

⁶⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 3 October 1914.

⁶⁹ BMH, WS 373 (John Hosty).

⁷⁰ BMH, WS 447 (Thomas Courtney).

of the town council and the majority of the town's merchant and social elite. The Irish Volunteers' rival campaign involved young members putting up posters, disrupting recruitment meetings and organising rival ones. Their campaign did not endear them to the townsfolk and Thomas Hynes stated that 'we got beaten up eighty per cent of the time, as the population of the town was very hostile.'⁷¹ On one occasion, Volunteer Thomas Courtney managed to get hold of a pile of recruiting forms for the British army. He, along with other republicans went to the houses of those who had signed up to leave for the front and tried to dissuade them from going. When this proved unsuccessful, Courtney filled out the remaining blank forms in the names of prominent supporters of the recruiting drive in the town. He later recalled 'some had to go, but others got off. It was noticeable how some of them cooled off in their recruiting efforts after that.'⁷²

In the years following the split, Sinn Féin and the Irish Volunteers consistently failed to make any inroads amongst the labouring classes in Galway town. Hostility to republicans amongst the urban working class was due primarily to the large number of young men from the city serving in the British army. Galway had a strong tradition of service, Renmore Barracks being the headquarters of the Connacht Rangers. There was also a particularly strong Navy tradition among the fishing community of the town, particularly in the Claddagh and between 200 and 250 young men from the small fishing village served in the Royal Navy during the First World War. Clashes between 'separation women' and Sinn Féin supporters had been a frequent feature of life in the town since the beginning of the War and with so many of the urban poor dependent upon an army stipend to survive, the Volunteers' German sympathies increasingly isolated the republican element from their natural constituency.⁷³

The civil and political affairs of the town continued to be dominated during the war years by a conservative merchant elite, foremost among whom was the larger-than-life figure of Martin Mór McDonagh. Originally from humble peasant stock, McDonagh's father had succeeded in dragging himself and his family out of poverty in Connemara by working as a middleman for local landlords. By marrying wisely and investing in land and cattle, he laid the foundation for

⁷¹ BMH, WS 714 (Thomas Hynes).

⁷² BMH, WS 447 (Thomas Courtney).

⁷³ Separation women, as they were known, were the wives of soldiers fighting at the front who received a separation allowance. The term tended to be used somewhat pejoratively as the urban wives of soldiers at the front unjustly gained a popular reputation for licentious behaviour.

his son's business empire. Thomas McDonagh & Sons, consisted of a large fertiliser factory, general stores and numerous other commercial ventures. McDonagh was the primary employer and businessman in the town and was chairman of the local Urban District Council, amongst numerous other bodies. In 1929, he was ruthlessly parodied as the archetypal *gombeenman* in Liam O'Flaherty's banned novel, *The House of Gold*. O'Flaherty provided the following description of his central character, 'In every little town in Ireland, you will find a man like Ramon Mor, a grabber, who makes his money by worse usury than Shylock ever practiced.'⁷⁴

Whilst O'Flaherty's novel is fictional, there is very little doubt about whom he is describing and it is clear that McDonagh accumulated much of his own land and animals in the form of unpaid debts from unfortunate clients and that his monopoly in business allowed him to dominate commerce in the town and surrounding areas. In 1911 he formed the Galway Employers' Federation to counter the founding of a fledgling union of dock workers in the town, the 'Galway Workers and General Labourers' Union.' During a strike at the docks in March 1913, he brought over strike breakers from Liverpool to handle his stock at the quays.⁷⁵ The strike eventually ended in a compromise but the episode amply demonstrated McDonagh's conservatism. That he was also chairman of the National Volunteers in Galway is an indication of the movement's antipathy toward the socialist leanings of their smaller rivals the Irish Volunteers.

On the centrality of patriotic self-sacrifice in the national interest, both the constitutional and radical traditions were in firm agreement. However, what actually constituted patriotic duty in the first place and whether that meant joining the British army to fight in Europe or staying at home with the Irish Volunteers to strike a blow against the empire, the competing traditions in Galway were bitterly divided. In what passed for political debate in the county, both sides consistently referred to themselves as the true patriots and attacked their opponents for being motivated by mere self-advancement.

The perception that the UIL was becoming increasingly moribund was somewhat tempered, and also partially explained, by the tireless involvement of its elected representatives in the

⁷⁴ Liam O'Flaherty, *The House Of Gold* (London, 1929), p. 18.

⁷⁵ John Cunningham, *'A town tormented by the Sea' Galway 1790-1914* (Dublin, 2004), pp 241-2.

recruitment campaign for the British army.⁷⁶ In the first three years of the War the efforts of the local organisation at recruitment ‘to the colours’ is notable for the remarkable energy displayed by party figures and their seemingly tireless performances on public platforms. In this respect, neither William Duffy nor James Cosgrave could be held responsible for the almost total failure of their efforts to enlist the young men of Galway. In Galway town, the campaign was ably organised by the Urban District Council with James Reddington, Philip McDonnell and Martin McDonagh to the fore.

It is noticeable how quickly the rhetoric of recruitment meetings became antagonistic, however, as speakers increasingly resorted to insulting the integrity of their audiences, with general attacks on the character of local farmers relentlessly bellowed from public platforms. At the Galway summer assizes in 1915, for instance, Judge Boyd, noting that only eight hundred men had joined the army, commented that ‘the local populace lack manliness in this crisis’.⁷⁷ At a recruitment rally in Eyre Square, Martin McDonagh rounded on a group of agricultural labourers waiting to be hired nearby:

I’ll hire you, [amidst loud laughter and applause from the crowd] and I will give you more pay than you will get from the farmers. Why do ye not go? Perhaps ye were thinking that on the lands that ye were going to there would be no German bullets, well ye will be in as much danger on the bogs from God’s lightning as on the battlefield from German bullets.⁷⁸

As if to rub salt in the National Volunteers’ wounds, as the War dragged on, the Irish Volunteers began to consolidate their support across the county. At a review in Athenry in November, seven hundred men paraded around the town from ten companies with rifles and pikes being carried by a number officers. Six local clergy were present on the platform in the town along with Laurence Ginnell MP and The O’Rahilly. Whilst the *Connacht Tribune*

⁷⁶ As part of a nationwide drive to re-invigorate the National Volunteers at grass-roots level, a series of inspections and local consultations began in the summer of 1915. As part of the process, Colonel Philips commenced a tour of inspection of the nominal battalions in the county. Only five companies attended at Loughrea. A week later, a visit to the second strongest battalion in Portumna could only muster an attendance of 240 men. The situation was worse in the Connemara battalion and only one company replied to a communication from Headquarters to nominate a representative to a newly established Galway county board.

⁷⁷ *Connacht Tribune*, 25 July 1915.

⁷⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 25 July 1915.

believed that the ‘bungling administration is largely to blame for the Athenry meeting,’⁷⁹ in Loughrea, the National Volunteers seemed equally determined to show that they still represented a force to be reckoned with. At a National Volunteer meeting in the town, held the following week, three hundred men paraded around the streets and the press reported that ‘strong feelings of resentment in Loughrea pervaded the ranks of the National Volunteers in consequence of some statements made at the meeting in Athenry, composed of a miscellaneous group of political free thinkers and cranks.’⁸⁰ William Duffy later assured the assembled crowd of the patriotic credentials of their diminishing force, adding that, ‘Loughrea could be relied upon to keep the lamp of patriotism and nationality aflame. Loughrea men sheathed the sword in ’79 and honestly at the bidding of Michael Davitt and Matt Harris.’ Following the meeting, elements in the crowd attacked a number of homes in the town belonging to republican sympathisers, breaking windows and hurling rocks at the occupants.⁸¹

The collapse of the National Volunteers and their subsequent difficulty in recruiting men to the British army represented a deep humiliation for many of the local elite in Galway, who were overwhelmingly pro-war. Crucially, many of the county’s leading recruiters such as Martin McDonagh and Frank Shawe-Taylor were also members of the County Galway Farmers’ Association. Conversely, many of the leaders of the Irish Volunteers in the county, men such as Dick Murphy of Athenry and Tom Kenny of Craughwell, were also leading secret society men and heavily involved in the communal agitations that were ongoing in the Athenry and Loughrea Districts. Thus, Dick Murphy would have played a leading role in the boycott against Shawe-Taylor in Athenry, as well as actively campaigning against the National Volunteers’ recruitment drive. Similarly, Martin McDonagh, who was the head of the National Volunteers in the county, also had a mansion at Monatigue in Craughwell and his grazing farm was boycotted by the local secret society from 1919 onwards. The agitation was organised and led by local fenians, who were also heavily involved in the Irish Volunteers. McDonagh was forced to give up the farm following the campaign against him and his mansion was subsequently burnt down.⁸² McDonagh was later to chair the ‘Committee for Public Safety’ in Galway which had been organised to ‘defend the town from invasion’ by the

⁷⁹ *Connacht Tribune*, 10 July 1915.

⁸⁰ *Connacht Tribune*, 10 July 1915.

⁸¹ *Connacht Tribune*, 10 July 1915.

⁸² See Chapter One for campaign against Shawe-Taylor in Athenry, Chapter Four for anti-grazier agitations in 1920 and Chapter Five for the murder of Shawe-Taylor.

rural companies of the Irish Volunteers in 1916.

The militancy of the Irish Volunteers represented a defiance of traditional social deference, and the overlap in membership with secret society agitators added another dimension to the already volatile political scene in the county. The mixing of potential armed insurrection with violent tenant agitation gave the traditional farming elite added incentive to make common cause with the police and others to oppose the republican movement. The antagonism was now personal, economic and political, and both sides were simply awaiting an opportunity to strike at the other. That opportunity would eventually come, with the rebellion in Easter Week 1916 and once again in the 1919-23 period. By 1915 the scene was very firmly set for a bitter showdown between the two and for the strong farmers in the east of the county, the Irish Volunteers simply had to be stopped before the tenant farmers became even more militant.

2.4 The Town Tenants' Association

If rural society in Galway was deeply riven by an under-articulated antagonism between large and small farmers, then the cultural chasm between town and county added another dimension to a complex society. The degree to which the modes of political organisation, efficiency and determination differed between the tenant farmers and the urban poor is best illustrated by the fortunes of the Town Tenants' League. Furthermore, the failure of their campaigns also illustrates the reactionary nature of the urban UIL and its inherent ability to frustrate social progress. In an important article on the cultural chasm between small town and rural Ireland, Brian Graham and Susan Hood argued that the necessary functional interdependence that existed between town and countryside in rural Ireland in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century 'should not be extrapolated into an assumption of a long term synonymy of small town and rural interests.' As Hood and Graham pointed out:

The possibility of a cultural chasm between town and country has been precluded, whilst town-country tensions are depicted as petty and trivial within the context of the overwhelming issue of land. If urban history has been neglected then, this mirrors the general neglect of urban dwellers and their claims for fair rent and fixity of tenure.⁸³

⁸³ Susan Hood and Brian Graham, 'Every Creed and Party: Town Tenant Protest Late Nineteenth and Early

Thus, whilst the militancy of the small tenant farmers during the same period has been the focus of extensive research, the equally valid claims of town tenants has received scant attention. The issue of urban tenants' rights has not been analysed because towns have largely been depicted as adjuncts to the rural world, where the defining national characteristics could be found. Thus, as Hood and Graham have concluded 'the nationalist rhetoric, which subsumed the labour issue, also absorbed the urban perspective in general and the theme of the small town in particular.'⁸⁴

Town tenants' rights first became an issue following the passing of the radical land legislation that transformed rural Ireland from the late 1870s onwards. Whilst individual Town Tenant Associations had sprung up around the country, it was not until 1904 that a national all-Ireland Town Tenants' League was founded. The aim of the organisation was to secure for town and village dwellers the same rights that tenant farmers had secured. In particular, the association campaigned for fair rents, fixity of tenure and compensation for improvements made to rented accommodation. In response to the association's demands, the Town Tenants Act was passed in 1906, which went some way toward providing for the three Fs and constituted the first Act of its kind in the United Kingdom.

The Town Tenants' League was initially very successful and quickly established a branch in every county in Ireland, with a weekly national executive meeting in Dublin. Local groups would also campaign on specific cases where they arose. In Athenry, for instance, Stephen Jordan recalled that the IRB men in the town joined the association en masse in 1906 against IRB rules, when a dispute over the allocation of houses in the town arose:

The Town Tenants Organisation, by agitation and agrarian outrages, succeeded in forcing the sale of the houses to tenants and also the division of the adjoining lands in what was called accommodation plots to each tenant purchaser. This led to a series of activities for the division of lands in all areas bordering Athenry. As the R.I.C. failed to get any info, it turned very nasty.⁸⁵

The Athenry agitation reached a climax in 1907 with local graziers being persuaded to bow to

Twentieth Century Ireland' in *Journal of Historical Geography*, xxiv, (1998), pp 170-88.

⁸⁴ Hood & Graham, 'Every Creed and Party', p. 171.

⁸⁵ BMH, WS 346 (Stephen Jordan).

the weight of local public opinion and give up their grazing on four farms bordering the town. The tactic of the town dwellers in this instance was instantly familiar, with large groups of townsfolk making their way to the farms in question and forcibly removing the objectionable stock. The *Irish Times* observed 'in casting up the prospect of agrarian peace in Athenry, it should not be forgotten that the present settlement looks remarkably like the direct reward of lawlessness.'⁸⁶

The success of the agitation in Athenry was not replicated elsewhere in the county and in this context the Loughrea Town Tenants were some years behind their more militant Athenry neighbours. A crucial and under-appreciated aspect of the land issue in Galway was the extent to which towns were affected by the sale of estates, as the ground rents in many towns were still owned by the remnants of the old gentry. Ballinasloe, for example was owned by Lord Clancarty, Headford by the McDonnells, Gort by Lord Gough, Loughrea by Clanricarde, and Ahascragh and Cappataggle by Clonbrock. There were seven local Town Tenants branches in the county in the period of this study but the only active branches were in Loughrea, Ballinasloe and to a lesser degree Galway town.

Martin Ward, who acted as chairman of the Loughrea Branch, was a charismatic figure and his house in the town was the scene of a famous incident in 1903, when he, along with a group of supporters refused to vacate the property from which he was being arbitrarily evicted by Clanricarde's agent, Edward Shawe-Tener. The issue was eventually resolved somewhat tamely, thanks to intervention by William Duffy and the local parish priest, with the result that Ward and his supporters gave up the property peacefully.⁸⁷ Tenants of Clanricarde from the Loughrea parish met under the leadership of William Duffy early in the New Year to organise themselves for the pending division of the estate. It was noted during the course of

⁸⁶ *Irish Times*, 7 September 1907.

⁸⁷ Ward himself, as this incident suggests, was more inclined toward direct action than his affiliation with William Duffy would suggest, and in a bizarre incident in 1907 he was charged with maliciously tarring the house of another Town Councillor. Shots had been fired by the owner of the house during the incident and Ward was lucky to escape from the scene unharmed. He subsequently denied the charge but the fact that he was apprehended fleeing the scene in possession of a tin of tar and a paintbrush made his claims of innocence unconvincing. The prosecutor in the case noted that daubing messages with tar on the front of someone's home with whom you have a disagreement was a common tactic in the town of Loughrea. (In his defence, Ward claimed that it was also common in the Loughrea area to run away when one heard shots in the middle of the night.)

the meeting that many tenants were still deep in debts from the original plan of campaign and Clanricarde was pursuing these old debts through the courts. At the meeting William Duffy described the CDB as 'a disturbing force in the county' and warned that 'the government should not waste one hour in taking all steps to expedite purchase.'⁸⁸ It was announced later that month that town tenants would be excluded from the sale.

At the AGM of the Loughrea Town Tenants' Association in March 1915, Martin Ward outlined to the audience the potential of the Clanricarde sale for town tenants, reminding them that they stood 'on the eve of events that would be of great importance to the town.'⁸⁹ The stated aim of their Association, he assured his audience, would be to secure the grazing lands adjacent to the town that would be included in the up-coming sale. The attendance does not seem to have filled everyone present with confidence with the speaker interrupted by a call from the floor that 'we do not have as many as we should have here'. Thomas Sweeney told the gathering:

In the Land War, which extended over thirty years, the towns of Ireland played an important part. I am not afraid to say that the brunt of the war had been borne in large measure by the men living in the towns. While they looked unceasingly and unselfishly after the interests of the tenant farmer, they unfortunately often neglected their own affairs.⁹⁰

The CDB subsequently wrote to the Loughrea Tenants stating that they could not and would not be considered in the redistribution.⁹¹ In relation to the alleviation of rents, however, the Association fared better. Ward told the gathering that 'he was glad to say that in almost all cases, where demanded, middlemen had given a reduction of from twenty per cent to twenty-five per cent.'⁹² In relation to the outstanding cases, James O'Loughlin drew applause from the audience when he assured them that 'there was nothing so useful as a little agitation.'⁹³ The anger at their treatment was palpable, as is the speaker's disappointment at the failure of the UIL leadership to prioritise their claims. Thomas Sweeney, one of the more militant

⁸⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 25 March 1915.

⁸⁹ *Connacht Tribune*, 25 March 1915.

⁹⁰ *Connacht Tribune*, 25 March 1915.

⁹¹ *Connacht Tribune*, 5 June 1915.

⁹² *Connacht Tribune*, 5 June 1915.

⁹³ *Connacht Tribune*, 5 June 1915.

Loughrea members, proposed in conclusion, 'that something like a Plan of Campaign was needed and a reduction of twenty per cent to twenty five per cent demanded from the head landlord.'⁹⁴

The Portumna Town Tenants were not slow to realise the significance of the Clanricarde sale either. The association met in July 1915 'to discuss at length the large rents they are paying at present'.⁹⁵ At the meeting, it was suggested that the owners should be approached with a view to obtaining abatements and a list of parties who would require land was forwarded to general secretary in Dublin. Lacking the militancy of their Loughrea neighbours and without the direct support of the local UIL, however, references to the Portumna Town Tenants quickly became scarce after their first and seemingly only meeting.

Following their success at securing rent abatements and their failure to be included in the division of the Clanricarde estate, the Loughrea Town Tenants changed tactics somewhat and took up the cause of those tenants who were living in the town but who had been evicted from the Clanricarde estate during the original plan of campaign. In January 1916, the association received a letter from the CDB stating that they would not deal with any evicted tenants in the town and did not intend restoring them to their former holdings. The Board stated that they could not deal with any claims of eviction that were not previously investigated and recommended to them by the Estates Commissioners. At a meeting in Loughrea, an angry Martin Ward declared that 'the tenants had no option but to take a course of action likely to renew the old troubles that Loughrea had been afflicted with since the beginning of the great agitation.'⁹⁶ A defiant resolution was then passed stating that no settlement would be recognised by the local community that did not recognise the evicted tenants 'and more particularly the Plan of Campaign tenants'.⁹⁷

At the same meeting Martin Ward highlighted a new issue, which had been particularly troubling the branch. For some time, the Loughrea Town Tenants had been highlighting the lack of support both the local UIL and the leadership of the Parliamentary Party had been giving to the cause of the town tenants. In the view of the Loughrea Branch, the leadership of

⁹⁴ *Connacht Tribune*, 5 June 1915.

⁹⁵ *Connacht Tribune*, 31 July 1915.

⁹⁶ *Connacht Tribune*, 1 January 1916.

⁹⁷ *Connacht Tribune*, 1 January 1916.

the tenants' movement was also culpable for not being militant enough in their dealing with the leadership of the Parliamentary Party. At their January meeting, Ward emphasised the recurring theme of the abandonment of the townsfolk by their ungrateful country neighbours, telling the gathering:

Town tenants had gained nothing in proportion to what the towns had contributed to other movements and since last May, he was determined to see the movement reformed. A strong and vigorous movement was required and it needed to have the Irish Parliamentary Party behind it.⁹⁸

At a meeting in March, Francis Glynn continued the militant theme and asked 'Look at Athenry, why could the town of Loughrea not get up and fight for themselves as they had done for the tenants formerly? We have our MP [William Duffy] here tonight and I would like to see what he has to say on this matter.'⁹⁹ Duffy later claimed that the criticism was politically motivated and noted that 'Sinn Féiners were conspiring to bring discredit on his name, and that it was most ungrateful on the part of country people who should and did know differently to listen to attacks so grossly unfair and uncharitable.'¹⁰⁰ He was defended, however, by the Loughrea Town Tenants with Mr. Glynn concluding that secret society men had engineered the controversy:

With the lessons taught to people in our day, by people who should know better, and who should be Christian and charitable in their teaching and example, it is no wonder some men practiced the reprehensible doctrines taught them and thoughtlessly committed crime upon their tried and trusted friends.¹⁰¹

Duffy himself then went even further, noting at a branch meeting that 'the agricultural tenants were now free but the town tenant had to struggle on in slavery'.¹⁰² Thomas Sweeney noted in agreement that, 'they [Loughrea Town Tenants] had beaten down landlordism, baliffism, grazierism, and even Clanricarde, but today they were faced with a worse type than ever

⁹⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 1 January 1916.

⁹⁹ *Connacht Tribune*, 11 March 1916.

¹⁰⁰ *Connacht Tribune*, 11 March 1916.

¹⁰¹ *Connacht Tribune*, 11 March 1916.

¹⁰² *Connacht Tribune*, 5 June 1916.

before and that was the CDB.¹⁰³ Noting with satisfaction that the grazing had been surrendered at nearby Tully Hill, the delegates nonetheless expressed concern over who would now get the farm. As ever, Martin Ward was in no doubt who should get it, claiming that they would see to it that the original evicted tenants would be restored to Tulla. Ward concluded that 'those who fought for it should get it and not those who criticised them and sat by the fireside at home'.¹⁰⁴

Whilst rent abatements and inclusion in the division of local estates preoccupied the town tenants in Loughrea, the Galway town branch had a somewhat different target. At a meeting in early January, the growth of the co-operative movement in the county generated heated discussion. Noting that co-operatives had been opened in Moycullen and Loughgeorge and that others were being started in Spidall, Headford and Oranmore, a resolution condemning the co-operatives as a growing evil was proposed by Chairman W.J. Silke, who repeated the theme of the abandonment of the rights of townsfolk by their ungrateful country neighbours. Silke, from one of Galway's most prominent merchant families, commented that 'it was a very poor recompense to the townspeople, who in the past assisted the country people, that the latter should be starting these co-operative stores.'¹⁰⁵ The resolution specifically condemned:

That such societies are being run and financed by country landlords, middlemen and well paid officials, who derive large profits from the pockets of tenant farms, who patronise same, and accordingly it is manifestly unjust and unfair to legitimate traders and merchants in cities and towns that such societies be subsidised from the public purse, for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many.¹⁰⁶

The resolution created some heated debate and highlights an important conflict of interests for the organisation, between looking after the interest of the urban poor, as opposed to the local 'shopocracy'. The secretary of the Galway town branch, Mr. Simon, proceeded to speak in defense of the co-operatives and pointed out that 'if they affected the traders then the traders should form their own society to look after their interests'. He went on to say that he did not see why a branch of the Town Tenants 'should take up anything like that. Mr. Hoare

¹⁰³ *Connacht Tribune*, 5 June 1916.

¹⁰⁴ *Connacht Tribune*, 5 June 1916.

¹⁰⁵ *Connacht Tribune*, 15 January 1916.

¹⁰⁶ *Connacht Tribune*, 15 January 1916.

intervened to support his colleague adding that the 'co-operative stores are alright, we are supposed to be looking after the interests of the town tenants'. He then went on to refer to a case where wool that cost 4s 6d in Galway could be bought for 2s 3d at the Moycullen store. The chairman W.J. Silke then intervened to say that the speaker 'was not looking at things properly. It was detrimental to the markets of the town and which were going down greatly and they as citizens should support them.' However, Mr. Simon remained resolute stating that 'for the life of me I can't see why we should take up this case'. Despite the opposition however, the motion was carried by 9-3 with only Hoare, Philips and Simon dissenting.

In 1914, the Clancarty tenants in the vicinity of Ballinasloe were in the process of purchasing their farms under the 1903 Land Act, spurring the local town tenants to organise their branch of the Town Tenants to try and take advantage of the situation. At the inaugural meeting of the Ballinasloe Town Tenants League, the audience was told that

In no town in Ireland is this organisation so wanted, as not more than a dozen houses belong to the County Council, the vast majority belonging to the property middlemen, most of whom, to say the least, are anything but an improvement on the 'Lord of the Soil'.¹⁰⁷

Fr T.J. Joyce told the tenants that he hoped that town tenants would not be forgotten and that the sale of the towns would be included in the sale of the estates and that a judicial body would be set up to fix fair rents and save the town tenants from arbitrary action. He then proposed the course of action which was the cry of the tenants in Loughrea, 'We should do what they did in Athenry and buy out the town.'¹⁰⁸ Another speaker went on to ask, 'How can we can have a Town Tenants' Association, if we have slum landlords on the committee?' The speaker was quickly assured that, 'There are no such men on the committee as care was taken to exclude them.' The inaugural meeting concluded with the recurring theme that it was crucial that the town tenants and the local UIL be combined.

The Ballinasloe League went on to pass a resolution requesting the Urban Council to call upon the owners of slum property in the town which was already condemned by the sanitary officer, to immediately put the property into sanitary condition or else exercise their powers to close the houses. A member of the committee, Mr. Dunne, even went so far as to say that he

¹⁰⁷ *East Galway Democrat*, 14 February 1914.

¹⁰⁸ *East Galway Democrat*, 28 February 1914.

would be only too happy to see these houses pulled down. However, on the subject of the rents currently being paid for labourers' cottages built by the local council, the views of the local 'shopocracy' rather than the local urban poor, whom the association claimed to represent, was expressed by the Committee. Mr. Rothwell put his view forward, he claimed, 'as a large rate payer,' stating that 'it was the opinion of rate payers that they would not complain if they had to put their hand in their pockets and pay for *bona fide* labourers, but the ratepayers have very reasonable grounds for complaint when they have to pay for people who are paid good salaries.' Many of those occupying the cottages in the town were, he claimed, 'quasi-gentlemen' whom they would not be paying to build mansions'.¹⁰⁹

In a strongly worded editorial in July, the *East Galway Democrat* backed the local tenants' demands for rent reduction, noting that ninety per cent of the houses in the town were in the hands of middlemen, the editor declared that 'the landlords are bad, but the middlemen are the devil.'¹¹⁰ In relation to the town's slums, it was claimed at a large tenants meeting in October that 'if the town tenants never did their bit but pave the way for the elimination of those unnameable dens, it would have justified its existence.'¹¹¹ Claiming that four-fifths of the houses occupied by labourers were unfit for human habitation, Fr Joyce concluded that 'these abodes are an insult to God and they degrade men and women made to His image and likeness, herded together in these wretched dens to the level of brutes.'¹¹²

A resolution was subsequently passed calling for four major changes in the renting of property in the town, namely, the establishment of a fair rent tribunal by the local authority that would be empowered to fix rents; a general and substantial reduction in rents in all properties in the town; that all 'hovels' in the town be closed; and finally that no-one was to take a house from which a tenant was unjustly evicted.¹¹³ At the next meeting in the town, there was controversy over the resolution and in particular the demand for a general reduction of thirty per cent on all rents in the town. A resolution was put forward vetoing the previous one and proposing instead that a supplementary committee be appointed to reconsider the issue. The committee then proposed that rent reductions be considered on an individual basis

¹⁰⁹ *East Galway Democrat*, 2 May 1914.

¹¹⁰ *East Galway Democrat*, 28 July 1914.

¹¹¹ *East Galway Democrat*, 28 July 1914.

¹¹² *East Galway Democrat*, 2 October 1914.

¹¹³ *East Galway Democrat*, 2 October 1914.

only, rather than calling for a general reduction across the board.¹¹⁴

The committee's dramatic U-turn created bitter recriminations, with one delegate declaring that 'this meeting looks like a landlords' meeting. There is more being said on the landlords' side than the tenants.'¹¹⁵ Officers countered that only tenants with a grievance would be dealt with individually and the secretary of the Branch, Mr. Nicholson, was told by the committee that his objections were unfounded, as contrary to earlier testimony, 'there are not five tenants in Ballinasloe that are rack rented.' The decision to rescind the earlier resolution was eventually passed by a margin of eleven to three. However, the local press immediately issued a condemnation of the decision and the Chairman W.J. Ward, in particular. Noting with grim sarcasm that 'the town tenants have been fortunate in the choice of some of their officers,' they proclaimed their 'utter disgust' with the chairman's recent action and asked:

Are tenants to be thrown back on their landlords individually? For what purpose was the Town Tenants' League started? What has brought about this wonderful change of opinion in some speakers since the July meetings or are these men really as unstable as the shifting sands?¹¹⁶

Despite the U-turn by the committee, by the end of the year, Mr. Nicholson, who had supported the previous campaign for rent reduction in the town, succeeded in passing a new 'no rent' resolution stipulating that until all rents were reduced by twenty per cent, no rent would be paid in the town. The move, however, does not seem to have garnered any popular support and a no-rent strike was never actually initiated. Immediately after the decision was taken the most publicly criticised members of the committee, Ward and Moffett, resigned and whilst they gave no reasons for their departure, it is safe to assume that it was brought about by a desire not to be associated with the new demands of their branch and possibly to sabotage it. It is very noticeable that following their departure, general apathy seems to have gripped the branch with small attendances at meetings indicating a clear lack of appetite for a campaign. It was eventually decided to visit all tenants with the view to getting them to sign a petition committing them to a no-rent strike. However, following the original proposal there are no further references to the decision and reports of branch meetings in the local papers

¹¹⁴ *East Galway Democrat*, 7 November 1914.

¹¹⁵ *East Galway Democrat*, 7 November 1914.

¹¹⁶ *East Galway Democrat*, 7 November 1914.

eventually cease altogether.

The failure of the Ballinasloe Town Tenants' League to agree on a united policy to alleviate what were genuine social and health issues concerning housing in the town has echoes in the problems experienced by the league in both Loughrea and Galway town. Whilst the league seems to have had greater success in approaching individual landlords for rent reduction in Loughrea, the leadership of the branch, William Duffy in particular, was accused by his own members of acting in his own best interests in the case of the redistribution of a local estate. Duffy had handled the redistribution of a farm by the CDB in the Closetoken area and had subsequently been allotted a farm of land on the estate himself. This criticism appears to be justified by the fact that as an MP, Duffy would have been entitled to an income of at least £400 in expenses per annum and the case bears witness to his lieutenant, Martin Ward's dictum, that 'land should be given to those who fought for it, and not for those who sat at home by the fire and criticised them.'¹¹⁷ Allied to this episode was the constant frustration of all three branches that the UIL was not interested in lobbying for the town tenants and had never offered them its full support, as it had done so vigorously for the rural tenants in previous generations.

The actions of the Galway Town Branch in denouncing local co-operatives was heavily criticised even within its own branch and it was correctly demonstrated at a committee level that the local urban poor could purchase vital commodities for significantly less at a co-operative store than in the local shops in the town. In all three towns, the integrity of the decisions taken by local branch leaders were questioned by both members and the local press, as not being in the genuine interests of local tenants. It is also interesting to note that the resolution passed by the Galway Branch condemning co-operatives was proposed by local merchant William Silke and the resolution overturning the decision for a no rent strike that led to the collapse of the Ballinasloe branch was proposed by Mr. Rothwell, who was also from a local merchant family and who owned the largest furniture store and auctioneering business in the town, and by William Moffett, whose family owned the largest local drapers in the town. It is clear that the decisions of the local branches frequently represented the best interests of the local mercantile elite, rather than the urban poor, for whom the branch was supposed to be acting.

¹¹⁷ *Connacht Tribune*, 6 June 1915.

Conclusion

The character of popular mobilisation and political organisation in east Galway was as diffuse as it was factional. Tension between rival political movements was frequently exacerbated by a quick recourse to violence that exacerbated a polarised and volatile political culture. When issues of immediate rural concern such as a dispute over a local estate developed, the UIL could effectively mobilise as a functioning organisational structure. Furthermore, the party still had the power to mobilise vast numbers of men to join local Volunteer companies and participate in tiresome drill and other exercises that demanded a considerable degree of personal commitment. The majority of recruits to the movement were small tenants who did not succumb to secret society influence and who remained loyal to the infinitely more respectable elites of the UIL. The Party leadership's commitment to the War effort, more than any other single factor, was a bridge too far for ordinary members and proved that whilst the party could wake from its slumber, the same catalyst was a fatal development.

The humiliation that the demise of the National Volunteers represented and the violence in towns over recruitment to British regiments, allied to the tenor of recruiting meetings that frequently degenerated into denunciations of the entire local community, left many ordinary people disillusioned with conventional politics. Furthermore, the sheer energy displayed by the local elite in the party and their personal commitment to pushing the recruitment agenda was a factor in their own personal demise and neither Stephen Gwynn, James Cosgrave or Richard Hazleton opted to stand for re-election in the county again. Only the stubbornness of William Duffy, buffered by a loyal and tempestuous following in the town of Loughrea and the self-confidence of William O'Malley insulated from mass opinion in England, could escape the reality that by 1917, they were finished as a political force. By 1918, there was simply very little remaining of the original party structure and even if ordinary people wanted to support the party, there was little left to support.

Whilst many more small tenants joined the National Volunteers than the Irish Volunteers, the key leadership roles of local IRB men in the latter and their involvement with communal agrarian agitation, gave both movements an obvious rural class dimension, as well an even greater rural/urban character. 'Men of substance' simply did not join Sinn Féin or the Irish

Volunteers and although there were individual Volunteers in most towns, there were no active companies prepared to attack the Crown Forces in urban areas. (The Galway town company killed one member of the Crown Forces in September 1920 and this will be discussed in the next Chapter.) This dual dimension to the evolution of politics in the county represented the exacerbation of pre-existing cleavages rather than a new development. Class tension had always been a feature of rural society, albeit one often obscured in the face of a perceived outside aggressor. Pádraig Lane has argued that the homogenised version of the Land War perpetuated by the eventual victors, the rural middle class, of a united struggle by all rural classes against landlordism has glossed over the innate tensions that existed within the Land War between the rural proletariat and the farmers.¹¹⁸ As F.S.L. Lyons points out, following the Land Acts ‘the gulf between the farmer and the landless man came to mirror all too faithfully the gulf that had formerly existed between landlord and tenant.’¹¹⁹

If the prevailing social dynamics fundamentally defined the Volunteers’ means, objectives and targets, it also defined from whom they could draw support. The pivotal role that the IRB played in agrarian unrest defined how the movement was perceived locally and from which broadly defined social groups they could draw support. If the lives of the rural poor were inherently insecure due to their obvious economic vulnerability, their agitation against the grazing system introduced a key theme that influenced attitudes towards the physical force movement. The more respectable elements in farming society were suddenly faced with the stark realisation that their own land, which they had consolidated over decades through a mixture of shrewd marriages, economic conservatism and hard work, could become ‘fair game’ for the land hungry smallholders, should the Irish Volunteers continue to gain in strength and support. The economic insecurity of the ‘middling’ farmers manifested itself in their social and political conservatism which resisted the overwhelming tide of political change, later witnessed in other counties after the Rising, as active support for the republican cause in the county remained limited to rural tenants.

The Volunteers were perceived with contempt by all classes in the towns and the movement in turn had little to offer urban tenants other than mutual suspicion. The towns were to remain onlookers to the future political upheaval of the period as the agents of political change

¹¹⁸ See Pádraig Lane, ‘Agricultural Labourers and the Land Question’ in Carla King (ed.) *Famine, Land and Culture in Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), pp 101-13.

remained resolutely rural in character. The urban tradition of recruitment to the army was later reflected in an enduring loyalty to the RIC, despite the virtual collapse of the force in rural areas in 1917. The chasm between small town and countryside was to be exacerbated by the events of Easter Week 1916 when the National Volunteers mobilised to 'defend their towns' from invasion by the Irish Volunteers and a co-ordinated civil defence force was raised to come to aid the security forces. Whilst Campbell has stressed the radical nature of rural political mobilisation in Galway, he has not explored the crucial rural/urban divide in the county, the reality of the dual wings of the UIL reflecting this cultural chasm and the reactionary nature of the urban UIL generally. It was inevitable that the social divisions in the county would find expression in political organisation and popular mobilisation. The rural wing of the party could be subsumed into the republican movement's various component parts in the future and except a small number of districts there was little to separate the aims and culture of the two movements. The emergence of the physical force tradition could not encompass the urban political tradition, with its inherent conservatism, antipathy towards progressive tendencies and the growing level of personal antagonism.

Whilst Fitzpatrick has stressed the continuity which existed between the UIL and republican movement in Clare and Longford respectively, the reality of the existence of an urban/rural divide has not been investigated to the same extent as that which emerges in Galway.¹²⁰ There was only a small amount of agrarian agitation in Longford, but Clare ranked next to Galway for anti-grazier unrest. Whereas he acknowledges the importance of anti-grazer activity, Fitzpatrick does not identify the exact nature of the relationship between agrarian unrest and popular politics and discerns no cleavage within local politics reflecting this reality. Both studies treat towns as minor components within an overwhelmingly rural world with social cleavages precluded as defining influences on popular mobilisation. This tendency to treat the urban world of the town as merely a sub-section of a resolutely rural universe fails to appreciate the nuances of rural society and the seminal antagonisms which define it.

Peter Hart has concluded that the IRA in west Cork was predominantly comprised of the lower middle classes and upper working classes of the towns; the corner boys and shop

¹¹⁹ F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine* (London, 1926), p. 26.

¹²⁰ Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life*, pp 192-230.

assistants commonly sneered at in police reports.¹²¹ In his study of the Volunteer movement, Augusteijn came to a similar conclusion about the urban roots of the force.¹²² In Galway the picture was very different, with the IRA remaining a completely rural organisation throughout the period and towns generally remaining disinterested in the organisation. Whilst the Volunteer movement flourished in urban areas during the Redmondite phase of the organisation, following the spilt, the town companies virtually collapsed overnight. Whilst there were small numbers of individual Volunteers living in the towns from 1917 onwards, there were simply not enough in each district for there to be any appreciable organisation or obvious indications of republican activity. This situation did not change significantly as the conflict progressed, although individual Volunteers from the towns were involved in the IRA.¹²³

Although there was some anti-grazier activity in each county, the radicalisation of the rural IRB and its involvement in anti-grazer activity created the foundation for the growth of militant nationalism. Whilst the IRB remained a strongly urban phenomenon in the rest of the country, in Galway its rural character was overwhelming. Whereas Hart's findings have been supported with comprehensive statistical research on this issue, which involved the collation of data on the social background of hundreds of Volunteers, Tom Barry's subsequent impressions of the conflict emphasised the rural urban/divide and he described the people of Union Hall, Bantry and other 'garrison towns' as 'lickspittles' for their perceived subservience.¹²⁴ While there is a sectarian undertone to Barry's remarks, similar sentiments were to become common in the *Galway Express* newspaper after it was taken over by Sinn Féin in 1918. The paper continually lambasted townspeople in general and labelled Galway town 'a sickening old city inhabited by the garrison and its hangers on'.¹²⁵ Thus, the inherent value of local studies of the revolution becomes amplified as different regions of the country demonstrate the variance of regional factors and the complexity of social forces which compelled young men to join the IRA.

¹²¹ Hart, 'The Geography of Revolution in Ireland 1917-1923', p. 161.

¹²² Augusteijn, *From Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 334.

¹²³ For instance, Seamus Quirke, Sean Mulvey, Thomas Courtney, Joseph Togher were active in Galway town and Larry Lardiner and Dick Morrissey were from the town of Athenry.

¹²⁴ Tom Barry, *Guerrilla Days in Ireland* (Dublin, 1949), p. 6.

¹²⁵ *Galway Express*, 9 August 1918.

Chapter Three: 1916: A crisis in Local Politics

In the historiography of Easter Week 1916, events outside Dublin have until recently received scant attention and most standard works on the topic have generally focused solely on the capital.¹ The national aspect of the Rising has been neglected, to the detriment of a full appreciation of the aims of the Rebellion's planners. Charles Townshend has stated, 'we have no idea if there was a plan for a nationwide Rising.'² This chapter examines the events of Easter Week in east Galway in their broader social and political context in order to reveal the full extent of the republican leadership's plans for the country as a whole. The Rising in the county has been described by one historian as a skirmish.³ However, an analysis of events in county Galway illustrates the potential for civil disorder which clearly existed outside of the main urban centres and which warrants further analysis. This chapter explores the events of Easter Week to reveal how the leadership of the movement planned to co-ordinate the Rising outside the capital, the scope of their ambition for country units, and the degree to which they seriously conceived of having any realistic chance of success.

The local Rising set in motion a revealing series of reactions and recriminations by nationalists across Galway, who mobilised to 'protect their towns from rebel invasion'. A detailed study of the Galway Rising and counter-Rising in its proper social context exposes the depth of political divisions which existed during the opening decades of the last century and the pervasiveness of social antagonism in rural Ireland. In a radicalised county like Galway, political enmities ran much deeper between republicans and the elites of the National

¹ A conference at National University of Ireland, Galway, entitled '1916, Local Dimensions' held in May 2006 has been the only attempt to examine the issue. Two brief accounts of Easter Week in the county have been published as chapters in much larger studies. In 1971 Desmond Greaves published an account of the Rising in *Liam Mellows and the Irish Revolution*. More recently Fergus Campbell included a detailed account of the Rising in his study, *Land and Revolution: Nationalist Politics in the West of Ireland, 1891-1921*, pp 205-18. Whilst Greaves' account is a useful introduction, Campbell has provided much valuable research on the role of Sinn Féin and the Volunteers in agrarian secret society activity and the rise of Sinn Féin the county.

² Quoted from a lecture given by Townshend at the National University of Ireland, Galway, 19 May 2006.

³ Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland, The Sinn Féin Party, 1916-1923* (Dublin, 1999), p. 43.

Party than elsewhere and the potential for civil unrest between the two groups on a scale inconceivable elsewhere was only narrowly averted.

The response of nationalists across the county who mobilised in large numbers to 'defend' their districts from the 'peasant army' roaming the countryside has not previously been examined.⁴ Nonetheless, the nationalist counter-Rising in Galway elucidates a number of key debates in the historiography of the era and was a crucial episode in souring the already poisonous political atmosphere in the county. The potential which existed for civil conflict in Ireland and the role of class as a motivating factor in the revolutionary period has been contested by historians. Whilst Rumpf has stated that civil conflict was a distinct possibility during 1919, Fitzpatrick and others have stressed the continuity between nationalism and republicanism and the emasculation of social divisions and radical agitation.⁵ It is clear, nonetheless, that in Galway local politics was immersed in a dual antagonism across an urban/rural and small tenant/strong farmer divide and rather than simply dismissing the rural dimension to Easter Week, the Rising ultimately became the defining event in the political culture in the county.

Opposition to the rebels was most vociferous in Galway town, where a co-ordinated public response to the crisis was organised by a hastily formed 'Committee for Public Safety', and a citizen militia, the 'Special Constables'.⁶ Alongside the National Volunteers, these organisations were active throughout the week in monitoring and arresting any potential sympathisers in the town, and in aiding the military preparations for an expected 'invasion' by the rebel force. The National Volunteers also came out in force in the town of Loughrea and in the villages of Turloughmore and Craughwell, where they manned the local barracks alongside the RIC.⁷ The extreme diversity of responses from within the county, ranging from widespread support amongst the rural poor, seeming indifference in most towns, to intense hostility in the city indicates that Galway was a highly fractured and complex society during the formative years of the Irish revolution.

⁴ Campbell's analysis of events is confined to rural areas only.

⁵ See Fitzpatrick's conclusion in *Politics and Irish Life*, pp 192-231, for an analysis on revolution and social change in county Clare.

⁶ Special constables were appointed in Dublin and other parts of the country during Easter Week.

⁷ This will be fully discussed in this Chapter.

Contrary to the national experience, the failure of the Rising in Galway represented a fundamental blow to the long term development of the republican movement in the county. Many Volunteers later reflected bitterly on the events of the week when so many local people conspired with the Crown Forces against them. The failure to provide adequate arms meant that the rebels were in a hopeless position before they even went out and the almost farcical elements of the Rising could not be easily glossed over by the insurgents. Rather than becoming the catalyst for a radical resurgence, the Rising marked the high point of militancy amongst the small tenants in the east Galway grazier belt. Disillusioned with the movement and the response of sections of the local community, the Rebellion represented another bitter episode on a continuum of disappointments for many local agitators. Beginning with the failure of the new Land Acts to accommodate the marginalised in rural society, followed by the economic boom of the Great War which disproportionately benefited the stronger and middling farmers, the Rising and imprisonment afterwards formed the prelude to the exit from the national movement for most of the Volunteer companies in east Galway. During the chaotic years of the War of Independence, the former republican stronghold around Athenry remained largely aloof from the national struggle as the tenant farmers once again refocused their anger on the grazier and the landlord and away from the Crown Forces.⁸

3.1 The Plan for the Rising

It is pretty plain now [May 1916] that the rebellion was precipitated and if it had been deferred until later when all was ready, it would not have been confined to the Districts of Galway and Gort, but would have embraced the whole county and we could not have held it.⁹

The plan for Rising in Galway was predicated on the successful delivery to the county of three thousand rifles from *The Aud* during Easter week. When the arms landing failed, the prospects for the Rising in Galway ended. The large number of men who mobilised had such a small number of rifles that they could never match the firepower of the Crown Forces as hundreds of the men went out with no arms at all and many carried only pikes. The course of events during the week can only be understood in this context. The plan for county Galway is

⁸ No Crown Forces were killed during the course of the War of Independence in the east Galway grazier belt. The only landlord killed during the whole period nationwide was Frank Shawe-Taylor of Moorepark, Athenry. This will be analysed in detail in Chapter Four.

⁹ CI monthly report, west Galway, May 1916, CO 904/100.

instructive in terms of what the IRB leadership intended for other rural parts of the country. When one examines the plan in detail, and looks at what actually happened in the county during Easter week, one cannot avoid the authorities' conclusion at the time, that had the arms been landed safely and distributed around the country effectively, the Rising in the countryside would have been an extremely serious situation for the authorities. Furthermore, given Mellows' deputy Ailbhe O'Monacháin's close connections to the Casement landing, the plan for county Galway is credible.¹⁰ O'Monacháin believed that the county was seen as crucial to the leadership's plans, 'GHQ had reasons for having Galway very specially organised and equipped for the coming Rising.'¹¹ The plan for the county had two distinct phases: Firstly, local companies were to be armed at central points in the county before returning to their districts and attacking all police barracks in their local areas. They were then to unite and proceed as a larger group into the heavily garrisoned and generally hostile, Galway town. Ailbhe O'Monacháin later explained:

It had been arranged that 3,000 of the rifles from *The Aud* were to reach Galway, and there was a man in Galway ready for each rifle. Everything had been planned with men on the railway to take the rifles at Kerry and distribute them all along the line right up to Galway, but the accidental drowning of three Volunteers in Kerry, my brother Cathal O'Monacháin, Conn Ceitinn and Donal O'Sheehan, and the failure to land the arms and the capture of Roger Casement, upset all those plans.¹²

Michael Fogarty was present at a Volunteer meeting in Limerick on Palm Sunday when he was first told of plans for the Rising.¹³ Fogarty was originally from county Clare but worked as a railway signaller for the Great Western Railway Company. He later explained that Paddy Brennan was in charge of landing arms from two sloops at Carrigaholt, some of which were to be loaded onto a railway carriage and sent north to be used in Galway. Fogarty's job was to try and make sure the railway lines were kept open and the train delivering the weapons arrived safely in Athenry. Local companies would then mobilise to central depots

¹⁰ O'Monacháin's brother Cathal, was one of the Volunteers sent by the leadership to Kerry to organise the unloading and distribution of the rifles from *The Aud*. He drowned in a freak accident that week, when the car he and his comrades were travelling in drove off a pier in Kerry.

¹¹ BMH, WS 298 (Ailbhe O'Monacháin).

¹² BMH, WS 298 (Ailbhe O'Monacháin).

¹³ BMH, WS 673 (Michael Fogarty).

along the railway line to receive their supply of weapons. In south Galway the arms would be distributed at Gort, Athenry and Tuam.¹⁴ Thomas Nohilly, adjutant Tuam Company, substantiates Fogarty and O'Monacháin's account and explained that he was told that his men in north Galway would receive their weapons from the train at Tuam, which was going to be commandeered by the IRB.

Having carried out the initial two phases of the plan, the next step for the Volunteers was to link up with other midlands companies along the Shannon. Tomas O'Maoileoin, who was in command of the Westmeath Volunteers in 1916 recalled 'We were to wreck the rail link to the West and then we were to march to Shannon harbour and effect a link with Liam Mellows's force holding Ballinasloe.'¹⁵ Patrick Callanan, recalled that a few months before the Rising, Pádraig Pearse visited Athenry and asked him whether in the event of a Rebellion, they 'could hold a line to the river Suck in Ballinasloe'. Callanan told him 'that it would be a very weak line and would not hold for any length of time'.¹⁶ Mellows had extended the area of his command eastward as far as Daingan in Offaly, and somewhat more loosely as far as Westport in 1915. The notion of holding a line along the Shannon is corroborated by Desmond Greaves in his biography of Mellows. It seems that as soon as Mellows had united his forces his intention was to move towards the Shannon, raising the country as he went.¹⁷

The plans for the Rising were highly aspirational and in reality they would have been extremely unlikely to have been successful. They demanded effective communications over a wide area, including many districts that had few Volunteers as well as areas that were actively hostile to the rebels. That the plan envisaged by the leaders was extremely optimistic is clear. Nonetheless, a plan did exist and the local leaders were aware of it. Furthermore, given the subsequent reaction of the RIC in the county during the week and the number of Volunteers that actually turned out, had the arms arrived from Kerry, the Volunteers would have genuinely represented a major threat to the rural RIC. Two important factors need to be considered: the Volunteers were remarkably unsuccessful in the attacks which they did carry out on police barracks during both Easter week and later during the War of Independence.

¹⁴ BMH, WS 1,164. (Michael Manning); BMH, WS 373 (John Hosty).

¹⁵ Uinseann MacEoin, *Survivors, The Story of Ireland's Struggle as Told Through Some of Her Outstanding People* (Dublin, 1980), p. 78.

¹⁶ BMH, WS 347 (Patrick Callanan).

¹⁷ Desmond Greaves, *Liam Mellows and the Irish Revolution* (London, 1971), p. 90.

However, despite their incompetence, when news reached the RIC of the early stages of the Rising, all rural barracks in the county were evacuated and the police flooded into central depots in Ballinasloe, Tuam, Galway town and Ballinasloe. Thus, it is highly likely that the Volunteers would have had a number of days when they could have consolidated their positions and generated support across the county. In Athenry, the police remained inside the barracks for the whole week, despite the events going on around them. Only a couple of small parties of RIC even approached the rebel force, who were, in effect, given the run of the east Galway countryside. Looking back after forty years, O'Monacháin believed that the county could easily have been taken, 'the large force of R.I.C. did not suspect anything. If the original plan had been carried out, all barracks in the county would have been taken without a fight.'¹⁸ In the end, however, the force of over six hundred men went out armed with only about twenty .303 service rifles, a few miniature rifles and about three hundred shotguns.¹⁹ In retrospect, the determination of the Galway men to 'come out' seems somewhat bizarre. The personal determination of Mellows to make a stand, come what may, was probably never in doubt but in Galway he was fortunate in that he commanded men who were undoubtedly more desensitised to violence than in most parts of the country and to whom a tradition of resistance to the state had never subsided since the original Land War. Cattle driving and various forms of 'moonlighting' would certainly have familiarised many with the use of pike and shotgun. Ailbhe O'Monacháin later recalled:

The Galway Volunteers, when they were out, did not do anything big. Badly armed as they were, their only hope was to bottle up the British garrison and divert the British from concentrating on Dublin. This they succeeded in doing. There were about 600 square miles of Galway Free County, from Galway city to Ballinasloe, Tuam to Gort.²⁰

¹⁸ BMH, WS 298 (Ailbhe O'Monacháin).

¹⁹ BMH, WS 344 (John Broderick).

²⁰ BMH, WS 298 (Ailbhe O'Monacháin).

3.2 The Context of the Rising

The 1916 Rising in Galway took place in the context of the increasing political fractiousness that resulted from the 1914 split in the Volunteers. This also lay behind a number of other seemingly unconnected disputes in the county. Violent feuding was taking place between semi-organised political rivals in Turloughmore and Craughwell, as well as frequent outbreaks of violence between republicans and nationalists in Galway town and Loughrea. The split also resulted in a very damaging schism for the GAA in the county with a rival National Gaelic Athletic Association founded in the south of the county by United Irish League supporters in response to the prominent role of local Irish Volunteers on the county board of the GAA. In the context of the vehemence of the language used in the split in the GAA, along with the actual violence in towns across the county, the Rising became perceived by many of the combatants as a showdown between the two groups: The rural tenant farmers of the Irish Volunteers based around the town of Athenry, versus sections of the urban poor, many of whom had relatives fighting at the front, combined with the noticeably more respectable local elites of the UIL whose strength was based in the towns of Loughrea, Galway and Ballinasloe. The sheer intensity of the ill-feeling that the split exposed in parts of the county partially explains the ferocity of the reaction to the rebels in the same areas and it was widely believed that the rural Volunteers were marching across the countryside to take control of the towns. For many nationalists, the Volunteers' strength and the belief that they were heavily armed and intent on occupying the garrison towns presented a very frightening scenario given the depth of local enmities. Hence, the belief that they had to be defeated by any means necessary, lest they look to settle old scores with their bitter rivals. In reality, the situation was somewhat different than later described by the nationalists of Galway and given Mellows's command it is highly unlikely that local people would have been harmed in any way. The psychological effect that the threat posed to the respectable elites of the towns explains their alarm and paranoia but their reaction also reflected a significant degree of bluff.

In early 1915 the police reported that 'Cummer and Turloughmore are in a state of disturbance and terrorised by secret society and moonlighting gangs.'²¹ Whilst secret societies were no doubt active in the area, the situation had become volatile due to the fall out over the split in the Volunteer movement and the subsequent bravado of some local leaders in

²¹ CI monthly report, west Galway, February 1915, CO 904/96.

provoking a number of riots and shootings. Local tensions exploded early in the New Year when a riot broke out in Turloughmore after publican and district Councillor Patrick Murray proclaimed himself a pro-German at a social gathering in the village, subsequent to which the police were attacked and fourteen men sent for trial for rioting and assault. Some of Murray's supporters were shot at on the way home, with two men sustaining wounds and three houses attacked by armed men.²² In the months following the disturbance, numerous gun attacks took place in the district, with violence peaking in March when the police reported that 'a strong faction has been organised to crush Murray and William O'Brien.'²³ The provision of extra police merely contained the situation, and the authorities later noted that whilst 'Turloughmore has been kept in order by the large force of police, the elements of disorder are there and the slightest relaxation of police watchfulness will result in crime.'²⁴ The riot had a sequel known locally as 'The battle of Murray's Fort' when police were caught in a riot in Turloughmore village as rival Volunteer companies attacked each other from their respective public houses. The RIC were forced to fire over the heads of the groups and police and rioters suffered severe head injuries as stones, hurls and other objects were used as weapons. Once again, a large number of Murray's supporters were later arrested and sent for trial. The number of extra police in the area had to be greatly increased in the ensuing months with the county inspector later noting that 'at Turloughmore and Cummer, the peace is only protected with incessant police vigilance, and no less than two head constables and fifty extra police have been drafted into an area of a very few square miles.'²⁵

At Craughwell police had been closely monitoring a long running feud between the local UIL and land agitators led by Fenian, Tom Kenny. The feud had involved numerous gun attacks over a number of years and had been the source of intense bitterness, virtually dividing the community for many years.²⁶ The dispute had its origins in a disagreement within the local UIL over the boycott of a local grazier with the more moderate faction opposing the strident campaign of the local secret society. The row had involved a series of gun attacks, faction fights and boycotting and continued for a number of decades afterwards. By 1915, the permanent presence of extra police in the area had tempered the violence. However, in the

²² *Connacht Tribune*, 13 February 1915.

²³ CI monthly report, west Galway, April 1915, CO 904/96.

²⁴ CI monthly report, west Galway, May 1915, CO 904/96.

²⁵ CI monthly report, west Galway, May 1915, CO 904/97.

²⁶ See Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, pp 161-62.

fallout from the dispute the local UIL had been split, with a rival Sinn Féin cumann founded and the village and parish torn apart by the bitterness on either side.

The GAA in county Galway also broke into rival organisations following the split in the Volunteer movement. The dispute was prompted, it was claimed, by the secessionists, owing to the undue influence of secret society men on the County Board of the GAA. The reality had more to do with the intense bitterness, particularly in the Gort and Loughrea areas, over the role of the Athenry Volunteers' involvement in secret society activity and resentment at these individuals' subsequent control of the GAA in the county. The administration of the GAA in Galway, and hurling in particular, was strongly influenced at an administrative level by members of the IRB, who were also senior Irish Volunteers. Following the split in the Volunteer ranks, the bitterness in the county resulted in the majority of clubs and officials in south Galway breaking away in late 1915 to join the short-lived National Gaelic Athletic Association, which had a small number of registered clubs, mainly from Wexford and Dublin, who had also split from the GAA for political reasons.

In 1915 the county board of the Galway GAA consisted of ten men, six of whom were amongst the most prominent IRB men in the county. (It is very possible, if not highly likely, that the remaining four men were also IRB members.) Patrick Murray of the Turloughmore dispute, William Cannon of Tuam, Stephen Jordan and Larry Lardiner of Athenry, and George Nicholls of Galway Town, were all committee members as well as prominent Irish Volunteer organisers and the Chairman of the Board, Tom Kenny, the former head centre of the IRB in the county.²⁷ There had been heated exchanges at county board meetings for a number of years, as south Galway members in particular, resented the role of Kenny and the authority he exercised over the organisation. This resentment cannot be detached from local political wrangling and the fact that Kenny's main detractors were from the Loughrea club, where the UIL still had considerable local support, was no co-incidence. The split in the movement was precipitated by the failure of any of the south Galway executive to attend the AGM of the County Board in Athenry, thus excluding themselves from any representation on the board for the coming year. The following month a letter appeared in the *Connacht Tribune* that was to begin a lengthy and bitter exchange of views. Noting that the National Gaelic Athletic Association had held their initial meeting in Wexford a representative of the rebel

²⁷ *Connacht Tribune*, 7 April 1915.

south Galway executive wrote, 'latterly we have watched with the heartiest approval their efforts to rid the association of an incubus, which is steadily and surely ruining it.'²⁸

Shortly afterwards, the south Galway executive announced that they were taking steps to arrange a match against the Dublin NGAA club Kickhams, to be played in Loughrea. At a following meeting, Martin Ward, of the Loughrea club, who was also a UIL town councilor, head of the Town Tenants Association and close associate of William Duffy MP, told a gathering of delegates:

The old enthusiasm for the game was gone, owing to the way it was run by one or two men in county Galway. This was not to be wondered at, as the principal it was manipulated under was wrong; using their position to inculcate into the minds of young men doctrines, which at this crisis in our history, should not as much as be mentioned among them.²⁹

The Galway affiliate of the NGAA was officially founded in early August, comprising ten south Galway clubs. Whilst the county board of the GAA was clearly dominated by the IRB, the 'rebel' executive was dominated by representatives of the UIL. Of the seven member executive, at least four men were prominent UIL representatives, with Martin Ward, Thomas Coen and James Mulkerrins, all Rural District Councillors and Brendan Cawley, a prominent UIL activist from Craughwell, acting as treasurer. The ten clubs involved in the breakaway group continued to play matches exclusively amongst themselves for a number of years afterwards, although the movement died out in 1918. On a national level only a small number of breakaway clubs from Sligo and Kildare ever joined with the Wexford, Dublin and Galway clubs, and the association folded a number of years later. However, the ten clubs that did break away in Galway represented a serious challenge to the association in the county and the lasting bitterness of the affair soured an already tense situation, which added extra vigour, as if more were needed, to local political rivalries.

²⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 29 May 1915.

²⁹ *Connacht Tribune*, 10 July 1917.

3.3 The East Galway Rising

That the Sinn Féin insurrection was so quickly put down and that it was confined to so few districts outside the metropolitan area, must be ascribed to the fortunate arrest of Sir Roger Casement and the failure of the German ship to land the required arms and ammunition. There is no reason whatever to believe that if these arrangements had not miscarried, the Irish Volunteers in any county would not [sic] have held back. In fact, the evidence is all the other way.³⁰

The first shots of the East Galway Rising were fired at 7.20 a.m. on Tuesday morning when a group of rebels numbering up to one hundred men attacked the police barracks at Clarinbridge. On reaching the village, the Clarinbridge and Killeeneen companies were reinforced by Volunteers from Gort. They immediately cut telegraph poles, blocked the main road through the village and partially destroyed the bridge in the town. A group of Volunteers, some as young as seventeen, rushed the door of the police barracks and successfully gained access. The four policemen remained upstairs and managed to reinforce the first floor of the building and the young inexperienced Volunteers, uncertain of what to do next, gave the defenders enough time to load their weapons and open fire, forcing a partial retreat. The local parish priest, Fr Tully, who was saying mass in the village when the attack began, pleaded with Mellows to call off the attack, but he refused and called for the barracks to surrender. After a few hours of sniping at the building, Mellows realised the attack was futile and the main body of rebels moved about seven miles further up the Galway road to Oranmore, leaving a small force behind, keeping the building under intermittent fire all day. They took with them three local R.I.C. men who had been caught unawares whilst out on patrol.³¹

As the rebels approached the village of Oranmore, they were joined by the local Oranmore and Maree companies. When word reached the town of the large group approaching the village, the four local constables barricaded themselves into the barracks. About thirty-five rebels approached the building and tried to rush the door and were greeted with a fusillade of rifle fire from the reinforced windows above. When Mellows approached the door and

³⁰ CI monthly report, east Galway, May 1916, CO 904/61.

³¹ Constables Malone, Donovan and Manning became the first prisoners of the rebel force. Constable Manning had attempted to escape when confronted by the Volunteers and had received shotgun wounds to the face, which were later treated in the convent in Clarinbridge.

demanded their surrender, he was greeted with more revolver shots. The building was then kept under intermittent fire all afternoon, until Sir Andrew Armstrong and a contingent of the Connacht Rangers arrived by special train, along with a section of Special Constables and RIC to relieve the beleaguered barracks. A five-minute fire fight ensued as the security Forces charged down the main street at the rebels' position and wounding a Volunteer in the thigh.³² At this stage the Volunteers had commandeered a number of motor cars, vans and traps, as they had been stopping and commandeering any vehicles that approached the barricades all day. The drivers were usually taken prisoner before being released after a short time. The rebels brought Constable McDermott, whom they had managed to seize in the town, along with them. Rather than face the infinitely better armed troops, they evacuated the village in their vehicles and retreated toward Athenry.

Meanwhile, companies from Derrydonnell, Newcastle, Athenry, Cussaun, Rockfield, Kilconieron, Kiltulla, and Killimordaly, had been turning out in large numbers at the Town Hall in Athenry and over three hundred men were now milling about preparing bombs and equipment. Frank Hynes, Captain of the Athenry Company explained:

They called in all the peelers from the outlying stations and occupied all the houses in the vicinity of the barracks and made an attack on the barracks impossible. The only thing we could do was prepare to defend ourselves in case of an attack. About one dozen armed men remained in my house during the night. On Tuesday night we decided to retreat towards Oranmore and meet Mellows and his contingent and leave it to him to decide what was best to do.³³

Mellows decided that they should move their camp a couple of miles west of the town to the Athenry agricultural college, cutting telegraph wires in the area, tearing up a section of railway track and commandeering foodstuffs on the way.³⁴ As the rebels regrouped at their new camp, they heard the first boom from big guns of *The Gloucester* in Galway Bay. The

³² In his brief account of the Rising for the 1966 edition of *Capuchin Annual*, Mattie Neilan states that Ryder later died from his wounds. Neilan was a prominent Volunteer who took part in the Rising, later becoming a *Fianna Fáil* TD. Ryder does not appear to have been deported afterwards and I have so far failed to find any other information on him. However, Neilan was quite elderly by then and there are several inaccuracies in his account, *Capuchin Annual* (1967), p. 324.

³³ BMH, WS 446 (Frank Hynes).

³⁴ BMH, WS 344 (John Broderick).

shelling of the coast between Oranmore and Castlegar, which continued all week, began on Tuesday afternoon. The shells were landing harmlessly in open country but the effect on the atmosphere in the rebel camp and the people in the countryside was immense. The rebels believed that their 'gallant German allies' had actually arrived and that the booming that they could hear was the sound of a naval battle between German U-boats and the British Navy.³⁵

The new rebel camp was now a hive of activity, and morale amongst the men was high with Cumann na mBan putting on a dance show for the men at night.

Many men who had not been in the Volunteers at all joined up to fight and all were in the best of humour and full of pluck. Several priests, including Fr Daly of Athenry, visited the farm and heard the men's confessions. Food was plentiful, and the people of the county were very generous in supplying baked bread, milk, etc.³⁶

Frank Hynes, an IRA officer from Athenry, explained the Volunteers' actions at this point:

Anyone reading this account would be inclined to think that we were acting in a rather cowardly manner – why did we not attack the barracks in Athenry? Why did we keep retreating, etc? The Volunteers who were out in Galway numbered between five and six hundred. We had about fifty full service rifles and about thirty rounds for each rifle, about one dozen pikes and a good many were not armed at all, so that if we wasted our ammunition on attacking the barracks, we had nothing to fight with after that.³⁷

Meanwhile, about six miles east of Galway town, the Claregalway and Castlegar companies billeted for the night at the small village of Carnmore to await orders from Mellows at Athenry. When news of the rebels gathering at Carnmore crossroads reached Galway town at around four o'clock on Wednesday morning, a large group of Special Constables and RIC formed a convoy of fourteen cars and drove to Carnmore to confront the rebels.³⁸ As Colonel Bodkin, and DI Heard arrived, they were immediately fired on. The confrontation at Carnmore pitted many of the men from either side of the Volunteer divide in Galway town

³⁵ BMH, WS 298 (Ailbhe O'Monacháin).

³⁶ BMH, WS 298 (Ailbhe O'Monacháin).

³⁷ BMH, WS 446 (Frank Hynes).

³⁸ BMH, WS 714 (Thomas Hynes).

that had been involved in the original violence following the split in 1914. Mick Newell recalled the scene:

The enemy advanced up to the cross roads and Constable Whelan was pushed by District Inspector Heard up to the wall which was about four feet high, the District Inspector standing behind Whelan and holding him by the collar of his tunic. Constable Whelan shouted, 'surrender boys, I know ye all.' Whelan was shot dead and the District Inspector fell also and lay motionless on the ground. They got back into the cars and went in the direction of Oranmore.³⁹

Following the skirmish, the insurgents made their way to Athenry joining up with their comrades before they marched south. They took with them Constable Walsh, whom they had captured at the police hut at Lydecan. Late on Wednesday, over six hundred rebels marched in military formation from Athenry to Moyode castle, located between Athenry and Loughrea, arriving around seven or eight on Thursday morning.⁴⁰ The camp was a hive of activity, with local visitors coming and going and parties of Volunteers heading out to investigate the local countryside for intelligence and supplies.

However, the officers were unhappy with the capacity of the old mansion to withstand an assault, as the group now numbered around six hundred and fifty men, and they were beginning to have difficulty keeping everybody fed.⁴¹ Hunger began to affect morale, forcing Mellows to address the men on Thursday night, asking anybody who wasn't happy to leave. 'Some men for whom there was no arms, decided to go home and one whole company went away.'⁴²

The earlier euphoria was beginning to fade as the sobering realisation sank in that it was only a matter of time before they would have to face infinitely better equipped British troops.⁴³ Their chances of putting up any kind of defence with so few arms were hopeless and rumours were circulating in the camp of the imminent arrival of heavily armed troops. These were

³⁹ BMH, WS 342 (Michael Newell).

⁴⁰ BMH, WS 343 (James Barrett).

⁴¹ BMH, WS 344 (John Broderick).

⁴² BMH, WS 298 (Ailbhe O'Monacháin).

⁴³ BMH, WS 344 (John Broderick).

taken even more seriously when the source of many of them was Tom Kenny himself. Kenny had been riding to the rebel camp all week with dispatches. Frank Hynes explains:

We will give the bearers of these false rumours the charity of our silence, but one in particular who was responsible for most of them was a very prominent republican and a member of the I.R.B. up to Easter Week. This man did his best to get us to give up and go home and have sense. We called an officer meeting and I'm afraid that one or two of our officers were anxious to take him seriously and take his advice and go home. Liam got disgusted and said he would not disband his men. He handed over command to Larry [Lardiner] but Larry would not disband them. Liam, after about an hour took over again.⁴⁴

The battle for the hearts and minds of the men was now under way between the outsider Mellows, and the Fenian, Kenny, and by this time, Kenny was deeply resentful of his new adversary. Nonetheless, the train lines had now been repaired and it was obvious to the military that a nationwide rebellion was not going to occur. They could now afford to spare troops from the capital and on Friday heavily armed companies of the Sherwood Foresters began arriving at Loughrea. Late on Thursday night the rebels left Moyode and marched south to Limepark, an old shell of a big house, near Peterswell. On Friday night, the Volunteer command decided to change camp and go towards County Clare and attempt to join up with the Clare Volunteers. It was rumoured that large forces of British troops were concentrating in Athenry and Galway, intending to surround Moyode.⁴⁵ Fr Feeney, who had been with the Volunteers all week, was now joined by Fr Fahy from Maynooth, and the pair pleaded with Mellows to disband his men before the military encircled them.⁴⁶ When Mellows refused their pleas, Fr Fahy managed to persuade him to allow him to put his case to a meeting of brigade

⁴⁴ BMH, WS 446 (Frank Hynes).

⁴⁵ On the way past Craughwell, some of the rebels entered a local house and dragged Edward Willis from his bed. Willis was an employee of Christopher Kearns, a 'gentleman farmer' from Oranmore, who had boarded *The Gloucester* to help direct the shelling of the coast. Willis was most likely in the town to glean information on the rebels' movements with the help of the local National Volunteers. Willis actually lived in Oranmore and his presence in Craughwell would have raised the Volunteers' suspicions that he was staying with local National Volunteers to gain information on the situation in the countryside in order to report back to the authorities. He was taken prisoner and brought to Limepark, where he was later released unharmed. *The Galway Express*, 6 May 1916.

⁴⁶ Fr Fahy who was based at the College in Maynooth, was visiting the area and had been staying in the Esker Monastery, near Athenry. Fr Fahy was a republican and remained active in the republican movement all his life.

officers. Michael Kelly later recalled the scene: 'A discussion then arose mainly between the priest and Mellows. The priest was trying to convince the meeting that, as the Volunteers in Dublin had surrendered, the Galway Volunteers should disperse, as their position was hopeless in the circumstances.'⁴⁷

After Fr Fahy spoke, Mellows as officer commanding, addressed the men. He said he would not order them to disband without a fight, but that he was willing to put it to a vote and let them decide their own fate. Only Mellows and his deputy O'Monachain voted not to disband.⁴⁸ Mellows accepted the decision of his men to leave but he refused to the end to give an official order to do so. Fr Fahy remembered, 'Mellows was very depressed, the news from Dublin upset him greatly.'⁴⁹ Frank Hynes recalls the final conclave:

There was terrible confusion but in the midst of all of it, the rifles were thrown here and there on the ground. When Liam had bidden goodbye to all of them he came up to me, 'Goodbye Frank', he said. My only fear was that he would object to me staying with him. I said, 'I'm staying with you.' The poor man took my hand in both his and said, 'God Bless you'. I knew he appreciated it very much because I think I was the only one who bothered about his fate.⁵⁰

The Rising in the county had ended up in an undignified farce with Mellows's men abandoning his command and returning home. The Volunteers had generally respected both private property and local people throughout the week but their spirits were broken by the prospect of facing fully armed British regiments against which they had no hope. The humiliation for the men involved was immense and the episode became a source of ridicule by their rivals in the county for many years to come. Events beyond the control of the large force controlled their destiny from the beginning and the feeling of hopelessness at the end of the week would shortly turn to anger at their betrayal by others in the community. The sheer size of the Galway Volunteer force and their unchallenged control of the countryside could not prevent their detractors from accusing the Galway force of simply opting not to attack the central barracks in the county, choosing instead to wait aimlessly in Athenry whilst a large garrison of police remained isolated only a mile or so away. Despite combatants' later claims

⁴⁷ BMH, WS 1,564 (Michael Kelly).

⁴⁸ BMH, WS 383 (Rev Thomas Fahy).

⁴⁹ BMH, WS 383 (Rev Thomas Fahy).

⁵⁰ BMH, WS 447 (Frank Hynes).

that lack of arms dictated the course of events, the group were unwilling to attack other garrisons in the area and those they did attack in Clarinbridge and Oranmore, they were unable to take.

Despite having a detailed picture of events in the county, and whilst acknowledging the potential possibilities inherent in the Volunteers' plans, the degree to which Mellows could have pushed his men into outright insurrection remains seriously doubtful. The key issue relates to the degree to which the Volunteers were genuinely prepared to carry out a serious offensive insurrection. The evidence strongly suggests that, apart from Mellows and a handful of officers, the Galway Volunteers were not committed to enduring the dangers of a sustained campaign and many of the men were completely unaware of Mellows' intentions when they mobilised. Once the consequences of his aspirations for the Rising became clear, rank and file Volunteers simply lost their appetite for violence, deserted Mellows and returned to their homes. The affair became, in every sense, a bitter episode for all those involved.

3.4 The Nationalist Response

The course of events in Galway town during Easter Week highlights the extreme diversity of reactions to the Rising from within the county. When Pearse's mobilisation order arrived late on Easter Monday 1916, the town company, racked with anxiety and confusion, was simply in no state to mobilise.⁵¹ On Tuesday morning, the police moved quickly and arrested any known republicans including most of the Volunteer officers and senior IRB men in the town. Thomas Hynes remembered, 'as far as the city was concerned it was too late to do anything.'⁵² Thomas Courtney, who had been racing around the town trying to get his men out, found fellow Volunteers were unwilling to obey his orders, and many could not be found.⁵³ When

⁵¹ Frank Hardiman recalled, 'When the Rising took place, the Volunteers in Galway city were in such a weak position, that it was almost impossible for them to act as a unit. The uncertainty of the Rising coming off, left the Volunteers without an opportunity of arranging to link up with the country units.' BMH, WS 406 (Frank Hardiman).

⁵² Only three men from Galway left to join Mellows at Carnmore, a boy named McDermott, James Corbett and one other. The strong IRB cell in the college did not take part in the Rising, as they were home on their Easter Holidays. BMH, WS 714 (Thomas Hynes).

⁵³ He later recalled, 'I think it was on Wednesday evening, I am not sure, I went to the house of the Captain of the Galway Company and asked him to go as far as Castlegar for me, as I had to go to

the news of the rebel activity in the countryside reached the town on Tuesday morning, it created a sensation amongst the townsfolk. Finding themselves cut off by rail and road from the rest of the country and telegraph lines cut, rumour and mild hysteria quickly took over. The vast majority of the people had little sympathy with the rebels and as word spread that the Volunteers were massing in Oranmore, they were viewed by many as a hostile invading force. The *Connacht Tribune* reported that 'on a muggy day, [with a] dry atmosphere and serene sky':

All in all, one had the vague sense that one was living through an historic hour. That for a day, the town was recalling the stirring days of Emmet and Lord Edward Fitzgerald and the men of '67, with this taking of police barracks, these conjectural Risings and marchings and the same dependence on primitive methods, the dispatch rider and rumour, which characterised the happenings of those times, as if we were not living in the days of motorcar, telegraph and telephone.⁵⁴

All premises closed their doors and all work in the town came to an immediate stop. Amid fears of a repetition of the events in the capital, the post office was placed under armed guard by the military and a notice of martial law was posted in the window stating that 'all licensed premises in the urban district of Galway were to remain closed forthwith and all persons were to remain indoors between the hours of five p.m. and eight a.m.' Members of the National Volunteers were explicitly exempt from the emergency regulations. The military curfew was greatly resented by the townsfolk and added to the sense of hysteria in the air.

Men were no longer able to concentrate their minds on their business, and all and sundry fairly took to the streets. Comfortable merchants went about and the streets were filled. Preparations were made for meeting and repelling the invasion and anxious people found themselves drifting towards the Square and looking in the direction of Oranmore and keeping a close eye from Foster street.⁵⁵

Spiddal. He refused, I then asked him to get some of the Galway Company to just take a message for me. He said he would not and told me I was a fool and did I think I was mad. My younger brother called at the home of three Volunteers and asked them to come to my home. Each said he would, but none of them came. On Thursday evening before I was taken to the barracks, I saw one of them deliberately avoid me.' BMH, WS 447 (Thomas Courtney).

⁵⁴ *Connacht Tribune*, 29 April 1916.

⁵⁵ *Connacht Tribune*, 29 April 1916.

The situation was further inflamed by misleading reports in the *Connacht Tribune* and the *Galway Express*. The two papers repeatedly reported the number of insurgents gathered at Athenry as being in the region of two thousand men, with reports of multiple deaths at Carnmore and Oranmore. The sense of isolation from the rest of the country was heightened by the barricades on the country roads to the east of the town. The Volunteers at Oranmore, Clarinbridge, Kilcolgan and Athenry had been hijacking motorcars and horses since Tuesday morning preventing reliable news from the surrounding countryside coming into the town, and dissuading motorists from the town venturing into the countryside. The situation was further compounded when a section of the train line to Dublin was ripped up near Oranmore by members of the Athenry company.⁵⁶

On Tuesday afternoon, a public meeting was called by the Urban District Council and attended by over one hundred people in the Town Hall. Originally convened for the council chambers it was moved to a larger venue to facilitate the large crowd that turned up. A 'Committee for Public Safety' was formed to liaise with and support the security forces and to organise a concerted civilian response to the crisis. The Committee was chaired by Martin McDonagh and citizens were urged to offer themselves for enrolment as Special Constables, or 'in any way the authorities may consider, they may be useful in the present crisis'. The 'Specials' as they were known, acted as a reserve force for the police all week and were armed and under military command. The *Galway Express* later thanked forty-seven local men whom they claimed were on duty that night and 'did much to relieve the police and give the latter a well deserved and much needed few hours' rest.⁵⁷ Numerous speeches were then made about the crisis enveloping the town and a series of fiery diatribes denouncing the rebels delivered. Significantly, Thomas Kenny began by decrying that 'they had been plunged into a civil war,' before going on to compare the actions of the rebels with the bravery of the Irish soldiers at the front. Of the Dublin Rising, he informed the audience:

A whole lot of men had, according to rumour, tried to hold up the public offices, the post office and places like that in Dublin. What on earth effect that could have in ten or twenty years as regards the government of this country? Was it not a million times better to allow

⁵⁶ *Connacht Tribune*, 29 April 1916.

⁵⁷ *Galway Express*, 29 April 1916.

things to go on the way they had been and not try and take the law into their own hands.⁵⁸

Another speaker continued 'Irishmen as a rule are not fools but unfortunately a large number of young men throughout the country were led astray by gentlemen who should know better and he for one did not blame the ignorant countrymen'.⁵⁹ The Reverend Davis agreed, adding 'They have been led into a trap and it is only afterwards when a settlement is reached, that they will realise what a mistake they have made in supporting the hot heads of the country.'⁶⁰ Another speaker then expressed the widespread sentiment that the rebels were 'a movement not for the benefit of Ireland but for Prussia and the leaders must be taught a lesson they'd remember for ever.'⁶¹ Professor Kinkead also saw the hand of the Germans at play in the county and believed, 'the whole thing was engineered with German money, for German purposes.'⁶² Thomas McDonagh, who could not understand the actions of the rebels, was quick to point out that 'the farmers of this country were treated better than those of England and Scotland. Just now the tenant farmers of Ireland were more prosperous than the farmers in any other part of the world and yet they rose up in rebellion, it was lamentable.'⁶³

Throughout the week, meetings of the 'Committee for Public Safety' were held on a daily basis at the Town Hall as the security operation in the city passed from the police to the military under the supreme command of Major Craig.⁶⁴ As the week progressed there began to be growing concern and anger at the perceived isolation of the town and much debate centred around potential food rationing measures, with talk of an impending bread famine should the town remain cut off from the rest of the country. Later that night, a group of National Volunteers under Captain J.P. McNeill donned their old uniforms and a column of forty men marched around the town in military formation with rifles and bayonets, which had earlier been provided by the military. As the week progressed, police reinforcements who had evacuated the surrounding countryside, poured into the town. Their numbers were later boosted with the arrival on Thursday of cars carrying one hundred and fifty RIC men, who

⁵⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 29 April 1916.

⁵⁹ *Connacht Tribune*, 29 April 1916.

⁶⁰ *Connacht Tribune*, 29 April 1916.

⁶¹ *Connacht Tribune*, 29 April 1916.

⁶² *Connacht Tribune*, 29 April 1916.

⁶³ *Connacht Tribune*, 29 April 1916.

⁶⁴ *Connacht Tribune*, 29 April 1916.

had been sent from Belfast. Groups of citizens were now responding to the crisis as best they could. Dr Sandys, divisional surgeon and Mr O'Dockery, Superintendent, in conjunction with St Johns Ambulance Brigade, took over houses, and a full staff of trained nurses and assistants were in readiness, day and night, to attend any injured troops that may be brought in.⁶⁵ The *Galway Express* in an article entitled 'Our Citizen Army' reported midweek that 'One of the brightest spots in the present lamentable affair is the manner in which Galway civilians have risen to the occasion. A fine citizen army of special constables, dispatch riders, assistants in first aid, etc, have cheerfully given their service to the local authorities in their hour of need.'⁶⁶

Volunteer Thomas Courtney remembered 'Specials' following him about wherever he went, so much so, that, he had to enlist a 'young buck', teenager Michael Heffernan, to report to him the movements of the Crown Forces. Courtney recalled, 'All roads were guarded, they would not let a boy of four out of the town, everybody was on the streets talking about a rebel army that was to march on the town. It was rumoured that rebel villages were to be shelled from ships in the harbour and that a submarine with arms was to land in Rosmuc.'⁶⁷ By Wednesday, the RIC in the city aided by the Special Constables had rounded up a motley crew of any republicans they could find in the town. Michael O'Droighneain, the IRB organiser from Furbo; solicitor George Nichols, IRB centre for Galway; Frank Hardiman of the Town Hall; Padraic O'Maille, later Ceann Comhairle of the First Free State Dail; and Professor Steinberger, a German linguistics professor from the College, were among the most prominent. The men were tied up and loaded onto open top vehicles before being paraded around the streets for the entertainment of the local people. Frank Hardiman remembered being set upon and beaten by 'rowdies' at a number of places and O'Droighneain recalled being frequently abused and pelted with mud by passers by.⁶⁸

On Tuesday afternoon, a Navy vessel, *The Gloucester* began bombarding the coastline and the sound of the first four-inch shells increased the already heightened sense of anxiety in the town. The boom of the big guns could be heard by the rebels twelve miles away in Athenry, further fuelling rumours that Oranmore and other 'rebel villages' were being bombarded.

⁶⁵ *Galway Express*, 29 April 1916.

⁶⁶ *Galway Express*, 29 April 1916.

⁶⁷ BMH, WS 447 (Thomas Courtney).

⁶⁸ BMH, WS 374 (Michael O'Droighneain); BMH, WS 406 (Frank Hardiman).

Another rumour, that a naval battle was taking place between German U-boats and the British Fleet was widely believed. In fact, the shells were deliberately targeted at open countryside and were never used on civilian or urban targets as the authorities lacked any concrete intelligence on the rebel activity in the countryside. The shelling provoked terror in the communities living around Galway Bay and people quickly began to flee to the perceived safety of the town. The *Galway Express* reported, 'Even as we write, streams of peasant refugees are fleeing from their once peaceful homes in the tranquil countryside from Oranmore to Castlegar and vicinity to seek the shelter denied to them by the folly of their own friends and neighbours.' The paper later reported that the village of Oranmore 'is being gradually deserted until now it is a veritable wilderness'. Thomas Kenny, editor of *The Connacht Tribune* assured his readers, 'The citizens can now rest in perfect security ... this vessel could easily turn its guns, not only on Oranmore, but on Athenry, with the most effective results.'⁶⁹

As the week progressed more British Naval vessels arrived in the Bay and on Wednesday a man-of-war arrived carrying a company of Royal Munster Fusiliers. The men were given an official welcome at the quay by members of the 'Committee for Public Safety' before making their way to Renmore barracks amid the cheers of the townsfolk and by Friday, there were five Navy vessels in the bay and the prisoners from the town were put on board the cruisers.⁷⁰ On board *The Gloucester* was another group of prisoners including a group of unlucky Aran Island men had been dragged out of the water and taken prisoner when their currach was overturned whilst bringing turf out to the islands. On Friday the prisoners, minus the island men, were transferred to the sloop, *The Snowdrop* and brought to Cobh before being deported to England.

Later that week, Thomas Courtney recalled being told by a sailor that the Navy and 'the specials' had worked out a trap for the rebels, that had it worked, would have resulted in massive loss of life. Although the shelling of the coastline had a serious psychological impact, it had not resulted in any actual devastation.⁷¹ Stark, who was on the Cruiser, told Courtney, 'The shells they were firing were only four inches. It was a trick to cod the shiners, to make

⁶⁹ *Connacht Tribune*, 29 April 1916.

⁷⁰ *The Sayonara, The Guillemot, The Gloucester, The Laburnum* and a sloop ship, *The Snowdrop*. BMH, WS 714 (Thomas Hynes).

⁷¹ The *Connacht Tribune* did report that a cow had been 'knocked out' in Ballindooley.

them think that they had not the range to hit the Dublin road.’⁷² In fact, the cruiser had larger shells on board which had the range to hit the village and the surrounding countryside, including the Galway road. The plan was that after continuous firing along the coastline, the rebels would be lulled into a false sense of security and believe that they could safely advance into the town. The cruiser had the larger shells trained onto the road in anticipation of the Volunteers falling into their trap.

Frank Hardiman, who was a prisoner aboard *The Laburnum*, confirmed Courtney’s story in his account of his ordeal.⁷³ He stated that the firing was being directed on the ship by two special constables, Christopher Kearns, from Oranmore, and Leslie Edmonds from the town. Using their local knowledge of the area, the men were picking out the most obvious approach route the rebels might take, to allow the military to get their range in advance of an approach. Meanwhile, another group of Special Constables were on the roof of the Railway Hotel in Eyre Square. Using the panoramic view of the bay that the roof of the hotel afforded, the ‘Specials’ were relaying back to the cruiser the accuracy of their firing and any rebel movements on the horizon.

On Wednesday ‘The Committee for Public Safety’ passed a resolution calling for the ‘crushing, by every means possible’ of the men, who for many of them, had been their former comrades in the Volunteer movement:

That we, this public meeting declare the action of ill advised persons in the county, who have at a time when the valour of the Irish troops has done so much to shed glory on the Empire, chosen to shock and outrage public opinion by bloodshed and civil strife. That we now declare our opinion, that the advice of Mr John Redmond indicates the course which true political wisdom shows to be right and we call on all the authorities and the people of Galway to crush by every means possible, the efforts of the disaffected fanatics and mischief makers.⁷⁴

The lack of solidarity for the country ‘refugees’ in the ‘besieged’ town was now emerging in other ways:

⁷² BMH, WS 447 (Thomas Courtney).

⁷³ BMH, WS 406 (Frank Hardiman).

⁷⁴ *Connacht Tribune*, 29 April 1916.

A new type of blockade has been established in Galway. Country people coming from the direction of the recent Volunteer activities have been forbidden to bring any provisions or household supplies home, lest any of these commodities would find their way to the enemy's camp. The procedure appears to be an effective one.⁷⁵

By Friday, people began to return to work and the market resumed as usual in the Square. On Saturday public houses were given permission to open and schools were ordered to resume on Monday. In the morning, a reconnaissance force of 'specials' ventured out in twenty-five motor cars alongside seventy-five Royal Munster Fusiliers and fifty RIC.⁷⁶ Using their local knowledge of their old comrades and their villages, they ventured as far as Kilcolgan and Carnmore, picking up anyone suspected of involvement in the Rising. By the weekend, the military had ventured to Athenry and found it deserted by the rebels. At the daily meeting of the 'Committee for Public Safety', a telegram of thanks was read out from the military police and the committee was updated on the 'round-up' operation now in progress. A clearly relieved Martin McDonagh declared 'We are with the authorities in this unfortunate matter.'⁷⁷

Like the press nationwide, local newspapers were uniform in their condemnation of the Rising. *The Tuam Herald* described it as 'a melancholy exhibition of midsummer madness' and the rebels as, 'degenerate sons.'⁷⁸ In an editorial 'Poisoning the Well', the *Connacht Tribune* explained, 'The reason we are not all rebels is that we are fortunately sane enough to see that the dreams of Ireland as a sovereign state is hopeless. Attached to England, we must remain.'⁷⁹

Organised support for the authorities was not limited to the city. At Craughwell, Turloughmore and Loughrea, the National Volunteers came out in force to aid the local RIC.⁸⁰ Forty National Volunteers manned the barracks in the village in shifts throughout Easter Week and the *Tuam Herald* commended 'The Craughwell men's loyalty to Ireland,' and claimed the locals 'knew well little mercy would be shown some of them, if those lunatics got

⁷⁵ *Galway Express*, 6 May 1916.

⁷⁶ *Connacht Tribune*, 29 April 1916.

⁷⁷ *Connacht Tribune*, 29 April 1916.

⁷⁸ *Tuam Herald*, 20 May 1916.

⁷⁹ *Connacht Tribune*, 27 May 1916.

⁸⁰ *Galway Express*, 6 May 1916.

into the village'. The paper concluded that the rebels had been frightened away by the loyal Craughwell men as 'cowardice would not allow those German hirelings enter where they knew a warm reception awaited them'. The paper seemed rather surprised at this turn of events, noting that Craughwell was 'previously considered a hell on earth by men who knew it not'.⁸¹ At Turloughmore, an area 'not noted for its loyal sentiment' the *Galway Express* reported, 'notwithstanding its reputation, the village and district of Turloughmore were quiet during the Rising. The local Corps of National Volunteers armed themselves and placed their services at the disposal of the police.'⁸² Similarly in Loughrea:

The National Volunteers met and helped the police and but for them, the town would have been handed over to the crowd for mischief and worse. Their conduct is eminently credible, for it was a trying and courageous act on their part. Great credit is due to Mr William Duffy M.P. and his local and patriotic helpers for having got his men to show themselves true National Volunteers and not the advance guard of looting and murderous Germans.⁸³

The Rising in Galway is significant because of the counter mobilisation of nationalists which it inspired as well as for amount of men who remained under Mellow's command for the whole week. There were other mobilisations nationwide but they did not generate the same level of support or opposition, although there are clear echos of the situation in Galway elsewhere in the country. The most significant of these were at Wexford, Kerry and in county Meath, although many towns such as Tyrellspass, Drogheda and Coalisland witnessed smaller mobilisations.⁸⁴ In Wexford, a smaller, although clearly analogous scenario to Galway developed, when six hundred Volunteers mobilised in Enniscorthy taking possession of the town and declaring it a republic. Communications into the district were severed and the Wexford to Arklow train held up by armed men.⁸⁵ The men were armed with about two hundred shotguns and proceeded to search homes in the area in pursuit of arms, whilst provisions were commandeered from local stores. The police remained inside their barracks throughout and no concerted effort was made to capture the building or its defenders. Meanwhile at nearby Wexford town, over two hundred 'Hibernians, National Volunteers and

⁸¹ *Tuam Herald*, 20 May 1916.

⁸² *Galway Express*, 13 May 1916.

⁸³ *Tuam Herald*, 20 May 1916.

⁸⁴ See Townshend, *Easter 1916*, pp 214-43.

⁸⁵ *Royal Commission on the Rebellion in Ireland*, p 82.

Unionists' collected and took possession of the police barracks in anticipation of an attack from Enniscorthy.⁸⁶

In Kerry two constables were shot and wounded at Firies RIC hut near Farranfore by a local Volunteer acting alone. At Tralee, over three hundred Volunteers assembled awaiting orders from Austin Stack. One hundred army reinforcements were sent for from Dublin and when arms failed to materialise the men simply dispersed.⁸⁷ Police reported 'great unrest' in the Tralee and Caherciveen districts during the week, necessitating the drafting of extra police into the area. Meanwhile, in north county Dublin, the Dublin Brigade's 5th Battalion led by Thomas Ashe engaged Crown Forces at Ashburn after aggressively pursuing a police convoy.⁸⁸ The small column managed to pin down a mobile detachment of RIC men killing eight, whilst sustaining two casualties themselves.

In April 1966, a few weeks after the IRA blew up Nelson's Pillar on Dublin's O'Connell Street, a small plaque erected to the memory of Liam Mellows and his comrades who took part in the 1916 Rising in the west was destroyed in a small explosion at Limepark in South Galway.⁸⁹ The destruction of the plaque served as a stark reminder that even fifty years later, the Rising remained a contentious issue for some sections of local society. Earlier in the year, the *Connacht Tribune* had published a series of vitriolic letters questioning the patriotic merits of the local insurgents.⁹⁰ The reputation of one local leader in particular was attacked and in turn vigorously defended with claims and counter claims of fascist and communist sympathies on the part of the antagonists. The fact that the Rising in the county still provoked intense local debate was indicative of the competing interpretations that still existed in the popular memory.

⁸⁶ *Royal Commission on the Rebellion in Ireland*, p 83.

⁸⁷ *Royal Commission on the Rebellion in Ireland*, p 81.

⁸⁸ See Townshend, *Easter 1916*, pp 214-21.

⁸⁹ *Connacht Tribune*, 23 April 1966.

⁹⁰ During April and March of 1966, 'Moyode man' wrote to the paper questioning the contribution to the rebellion of the people of the town of Loughrea and whether a planned parade to commemorate the Rising was appropriate. In reply 'Loughrea man' contrasted the 'true patriotism' of the Redmondites of the town with the 'brain washed communists' who 'slaughtered a cow for Ireland above at Moyode.' The debate prompted a number of replies from ex-combatants over the course of the next two months.

Conclusion

The Volunteers who went out in 1916 in Galway were overwhelmingly drawn from the land hungry small tenant class. In a study of two hundred and eleven of the Galway insurgents in 1916, sixty-nine per cent were small farmers or their sons, with the next largest group being skilled and unskilled labourers.⁹¹ Thus, it was not incorrect to label the Rebellion, as local commentators did at the time, as an uprising of the small farmers.⁹² The rural class component of the Irish revolution is not merely a sub plot to a greater narrative of the independence struggle. In ascertaining what stance members of the different rural social groups would be likely to adopt on the issue of redistributive land reform, Anthony Varley identified three main groupings in east Galway.⁹³ Graziers and shopkeepers were the dominant economic force in the county and along with the remnants of the landed gentry they formed what he termed the 'large scale/estate agricultural class'. Below the capitalist land class came the 'rising tenant farmer class' composed of farmers who had benefited from earlier Land Acts and in many cases consolidated their holdings over time through cautious management of their resources. At the bottom of the social ladder came the peasantry, eking out a harsh existence on small plots of economically unviable land. Within this group further distinctions can be drawn between subsistence peasants, commercial peasants, herds, labourers, landless labourers and so on.

Land has always had a value far beyond its economic potential in rural society. The struggle fought for the land in previous generations provided a crucial folk memory that motivated and guided the Volunteers in Galway in 1916. As Fitzpatrick notes, 'the forms of liberation sought by potential social revolutionaries were likewise influenced by various visions of history. The campaign for tenants' rights and land purchase assumed that the current occupiers of land were entitled to recognition as proprietors on the grounds that their ancestors had been expropriated by planters and forcibly reduced to the status of insecure tenants... The rhetoric affirming communal sovereignty over the nation's soil and all its resources was a

⁹¹ Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, Tables 13, 14 and 15, pp 186-7.

⁹² *Connacht Tribune and Tuam Herald*, both, 29 April, 1916.

⁹³ Anthony Varley, *The Politics of Agrarian Reform; The State, Nationalists and the Agrarian Question in the West of Ireland* (unpublished PhD Thesis, Southern Illinois University, 1994), p. 96.

commonplace of radical nationalism.⁹⁴ In Galway, the Land War had a double significance, as David Jones has stated, ‘the significance of the Land War was that it created an elaborate and sophisticated organisational structure within the peasantry.’⁹⁵ Due to the unresolved nature of the land question in Galway, it was the inheritor of these structures, the Galway secret society, which had been assimilated by the IRB in the county, which was then subsumed into the Volunteers, that ‘went out’ in 1916.

Class tension was always a feature of rural Ireland and whilst the cultural carnage of the Great Famine has been well documented, some aspects of the countryside had not changed as radically as one might expect. As Padraig Lane points out, ‘in the 1890s Redmond, Dillon and William O’Brien regarded any labourers’ movement as a divisive element in national affairs.’⁹⁶ Lane argues that it was this attitude toward the labourers by the rural middle class, the tenant farmers and their political representatives, which lay at the heart of the matter and it can be seen that throughout the various stages of the land struggle, their attitude was in the main inimical to the labourers.⁹⁷ With farmers increasingly enmeshed in the market system, the rural poor were becoming more reliant on shopkeepers whose increasing prominence in political life had serious repercussions for the rural poor. While the stereotype of the rural ‘Gombeen man’ has often been portrayed in Irish fiction, it has received less academic attention. Liam Kennedy has explained that the rise of traders was one of the most significant features of post famine rural Ireland.⁹⁸ Caught on one hand by their inability to challenge the stranglehold of the graziers on available land and yet reliant for credit on shopkeepers who were also often graziers themselves, the rural poor felt an increasing antagonism toward the mercantile elite. The antagonism manifested itself in the campaign of the local UIL in Galway town against the local co-operative movement who threatened the livelihoods of the traders in the town.

⁹⁴ David Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands* (Oxford, 1998), p. 30.

⁹⁵ David Seth Jones, ‘The Cleavage between Graziers and Peasants in the Land Struggle 1890-1910’, in Samuel Clark and James Donnelly Jnr (eds.) *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780-1914* (Dublin, 1988), p. 386.

⁹⁶ Padraig Lane, ‘Agricultural Labourers and the Land Question’, p. 109.

⁹⁷ Lane, ‘Agricultural Labourers and the Land Question’, pp 112-3.

⁹⁸ Liam Kennedy, ‘Farmers, Traders and Agricultural Politics in pre-Independence Ireland’ in Clark and Donnelly Jnr, (eds.) *Irish Peasants* (Dublin, 1998), p. 342.

This lack of solidarity within rural society was a defining feature of the revolutionary era in Galway. The fiction of tenant/labour unity during earlier struggles was of paramount significance during the revolutionary era, albeit reconfigured as a cleavage between the middle and strong farmers, and the small tenants and landless. During the Land War there was a conviction among the poor that the farmers had come into their inheritance due to the toil of the labourers, and a belief among the farmers that the labourers would undermine their hard fought security. The rural poor, who were the foot soldiers in the UIL's campaigns of agitation in the 1890s and again during the ranch wars of 1906-1909, believed that the graziers had come into their inheritance on the backs of the small tenants and that the accumulation of large grazing farms was fundamentally immoral. It was the small tenants who then formed the backbone of the Volunteers and the suspicion of the movement prevalent among the larger farmers and merchants was fuelled by their particular interpretation of the Rising and their adversarial positions in relation to grazing system, as much as from any particular political ideology or conviction.

The War had a number of serious repercussions for those on the economic margins of rural Ireland. The suspension of emigration dashed any hope of escape from the grinding poverty of the countryside for many young men, putting serious pressure on already hard-pressed families. Secondly, land purchase was effectively stopped as the work of CDB was put on hold. The Board withdrew its impending offers for 159 estates comprising 267,5000 acres and subsequently either rented some of this land to graziers or simply left it idle.⁹⁹ For those whose hopes rested on consolidating their holdings from this land, it represented a grave disappointment. Furthermore with the economic boom which was generated by rising prices, demand for land increased and because land was now more valuable, eleven-month leases became more expensive. In addition, ordinary people increasingly had to pay exorbitant prices for their foodstuffs as profiteering became a serious problem.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the economic boom that the European conflict brought to the stronger farmers and traders further exacerbated the ongoing economic marginalisation of the rural poor which was an inherent product of the grazing system.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Dooley, *The Land For The People*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁰ Reports of the prosecutions of shopkeepers for selling food stuffs, eggs and potatoes in particular, for more than the maximum price set by the government abound in local papers during the period. The profit reward was more than enough to offset the government fines.

¹⁰¹ The two most prominent members of the 'Committee for Public Safety', Martin McDonagh and

Following the Rising, Mellows, O'Monachain, and Kenny managed to make it safely to the U.S. Most of their men had no option but to return to their homes and await the inevitable round up by the Crown Forces. In the course of the following week over four hundred men were picked up and interned in Galway jail before being transported to Richmond Barracks in Dublin. Eventually three hundred and twenty-eight Galway men were deported to Frongoch, with the vast majority released at Christmas 1916. In other parts of the country the prisoners who returned home after the Rebellion were received with a rapturous welcome in an Ireland utterly transformed. In Galway, this was not the case and many of the men and their families suffered genuine hardship upon their return. Martin Dolan, who knew many of the men involved, interviewed surviving veterans of the Galway Rising for the fiftieth anniversary edition of the *Connacht Tribune*. He noted 'No bonfires awaited them, the Galway men returned almost unnoticed and made their way quietly to their homes.'¹⁰² Thomas Ruane of the Claregalway Company was granted early release from Lewis prison on the grounds of ill health. His police file notes, 'there was no one to meet him off the train in Oranmore, just a couple of family members but no supporters.'¹⁰³ Frongoch had been an ordeal for many of the men and Patsy Furey from Oranmore and Martin Rooney of Kilcolgan both died within a few weeks of their return.¹⁰⁴ Like so much of what went on in Galway, their stories were not recorded in any history of the Rebellion.

In Athenry when the men returned they were subjected to a boycott enforced by the local shopkeepers and the large farmers. Gilbert Morrissey O/C Athenry Company put the subsequent inactivity of his area during the War of Independence down to demoralisation following the Rising:

Many of the Volunteers suffered a great deal of hardship subsequent to the Rising of 1916. At that time, a great many of them were in poor circumstances. Many of them were breadwinners for their families and, when they were imprisoned after the Rising, the families suffered. The neighbours at that time were not as sympathetic as they became as the fight progressed, and there were no funds out of which provision could be made towards the amelioration of their

Joseph Young were both substantial traders who benefited from the war time economic boom.

¹⁰² *Connacht Tribune*, 'The Story of the Easter Rising in Galway', 24 April 1966.

¹⁰³ Dublin Castle Special Branch Files, CO/904/214/388 (Thomas Ruane).

¹⁰⁴ *Connacht Tribune*, 'The Story of the Easter Rising in Galway', 24 April 1966.

conditions. Many of them belonged to the farming class. At the time they were not as well off as they became two or three years later. They could not afford to pay hired men and their crops were left unattended until the general release in December 1916.¹⁰⁵

The fact that crops were left unattended while prisoners were in jail is startling and Morrissey is surely playing down the issue in his account. Small farmers would not have paid people to work their land as the seasonal work of the farm would have been carried out by neighbours and relatives. Thus, the local people either would not help or were prevented from helping in the usual way. It must also be remembered that the vast majority of these men would have had extended local family connections and it is inconceivable that their relations would not help unless physically prevented from doing so. Athenry also had a history of this type of boycott and a sustained campaign was previously carried out in the town against the foundation of a local co-operative.¹⁰⁶ When questioned about the attitude of some of the people of Athenry to the returning prisoners, one man whose father and uncle were deported angrily told this researcher, 'that's what they were like round here, they didn't want any change at all in the way things were'.¹⁰⁷ As discussed in Chapter Five, the area between Athenry and Loughrea, which, according to police reports, had continually been the most disturbed part of the Ireland between 1908 and 1916, was virtually quiescent during the War of Independence. During the entire conflict, no member of the crown forces was killed in the east Galway grazing belt and there were no engagements between the security forces and the IRA in the districts of Clarinbridge, Killeeneen or Athenry during the entire course of the struggle for Independence. However, in contrast, between 1913 and 1919, seven of the ten-man 'Dunsandle Grazing Land Committee' were wounded in separate gun attacks in the Athenry countryside.¹⁰⁸

Whilst the reason for this dramatic turn around is complex and will be fully discussed in the proceeding Chapter, disillusionment was a major factor as Dick Morrissey explained. The Fleming family from Clarinbridge illustrate the cynicism and sense of defeat which followed

¹⁰⁵ BMH, WS 1,138 (Gilbert Morrissey).

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Dermot McNamara, Ballydavid South, Athenry (11 January 2005).

¹⁰⁷ Interview with P.J. Moran, Park, Athenry (15 December 2005).

¹⁰⁸ Anthony Varley, 'A Region of Sturdy Smallholders? Western Nationalists and Agrarian Politics During The First World War' in *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol 55, (2003), p. 127. Daly of Dunsandle was the archetypical bad landlord of Irish folklore. Dunsandle is located roughly equidistant between Loughrea, Athenry and Craughwell, coincidentally, the secret society's main stronghold.

Easter Week. Michael Fleming Senior was an old *Invincible* and secret society member who, when news of the Rising arrived, dug up his private store of weapons and joined Mellows at Killeeneen, along with his six sons. Following the Rebellion, all seven were deported to Britain and on returning home, two of his sons, Joseph and Tom, had to emigrate to the U.S. to find work, becoming active in the American labour movement, never returning home. John, Patrick and George remained in Ireland but took no further part in the struggle for independence leaving just young Michael, 'The Rover' active with the Volunteers after 1916. Michael fought on the republican side during the Civil War and like so many of his comrades was forced to emigrate to England in the early twenties. He died from a fall on a building site and remains buried in an unmarked grave in Middlesbrough. For the rest of his life, Michael Fleming Senior never discussed the Rising with his family.¹⁰⁹

Political rivalries in the county were permanently poisoned as a result of the events of Easter Week. The previous antagonisms between the two groups now became further intensified and it ultimately negated any chance that republicans would attract or indeed court the support of the urban UIL in the coming years. Thomas Kenny of the *Connacht Tribune* and other local UIL leaders were never forgotten for their role in aiding the authorities and the tenor of their statements denouncing the insurgents. Leslie Edmunds, who directed the shelling of the Oranmore coastline from the British cruiser, in an attempt to lure the insurgents onto the Galway road, was eventually shot dead by the Castlegar IRA on 23 July 1922 and his body dumped in the same area where the shells had originally landed. The *Irish Times* which recorded the murder wrote that Edmunds was simply unlucky to drive into an IRA ambush set up for the Free State army and was mistakenly killed in the belief that he was an army officer.¹¹⁰ The reality was, of course, very different, and Edmunds had remained a wanted man by the local IRA since the Rising. The Rising was a bitter, local dispute which earned them the contempt and ire of the local respectable elite. The general attitude amongst some in Galway to the men and women of 1916 is best illustrated by a remark overheard by Frank Hynes while on the run after the Rising with Mellows. Whilst hiding in the thatch of a sympathetic farmer's cottage, a local farmer who was visiting commented upon Mellows and the rebels, 'that's the kind of them around here, the first gobshite that comes around and that

¹⁰⁹ From an interview with Mrs Lou Early (nee Fleming), Greystones, Co Wicklow (25 September 2006).

¹¹⁰ Edmunds was a senior inspector for the CDB for Galway and Clare. He was an Englishman, a Protestant and a professed loyalist. See *Irish Times*, 28 July 1922 and 1 August 1922.

lot follow him about like a little God'.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ BMH, WS 446 (Frank Hynes).

Chapter Four: Social and Political Change, 1916-1920

This chapter discusses the growth of Sinn Fein and the IRA following the 1916 Rising and examines the evolution of the movement in the context of a resurgence of agrarianism between 1918 and 1920 and the prevalence of sectarian intimidation in certain districts of the county. The police were ostracised earlier in Galway than in other parts of the country and the boycott of the RIC became widespread in the spring of 1918. The collapse of the RIC in rural areas created a brief window of opportunity for those harbouring resentments against local graziers to use all manner of intimidation to force the division of estates. In this context, Townshend has stated, ‘the real dynamism which underlay the national movement remained the pressure of population on land and land hunger exacerbated by the cessation of emigration seems to have remained the only forces which generated large scale popular action.’¹ However, whilst Dooley has examined the extent of what he has termed the ‘New Land War’ nationwide, the degree to which it impacted upon the growth of the republican movement has not been fully explored.² Whilst the Volunteers benefited from the militancy of the rural tenants in 1918, the sheer scale of the wave of agitation in 1920 forced republicans to create local mechanisms for resolving land disputes. The consequent shift in the movement’s stance from being at the heart of small tenant agitations, to essentially playing the role of ‘honest broker’, ultimately cost republicans the active support of sections of the community who increasingly turned away from the national struggle.

Deep seated resentments resurfaced across both urban and rural divides and the Protestant community in the east of the county was subjected to a sporadic campaign of intimidation in the town of Ballinasloe. The precise role of elements of the republican movement in this campaign was not always clear but both republicans and traditional nationalists contributed to

¹ Townshend, Charles, *Political Violence in Ireland: Government and Resistance Since 1948* (Oxford, 1983), p. 339.

² Terence Dooley, *The Land for the People, The Land Question in Independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004) pp 26-56; See also, Fergus Campbell, *Land and Revolution, Politics in the West of Ireland, 1898-1921* (Oxford, 2005), pp 240-57.

an increasingly menacing atmosphere, where local Protestants became unjustifiably identified with the extremism of northern loyalism. A number of Protestants had their property attacked with many others receiving threatening notices warning them to leave the district. In the face of such hostility, a number of families fled, some eventually resettling in the north of Ireland. The intimidation did not amount to a systematic campaign of violence, although it is possible that some events which took place in the town have not come to light.

Whilst religious antagonism was confined to one part of the county, violence directed against petty landlordism was widespread, concerted and part of a co-ordinated pattern of unrest. This conflict only ended with the intervention of the republican movement, who effectively came to the rescue of many larger farmers in early 1920. The new land arbitration courts attracted support from all groups in society, although it was the small tenants who were often the most dissatisfied with their rulings. The success of the courts, along with the party's new conservative stance in relation to trade unionism and the co-operative movement represented a decisive period of transition for republicans and their supporters in Galway. From March 1920 onwards the movement began to gain the respectability and cross-class support that the national leadership required. The increasing endorsement of Sinn Féin, as opposed to the IRA's campaign of violence, became dependant on the movement restoring 'law and order' and protecting the traditional rights of property. The irony was not lost on the small farmers that the ultimate success of the movement which they had created now depended upon the leadership jettisoning the pre-eminent agenda of the tenants: the fight for the land.

In the context, the 1918 election in Galway represented a triumph for the local over the national, the rural over the urban and the small tenant over the large farmer. The most striking aspect about the election result, apart from the margin of Sinn Féin's victory, was its inevitability. The UIL collapsed in 1917 as Sinn Féin spread rapidly across east Galway. The destruction of the National Party generated intense bitterness within the urban wing of the movement who could not conceive of republicanism as a legitimate political force. The most respectable sections of local society now faced the stark realisation that the new politics of Sinn Féin was not going to go away and the old party was gone for ever. Writing in his memoirs in 1919, William O'Malley, former MP for Connemara, described the 1918 election as 'the treachery and ingratitude of a people'.³ 'I felt humiliated as an Irishman... the Irish

³ William O'Malley, *Glancing Back: 70 years' Experiences and Reminiscences of Press man*,

people are essentially a jealous and an envious people.’⁴ O’Malley had lived in Brighton since the 1890s but he was adamant that many of the original Sinn Féin supporters in Galway sprang from ‘The English garrison – that is the parties that got all the government jobs, from a judgeship to a police inspector, they were the sons of policemen, land agents, grass farmers or land grabbers.’⁵ The motivation for the radicals was clear to O’Malley and he had no illusions about the ‘truth’ behind the revolution:

If you are a member of some secret society, you can pay off some old score you owe to some of your friends. You can shoot a policeman, who sent you one time to jail for some offence, of which, of course, you were perfectly innocent. And if you are sufficiently intelligent to appreciate the high policy of the intellectualists who run Sinn Féin, you will be able to satisfy all and sundry that you are a patriot of the first order.⁶

O’Malley’s memoirs reflect many of the motifs which became commonplace amongst nationalists who remained appalled at the rise of the Volunteers. The legitimacy of the new movement was never accepted by many in Galway whose opinion was often coloured by social snobbery and republicans’ perceived lack of deference towards established social and political institutions, which suggested an immoral and criminal conspiracy bent on social as well as political upheaval. Stephen Gwynn’s memoirs illustrate similar themes and his bemusement at the political culture of the ordinary people of his Galway constituency often bordered on contempt. Like his fellow Galway MPs, Hazleton and O’Malley, Gwynn chose not to live in the west and he later regretted his involvement in nationalist politics and was dismissive about the extent of his original ideological commitment:

I found during the first days of our Galway election the old hands looking at me apprehensively and I gathered from them afterwards that they were waiting for the moment when I should walk away in disgust and say that this was no work for a man of letters. Perhaps they were right. Later on, I had ample acquaintance with disgust. But at this first encounter, I felt myself to be pleasantly diversifying the experiences of a literary man.⁷

Sportsman and Member of Parliament (London, 1933), p. 188.

⁴ O’Malley, *Glancing Back*, p. 138.

⁵ O’Malley, *Glancing Back*, p. 134.

⁶ O’Malley, *Glancing Back*, p. 141.

⁷ Stephen Gwynn, *Experiences of a Literary Man* (London, 1926), p. 304.

Aloof from the ordinary nationalists of Galway and often contemptuous of their political opinions, Gwynn and O'Malley exemplified many of the less attractive traits of the Irish Parliamentary Party that were to contribute to their ultimate demise. The roots of Sinn Féin's victory in Galway were not to be found in any post-1916 nationalist ebullience; the Rising had provided republicans few added kudos and left them open in some quarters to ridicule. The events of Easter Week were constantly used to taunt republicans and they were often derided by their opponents for their perceived lack of 'manliness'. The real impetus for the republican revival following the Rising came from a small dedicated IRB leadership who were able to build up a genuine grassroots party structure, which successfully filled the political and cultural void left by the Nationalist Party as they became increasingly divorced from the common culture of ordinary people.

That Sinn Féin, through less than two years of local organisation were able to politically transform the county, was indicative of the moribund state of the National Party. If the new party was decidedly proletarian, it was no more representative than the rural UIL had been and they had consistently provided genuine representation for the small tenants in the past. The difference now, however, was that whilst Sinn Féin's enemies had been regarded as 'shoneens' and 'transistionists', 'the garrison and its hangers on,' the National Party and its supporters were now increasingly associated with pro-British policies such as recruitment to the British army and more pointedly, with the conscription threat. The tenuous links between the urban and rural wings of the UIL and the obvious tensions and contradictions therein had been strained to breaking point by the changed political reality brought about by the War and for many people, concerned with day-to-day farming issues, the National Party had in many respects, forgotten which side it was supposed to be on. The War was the greatest disaster that could have befallen the party due to the threat of conscription and the cessation of land purchase by the state. The UIL elites became increasingly concerned with the conduct of a War for which ordinary people had little sympathy or understanding. The party's abandonment of the local at the expense of the national and international left them vulnerable to any legitimate nationalist challengers.

The conscription threat and to a much lesser extent, the German plot were factors in the rise of Sinn Féin, but they were not seminal ones. The Parliamentary Party, in the eyes of many local rural political activists, simply no longer represented their views. Stephen Gwynn's opinions on conscription, discussed later in this chapter, graphically illustrate this point. The

moribund state of the local organisation was, in many ways, a natural result of a particular stasis that their dominance of national politics had created. More particularly, however, the increasing chasm between the Parliamentary Party and the reality of constituents' opinions represented a betrayal of ordinary UIL activists who had provided tireless local leadership, which had in many ways, been abused by the party elite. People had moved on in terms of their aspirations both for themselves and for their country and the National Party was no longer capable of reflecting that reality. During the 1918 election, the dichotomy between the old and the new was constantly emphasised. The *Tuam Herald* concluded that the National Party's failure was a result of 'an absence of legislative performance, the presence of questionable transactions, the stoppage of land redistribution and the failure of the Home Rule settlement.'⁸

The country was certainly getting ahead of the old men and old minds, which of late controlled its policy and regulated its destiny. Their methods of managing matters was not calculated to inspire public confidence and their manipulations of elections by the machinery of so-called conventions, of which we had wretched instances in this county were bound, sooner or later, to be resented by the people whose trust was sorely abused. The closed borough arrangement under which no independent young man dared to attempt to get into their ranks or was likely to be accepted by their party bred a sort of 'work incapables' who were fast losing public confidence.⁹

Sinn Féin's success was not merely handed to them by the political establishment and the party's strength was that it genuinely represented rural people's aspirations, although generally ill defined, whilst many of their elected representatives had little connection or interest in the common culture of ordinary people. What was remarkable in Galway, however, was the ease with which Sinn Féin completely replaced an admittedly exhausted and moribund party. The 1918 election represented the democratisation of local politics in the county as the local now became centre stage in politics and ordinary people connected with politics in a meaningful way. When local Sinn Féin leader George Nichols was elected Chairman of the Galway County Council in June 1920, the event had a deeper significance than similar occasions in other counties. The very first action of the new County Council was to rescind the original Council resolution condemning the local rebels who went out in 1916.

⁸ *Tuam Herald*, 4 January 1919.

⁹ *Tuam Herald*, 4 January 1919.

Nichols began his speech amid a respectful silence that quickly erupted into thunderous applause when his audience could no longer contain their joy. He began his speech by noting in emotional terms: ‘The ignorant country boys have learned a lot since 1916.’¹⁰

4.1 The Rise of Sinn Féin

The strategy of the republican movement in Galway evolved considerably in 1917 following the return of over three hundred prisoners from Frongoch. From a situation prior to the Rising, where many Volunteer companies continually defied and antagonised both the local police and the elites of the local political establishment, the movement now adopted a less visible approach with drilling and parades practically ceasing and public disorder avoided, as far as possible. The new emphasis amongst the leadership now switched to the building up of the Sinn Féin organisation in advance of the 1918 election, whilst drawing as little attention to itself as possible. This work was principally organised by a small number of energetic officers led by Stephen Jordan from Athenry, who traveled around the county organising local meetings to found parish cumainn. From having only one cumann at Craughwell at the beginning of the year, by December 1918, there were fifty-one in Galway with a total membership of 3,044.¹¹ The GAA, also led by Jordan as County Chairman, played a crucial role in energising the party with hurling matches and other GAA competitions allowing republicans to defy the police and military regulations and hold recruitment and organisational meetings under the guise of Gaelic games.

The police noted the connection between Sinn Féin and the GAA, and hurling in particular, believing ‘the GAA is only a cover to advance the interests of the Sinn Feiners,’¹² and ‘it is most disloyal and it gets at the young as no other organisation does.’¹³ The degree to which the GAA could also be used as a vehicle for all manner of local disputes, however, is illustrated by a hurling match held in Corofin in April 1917. Peter Glynn, a member of the IRB, assembled hurling teams from Anabally and Annaghdown, without letting the police become aware of the meeting beforehand. The game was held in order to show the authorities

¹⁰ *Galway Express*, 26 June 1920.

¹¹ CI monthly report, west & east Galway, December 1917, CO 904/104.

¹² CI monthly report, west Galway, May 1917, CO 904/103.

¹³ CI monthly report, west Galway, May 1917, CO 904/103.

that he could assemble men without the knowledge of police and to let other tenants who got farms from the CDB on the Blake property at Corofin see the strength of his following. Glynn wanted to acquire a farm on this property but he failed to do so 'on account of his history and antecedents'.¹⁴

The GAA in the county had suffered a serious blow following the Rising with the deportation of many of the organisation's leading members. At the start of 1917, the police noted that 'the GAA has not regained its old activity and importance since the Rebellion'.¹⁵ However, in only a matter of months, the organisation was growing in parallel with Sinn Féin, in a manner previously unheard of. The authorities initially interpreted the lack of Sinn Féin activity in the early months of 1917 as fear amongst the Volunteers of being re-arrested and District Inspector Rutledge noted:

The released Sinn Feiners are keeping out of sight, having a great dread of court martial. But they are still anti-British and would rise again if the Germans landed on this coast, not otherwise, as they recognise the futility of coming into conflict with the British Army without the solid backing of German soldiers.¹⁶

The belief that a German landing in Galway was a real possibility and that the local Volunteers were preparing for such an event was firmly held by the local RIC who continually warned Dublin Castle that the Volunteers were quietly preparing for an invasion following their defeat in 1916. District Inspector Rutledge wrote to Dublin Castle in February 1917, warning that 'the rebels must have some information that the Germans are about to attempt a landing because that alone would move them now after the lessons they learned in April 1916'.¹⁷ The newly returned officers held their first meeting in April in the home of Fr O'Meehan of Kinvara where the movement was completely reorganised and the decision to adopt more subtle tactics seems to have been taken. The actions of the younger 'Sinn Fein clergy' became a source of much unease for the authorities at the time who noted:

The number of Sinn Feiners is growing in this county and younger members are beginning to

¹⁴ CI monthly report, west Galway, April 1917, CO 904/102.

¹⁵ CI monthly report, east Galway, January 1917, CO 904/102.

¹⁶ CI monthly report, west Galway, January 1917, CO 904/102.

¹⁷ CI monthly report, west Galway, February 1917, CO 904/102.

show a spirit of defiance, egged on to it and stirred up by the younger members of the Roman Catholic clergy. This policy at present is to supplant Redmond's party and they will succeed in Galway as they have succeeded in Roscommon and Longford ... They recognise the futility of open rebellion but they think that much may be accomplished in other ways by a strong and determined party once the military law has been withdrawn.¹⁸

The District Inspector's conviction that Sinn Féin would successfully supplant the National Party at the next general election is remarkable. At this time, in April 1917, there were still only two Sinn Féin cumainn in the entire county, one at Craughwell and a second one which had just been founded in Mountbellew. The ease with which a small number of Sinn Féin organisers could supplant Redmond's organisation is indicative of the moribund state of the United Irish League, which was now practically non-existent, and in particular, the attitude of its local leaders. William Duffy and James Cosgrave, who actually lived in their constituencies, probably did more harm than good to their party in the long term. With his constant condemnations of the moral fibre of the farming community due to their reluctance to join the British army, Duffy became clearly associated in the popular mind with the conscription threat and he could eventually only command the support of his small loyal group of supporters in the town of Loughrea. James Cosgrave, on the other hand, was far less active in local politics from 1916 onwards and he had possibly decided to retire from politics at this time. Gwynn, O'Malley and Hazleton, as absentee representatives, neglected their own local party structures as they concentrated their energies elsewhere.

With the British government contemplating conscription for Ireland, the National Volunteers were by now practically non-existent. The National Volunteers in north Galway had refused to attend a public UIL meeting in Dunmore in January 1917, 'for fear of drawing attention to themselves as recruits for the army.'¹⁹ With police reporting that 'recruiting for the army could not be worse'²⁰ the conscription threat clearly provided a major boost to the republican movement and police believed that 'it is the bedrock of the Sinn Féin movement, fear of having to join the army and fight in the war. It is this which attracts the young men in such numbers and keeps them together.'²¹ By July 1917, the UIL was 'losing ground every day'²²

¹⁸ CI monthly report, west Galway, April 1917, CO 904/102.

¹⁹ CI monthly report, west Galway, January 1917, CO 904/102.

²⁰ CI monthly report, west Galway, January 1917, CO 904/102.

²¹ CI monthly report, Galway, July 1917, CO 904/106.

and in September, the organisation was finally pronounced 'practically dead in influence'.²³

The intense bitterness between the rural companies of the Irish Volunteers and the supporters of William Duffy in Loughrea town persisted and at a variety performance organised by the local 'Sinn Féin clergy' in May 1917, Duffy's supporters disturbed the proceedings by 'chanting for the red, white and blue of England and by denouncing Sinn Féin'.²⁴ The performers were then followed to their lodgings by a hostile crowd 'shouting loyal expressions'. The manager of the company was eventually arrested after drawing a revolver on the advancing mob and sentenced to two months' incarceration. Tense relations between the priests and the people of the town resulted from the incident.

Local political activists from both parties had to contend with the threat of violence from their opponents, however, and in June 1917:

The dwelling house of Martin Donnelan, Moycullen was fired into. No one was injured. The motive was to prevent Donnelan, who is a District Councillor from voting for Michael McNeill, Redmondite candidate for the Chairmanship of the Galway District council in opposition to the Sinn Féin candidate, Thomas Ruane, Carnmore, who took an active part in the Rebellion. McNeill was afraid to go on with his candidateship and withdrew and Ruane was elected Chairman.²⁵

The events of Easter Week remained fresh in many people's memories across the county and old scores remained to be settled. In December 1917, Luke Flynn was shot by raiders in his home near Galway. He had refused to hand over a shotgun to the Volunteers during Easter Week and Flynn had threatened to shoot the first man who tried to take it from him. A note from his sister to the police at Carnmore was subsequently found by the rebels who intercepted the girl as she made her way across country. Flynn was shot in the abdomen at close range and was lucky to survive the attack.²⁶

²² CI monthly report, west Galway, July 1917, CO 904/106.

²³ CI monthly report, east Galway, September 1917, CO 904/110.

²⁴ CI monthly report, east Galway, May 1917, CO 904/106.

²⁵ CI monthly report, west Galway, July 1917, CO 904/103.

²⁶ CI monthly report, west Galway, December 1917, CO 904/ 104.

By July 1917, the Sinn Féin movement was spreading rapidly in the county with local *cumainn* springing up on a weekly basis. The engine of the movement remained young rural men guided by the younger local clergy, leading GAA officers and older Volunteer officers who were also IRB men. The growth of the movement was still limited to the rural poor, with 'no responsible men or persons with a stake in the country attending their meetings.'²⁷ The police believed that the growth of the movement intimidated those who had not previously countenanced joining:

What is bad about the situation at present is that the older and more respectable people are getting afraid not to be Sinn Feiners. It must be remembered that these people have to live amongst the Sinn Féiners, who are going through men and young priests and for the most part are bullies. The Sinn Fein policy here is to get a good grip of the county and when their numbers are very strong, they will see what they can do, and they can do a good deal by shooting at night. That is the Galway habit, firing at persons and firing into dwelling houses.²⁸

The party received a further boost in September when, through some sleight of hand, they managed to acquire the unionist *Galway Express* newspaper. It was purchased by a party representative presenting himself as a unionist from county Monaghan.²⁹ The confidence within the movement was now starting to manifest itself in new ways with the Volunteers being asked in secret meetings whether they would be willing to participate in future attacks on police barracks and lists of the willing compiled for the local leadership.³⁰ In December, raids for arms began across the county with eight houses raided in Gort alone during the month and the District Inspector calling for military reinforcements to be sent to the area to 'eliminate the danger of an attack on Gort barracks, which I apprehend might take place on some favourable opportunity'.³¹

²⁷ CI monthly report, east Galway, November 1917, CO 904/104.

²⁸ CI monthly report, west Galway, July 1917, CO 904/103.

²⁹ CI monthly report, west Galway, September 1917, CO 904/104.

³⁰ CI monthly report, west Galway, November 1917, CO 904/104.

³¹ CI monthly report, west Galway, December 1917, CO 904/104.

Conscription

As will be discussed in the next section, by April 1918 a new Land War was emerging across the east of the country, with cattle driving and forcible ploughing becoming common. In April much of this unrest ceased as 'fear of conscription became the one subject occupying people's minds'.³² Conscription quickly provided a new impetus for nationalist solidarity at a time when local society was at a turbulent crossroads, as Laffan has noted, 'not since the days of O'Connell had Ireland been so united'.³³ Now 'all sections of nationalists joined together at conscription meetings and the most violent and seditious language was used'.³⁴ The 'ferment about the application of conscription' now meant that 'all other matters have sunk into insignificance before this question and it has greatly upset the ordinary routine of life in many places. The people are all pledge-bound now to resist it by every means in their power.'³⁵ In April alone there were eighty-two anti-conscription meetings across Galway and the general strike on the 23 April was rigidly observed throughout the county. As the crisis gathered momentum, the ranks of the Volunteers became swollen with new recruits, many of whom had previously stood aloof from the movement. Sean O'Neill recalled that the mercantile section of society in the Mountbellew area began to join the movement which they had opposed since the original split in 1914:

The well to do and former supporters of Redmond and pro-British types were all now looking to the Volunteers and Sinn Fein for a lead. Bank clerks, excise men and such would come to me and discuss conditions in the trenches of Flanders and Gallipoli. A very large number of 'would not be soldiers' flocked into the local Volunteer Company. Indeed many of my new recruits were philosophers; they deemed it wiser to take their drill instruction from me, rather than from a British officer. And then there was the possibility that their skins might be saved. But when the threat of conscription passed, these footmen, land stewards, gardeners and servants, faded away like a freak snow shower in midsummer.³⁶

The conscription crisis further alienated ordinary people from the state and as recruits

³² See next Section on the new Land War in 1918.

³³ Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland*, p. 134.

³⁴ CI monthly report, east Galway, April 1918, CO 904/105.

³⁵ CI monthly report, west Galway, April 1918, CO 904/105.

³⁶ BMH, WS 1,219 (Sean O'Neill).

continued to flock to Sinn Féin and the Volunteers, younger clergy became more prominent in denouncing the government. By June the conscription fear began to recede and cattle driving and forcible possession of land resumed on its previous scale and Sinn Fein now had a cadre of revolutionary priests in the county who preached the benefits of independence from the altar. Fr Brennan of Caltra was not an exception when he warned his flock not to have anything to do with the RIC, whom he referred to as 'pimps and spies and a disgrace to the country that produced them'.³⁷ Sinn Féin remained heavily involved in local agitations and although the rate of growth of the party slowed somewhat, it steadily increased throughout the year.

In May a further boost was provided to the movement with the arrest of a number of leading local Sinn Féin members for the so-called 'German Plot'. The 'German plot' involved the arrest of leading republicans across the country in connection with an alleged plot to enlist German aid for the independence struggle. Most of the men were deported to England under the Defence of the Realm Act and allowed to live openly. Many absconded and quietly made their way home. Most ordinary people saw through the government's weak attempts at fabricating a counter insurgency plot and the authorities' claims became a damaging exercise in public relations. Laffan has noted, 'there was widespread scepticism in Britain and a total disbelief in nationalist Ireland, where the idea of a German plot was seen as outlandish and comical.'³⁸ The Galway republicans arrested were George Nichols and Dr Bryan Cusack, Galway; Colm O'Gaora, Rosmuc; Thomas Ruane, Carnmore; Stephen Jordan, Athenry; Michael Trayers, Gort; and Brian Fallon of Loughrea. Despite the lack of credibility which the government's claims engendered, the arrest of the men and the subsequent deportation to England provided Sinn Fein with a boost in popularity.

³⁷ CI monthly report, east Galway, May 1918, CO 904/106.

³⁸ Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland*, p. 145.

The 1918 Election

As the summer of 1918 progressed and the fear of conscription passed, an increased military presence in the county ‘had a sobering effect’ and life returned to normal although the police still found it difficult to get the necessities of life in many places, ‘where local priests were to the fore as they attempted to make the RIC’s lives unbearable’.³⁹ However, much of the tide of unrest had passed and ‘respectable people feel relief that the growing strain of Sinn Féin intimidation is broken.’⁴⁰ The Sinn Féin party was now busy preparing for its first major election and optimism was high, ‘they appear to think that after the next general election they will have it their own way and that the people will rule.’⁴¹

Election meetings were held up and down the county amid almost total apathy on the part of the Parliamentary Party. This resignation on the part of the established party was mirrored across the country where many sitting MPs decided the party’s cause was hopeless and chose to desert a sinking ship.⁴² The police noted that over 1,000 people attended a Sinn Féin meeting to hear Frank Fahey plead the case for a republic in Loughrea in November. The decision to hold his meeting in the ‘anti-republican’ town was a direct challenge to William Duffy who a few weeks later could only attract one hundred and fifty people to an election rally.⁴³ A selection convention was called for the East Galway constituency but the party could not convince any party member to go forward, eventually leaving Liam Mellows standing unopposed. To observers in Galway, there was nothing surprising about the result of the 1918 election as the Sinn Féin landslide in the county was apparent very early in the year and the United Irish League was a spent force before Sinn Féin began to mount a serious challenge. From having only 3,394 members at the start of the year, the party had 7,486 members across eighty-three cumainn by the time of the election and crucially their activists had a youthful vigour which their opponents simply had no appetite to match.⁴⁴

³⁹ CI monthly report, east Galway, June 1918, CO 904/106.

⁴⁰ CI monthly report, west Galway, July 1918, CO 904/106.

⁴¹ CI monthly report, west Galway, October 1918, CO 904/107.

⁴² Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland*, p. 156.

⁴³ CI monthly report, east Galway, November 1918, CO 904/107.

⁴⁴ CI monthly report, east & west Galway, November 1918, CO 904/107.

Attacks on Sinn Féin in the local nationalist press such as the *Connacht Tribune* and the *Tuam Herald* became more vitriolic as the election loomed. The tone of the criticism was generally vulgar and intended to ridicule and humiliate Sinn Féin and the Volunteers. It is instructive to briefly analyse the motifs of insult and petty humiliation employed by both sides. Anti-Sinn Féin rhetoric can be classified into four main categories. Republicans were:

1. Derided for their proletarian roots in the rural poor.
2. Accused of being too young and too immature to have legitimate political opinions. (It was continually pointed out that most followers of the new movement were too young to have played any role in the original Land War.)
3. Accused of being manipulated as part of a wider conspiracy by ‘pro-British reactionaries’ and were merely the puppets of ‘the crowbar brigade,’ ‘freemasons’, ‘tories’ and the Orange Order.
4. Labelled physical cowards who lacked the courage of their convictions as evinced by their opposition to the War effort and the events of Easter Week 1916.

At a meeting of the Ballinasloe Board of Guardians, Mr Lyskey exhorted his colleague, Timothy Killeen, who had declared his support for Sinn Féin ‘to get rid of these undesirable men in the Sinn Féin ranks who were making with them and voting with them, for these are the fellows that will sell you and sell Ireland and bring down bitter ruin. Put them in prison and hang half them.’ Mr Cahill then told the meeting that ‘Sinn Féin are only a crowd of gossoons who play football and hurley and now think they can run the country.’⁴⁵ Following his victory in the South Roscommon by-election, the *Galway Express* labelled Count Plunkett, ‘a Tory and an Orangeman’ and ‘a silly old man who is dividing the people’⁴⁶ whose victory was ‘achieved by an unlikely alliance of Orangemen and freemasons.’⁴⁷ The *East Galway Democrat* set a similar tone, noting that despite the best efforts of ‘that Englishman Mellows,’ ‘the old leaders and the old methods will prove that the currency of idiots will not pass as genuine coin.’⁴⁸ Prominent local UIL councillor P.S. McDonnell praised the people of Galway at a public meeting in April 1918, who ‘unlike the diehards, did not live in a balloon

⁴⁵ *East Galway Democrat*, 7 July 1917.

⁴⁶ *Galway Express*, 17 March 1917.

⁴⁷ *East Galway Democrat*, 7 April 1917.

⁴⁸ *East Galway Democrat*, 30 November 1918.

or go on chasing rainbows.’⁴⁹ At a meeting of the National Club in the town, O’Donnell referred to a previous remark by Louis O’Dea in which he called the members of the National Party ‘slaves, place hunters and job seekers,’ noting that the munitions factory in Galway ‘was stern full of those posing as hillsiders and heroes, the Prospect Hill gang.’⁵⁰ The *Galway Express* hit back by labelling the National Party, ‘conscriptionists, treacherers, reactionaries, Tories, Orangemen and Dillonites.’⁵¹ The *East Galway Democrat* described Sinn Fein as ‘the descendents of castle Catholics, rent office hangers on, toadies, flunkeys, grabbers, policemen and disappointed office seekers.’⁵² The paper warned against the release of the Galway prisoners following the Rising noting that ‘the mad mullahs represented a danger to the country’.⁵³ The paper later published an editorial on the rise of Sinn Fein under the headline, ‘Suckling Youths’:

Big noises may be heard nowadays by suckling youths who have not so much brains as the head of a pin. Entering into politics and trying to put political opinions down the necks of the people is becoming sickening. A well-to-do farmer mentioned to us some time ago that he had changed his business from Ballinasloe to another town on account of the babbling nonsense of one of the class we have just referred to... In our town, the wings of shoneenism were always extended and under these wings clustered the brood of the backboneless, fearing a fight at any time, they turned and scut. Is it to the care of such that our future is to be trusted? ⁵⁴

The level of bitterness in local political debate continued to centre on the Rising. At a meeting of the Loughrea Town Commissioners in 1920, a heated debate took place over whether or not to rescind the council’s original motion condemning the 1916 Rising. Local republicans argued for the motion to be allowed to stand, as it would ‘remain as a record of the treachery of, and as an indelible stigma on, the proposer, seconder and their supporters’. Martin Ward, who had been the original proposer, remained unabashed and claimed that ‘it was a good, practical resolution.’ ‘Practical treachery’, came the reply, ‘it is sickening to be listening to a kaffir of your sort,’ retorted Greene. ‘I never went out marauding at night, as you did, Mr

⁴⁹ *Connacht Tribune*, 6 April 1918.

⁵⁰ *Connacht Tribune*, 13 April 1918. The Sinn Fein Hall in Galway was in Prospect Hill, Eyre Square, Galway.

⁵¹ *Galway Express*, 25 June 1918.

⁵² *East Galway Democrat*, 28 April 1917.

⁵³ *East Galway Democrat*, 23 June 1917.

⁵⁴ *East Galway Democrat*, 8 September 1917.

Greene,' replied Ward, to which Green bellowed, 'you should be tied up in a sack and let go with the tide. You are not fit to be a member of this council, you bloody bastard.' Ward, however, was not to be outdone in the shouting match declaring, 'we all know you, you are a night marauder.'⁵⁵

The 1918 elections in Galway saw the final and absolute destruction of the Parliamentary Party. Sinn Féin's margin was impressive and the National Party lost all five of its seats in the county. The abolition of the Galway Borough which represented the city reduced the number of seats in the county from five to four and denied the Parliamentary Party a safe seat. In the end, there was no city candidate put forward for election and the town was subsumed into the Connemara constituency where William O'Malley lost his seat and Stephen Gwynn chose to stand for the Dublin University seat. The party could not find a candidate to replace James Cosgrave in east Galway and in north Galway William Hazelton chose not to contest the election, in favour of standing for a seat in his native South Dublin. In retrospect, it is clear that the elite of the local Irish Parliamentary Party foresaw the electoral landslide and opted not to stand. In Munster seventeen of the twenty-four available seats were returned unopposed for Sinn Fein as the party endured its greatest humiliation.⁵⁶

Sinn Féin won all four seats with Liam Mellows standing unopposed in the east Galway constituency. Of a total of 40,496 votes cast in the three contested constituencies, Sinn Fein won 31,271 votes to the National party's 9,225.⁵⁷ For the National Party, Thomas Sloyan, a merchant from Tuam, took a credible 31.01 per cent of the votes in North Galway, William O'Malley took only 22.85 per cent of the votes in Connemara and William Duffy took only 14.10 per cent of the votes in South Galway. Thus, for Sinn Fein, Thomas O'Maille triumphed in Connemara with 77.15 per cent of the vote, Frank Fahey won south Galway with 85.90 per cent and Michael Cusack won the North Galway constituency with 68.99 per cent of the votes. All four elected MPs were former prisoners and all had been deported after the Rising (apart from Mellows who had gone on the run). Furthermore, all of the victorious Sinn Fein candidates, except Mellows, were born and raised in the constituencies in which they were victorious.

⁵⁵ *Connacht Tribune*, 6 March 1920. *East Galway Democrat* also referred to Sinn Fein as 'nocturnal rambler' on 4 August 1917.

⁵⁶ Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland*, p 164.

⁵⁷ B.M. Walker (ed.) *Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland, 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978), p. 7.

4.2 1918-A New Land War

The authorities were convinced that the Sinn Féin party would become 'dangerous if allied to some popular land campaign' and the land war of 1918 provided republicans with the vehicle they needed to generate increased popular support.⁵⁸ The European War had provided a major boost to graziers in Ireland, and in Galway, 'farmers were never in their lives in more prosperous circumstances owing to high prices for their stock and farm produce.'⁵⁹ The confidence of the Volunteers reached a peak in early 1918 and in many districts the police were virtually helpless as people began to treat them with open defiance. The IRA increasingly came out into the open again for the first time since Easter 1916 and:

The police, in moving about are treated with contempt and are jeered at. No one is allowed to speak to them and information as to the recurrence of outrages has to be dragged out of the injured persons. The opinion is prevalent that the police cannot do anything and would not be allowed to do anything. At night the lives of the police are in danger all the time while on patrol and I am in daily fear of hearing that some man has been shot by means of some foul and cowardly treachery. All this is due to the Sinn Fein rebels who went out in 1916.⁶⁰

The most significant impetus for the new militancy was the movement's involvement in ongoing land agitation in the county and the RIC noted that 'Sinn Féin is now being worked as an agrarian movement for the forcible repossessing of land. Land is being openly commandeered for grazing and for personal occupation. This new phase of Sinn Féin will bring many young men into the movement which previously held no attraction for them.'⁶¹ The county was now firmly in the grip of a land war, as many tenants became involved in cattle drives, forcible ploughing of land, public meetings and deputations, aimed at forcing landowners to surrender their holdings to the CDB for division. Unlike the previous campaigns, however, the UIL was now exercising very little influence and the involvement of Sinn Féin presented a much greater threat to property rights. A heightened sense of insecurity and fear prevailed for many landowners as the police were powerless to prevent farms from

⁵⁸ CI monthly report, east Galway, December 1917, CO 904/104.

⁵⁹ CI monthly report, west Galway, April 1917, CO 904/102.

⁶⁰ CI monthly report, west Galway, January 1918, CO 904/105.

⁶¹ CI monthly report, east Galway, February 1918, CO 904/105.

being taken over. DI Rutledge believed that 'were it not for the presence of troops in Galway and Gort and the operation of aeroplanes at Oranmore, it would be difficult for the police to keep an upper hand'.⁶²

Sinn Féin cumainn now sprang up around local agitations and former UIL members were often prominent at cattle drives and land seizures. The absence of priests or MPs as tenant representatives was notable as Sinn Fein and the Volunteers acted as stewards and organised deputations to landowners and the phenomenon of cumainn spontaneously forming to facilitate agitations as 'agrarian emancipation' had long been part of the modus operandi of the UIL. Sinn Féin flourished as the tide of agrarianism swept the county in the first four months of the year, 'muttering discontent and preaching sedition and disloyalty, secretly encouraging outrage and appealing to the basest elements of an irreconcilable people.'⁶³ The Galway secret society, which had been relatively inactive since its leader, Thomas Kenny, fled to the U.S. following the Rising, was now absorbed into Sinn Féin as the party openly involved itself in the land struggle. The wave of agrarianism that swept the county at the end of the decade occurred in three main phases. The first wave of violence came in January until May 1918 and the second phase took place from January until May 1920. Whilst agrarianism was a factor in 1919, the operations of the newly formed Dail departments and their initial efforts to resolve the issues over land led to less violence as the rural community anticipated some form of Dail-led initiatives to resolve the issues. The crucial difference between the land agitation of 1918 and 1920 was that during the first wave, Sinn Féin and the Volunteers were heavily involved in local agitation, whereas in 1920 party members and Volunteers were officially forbidden from taking part and sophisticated local arbitration courts were in place to defuse the violence and resolve disputes. There was no agitation in 1921 due to the heavy military presence but agrarianism emerged once more in 1922 and 1923 during the convulsions of the Civil War.

As the new Land War erupted across East Galway from January to May 1920, it posed very difficult questions for the republican movement as its leaders increasingly sought to assume the mantle of the legitimate protectors of law and order. The local press declared that 'never has the land agitation, either before or since the days of the Land League reached such a

⁶² CI monthly report, west Galway, February 1918, CO 904/105.

⁶³ CI monthly report, east Galway, April 1918, CO 904/105.

height as at present times'.⁶⁴ The campaign was mainly concentrated in the south east of the county and was centred on the Kilconnell-Ahascragh-Woodlawn districts. In the previous few months, it was estimated that 300,000 acres had been cleared of stock with 40,000 sheep and cattle dispersed and a list of twenty-nine local graziers who had been targeted appearing in the local press.⁶⁵ Deputations of tenants had visited all the major landowners in the district including Smyth at Colemanstown, Hutchinson in Donnane, Major Persse at Kilchreest, O'Hara-Trench at Clonfert and Lord Ashtown at Woodlawn asking them to give up grazing lands to the Estates Commissioners for division.⁶⁶ Captain Henry Dudley Hodgeson had a lucky escape when he found fourteen sticks of primed gelignite that had been buried into the outer wall of his residence at Oughterard, which failed to explode. P.K. Joyce, a Clifden merchant, was not so lucky and his home was severely damaged when a bomb exploded in the town in March. His family had just purchased Clifden demesne against the wishes of the community who had been agitating for some time to have the property sold to the Estates Commissioners.⁶⁷

With the police now almost completely withdrawn to the larger barracks in the main towns, the climate was at its most dangerous for those whose land was coveted by the rural poor. At the end of March, all of Lord Ashtown's stock was cleared in one night in a large and well organised drive, which saw many animals decked out in the national colours. By early April, with the annual yearly auction approaching, all but one of Lord Ashtown's graziers had agreed to sell up and even he had committed to give up his grazing the following October.⁶⁸ In addition, Smyth at Colemanstown promptly agreed to give up his 1,000 acres near Athenry. Large scale social disorder was only prevented in April 1920 by two developments, one sponsored by Sinn Féin and the other brought about by the agitators themselves. An extraordinary conference of graziers and tenants' representatives was held in Hayden's Hotel in Ballinasloe in early April. One motive for the agitators was the belief amongst tenants that much of the land then presently owned by the CDB was to be used by the government to resettle ex-soldiers who had fought in the War. Whilst praising the sacrifice of the local troops at the front in a lengthy speech in the House of Commons, William Duffy warned against any

⁶⁴ *Galway Express*, 10 April 1920.

⁶⁵ *Galway Express*, 10 April 1920.

⁶⁶ *Galway Express*, 28 April 1920.

⁶⁷ *Galway Express*, 20 March 1920.

⁶⁸ *Galway Express*, 10 April 1920.

measures the government was believed to be contemplating regarding land for ex-servicemen in his constituency. The people, the local press claimed, now saw that peaceful means were useless and 'moderate persuasion' would need to be applied.⁶⁹ From a tenant's point of view the conference was clearly a success, with thirteen graziers coming to an agreement with a local solicitor who negotiated on behalf of the small farmers. It is not apparent who organised this conference. None of the local partisan papers claimed any credit for their respective parties and each gave the conference only minor consideration. The success of the conference and the fact that it happened at all, demonstrated the crucial juncture that had been reached in the Land War; the law of the land was now clearly operating without reference to the established laws of property rights and neither the republican movement nor the state had any power to stop it.

The Ballinasloe conference offered only temporary respite for large landowners and as the land epidemic raged, Sinn Féin was forced to act. In May a 'Land Conference' was held by various representatives of the republican movement to develop a more effective system of arbitration which could gain the support of all sections of the community.⁷⁰ Land arbitration courts had been active since early March 1918 in the county. However, they were incapable of coping with the demands presented by the new spate of agitations. The conference agreed on a range of issues concerning mechanisms to resolve and administer local disputes. Issues of court procedure, fees, expenses, and so on, were codified and a standardised structure for the county agreed. A new, more sophisticated and standardised arbitration system emerged, based on the ten poor law divisions in the county, with fifteen arbitrators selected for every division, with at least one priest to be included on each. A quorum of three representatives from the panel was now necessary and every court had jurisdiction over three parishes at a minimum. The conference was organised under the auspices of Sinn Féin and all delegates were selected from local cumainn and Comhairle Ceanntar delegates.

From May onwards, the arbitration courts were regularly held in Portumna, Loughrea and Ballinasloe, the three main urban centers in east Galway.⁷¹ The courts were held openly in local hotels and they often struggled to accommodate the number of people who wished to be

⁶⁹ *Galway Express*, 10 April 1920.

⁷⁰ *Galway Express*, 10 April 1920.

⁷¹ See *Connacht Tribune*, 22 May 1920.

present to hear the deliberations. The pronouncements of the courts were then printed in detail each week by the local press. They were attended by all sections of local society with landlords, Protestant rectors, former Irish Parliamentary Party MP, William Duffy and professed loyalists such as the Duc Du Stacpole attending.⁷² Following the expansion of the courts, police reports testified to their widespread success and acceptance by all sections of the population and they led directly to the collapse of the Crown assizes, which ceased to function until the winter of 1920, when the republican movement was once more driven underground. As a direct result of the success of the courts, the Galway Assizes collapsed in July as no jurors could be found to deal with cases and witnesses, plaintiffs and defendants chose to take their cases to the Sinn Féin courts, whose decrees were enforced across the county by the Volunteers.⁷³

The wave of agitation which had gripped the east of the county was now brought to a halt as both large and small farmers brought their cases to the new courts for arbitration. The social control that Sinn Féin had so desperately needed and which it looked highly likely that it would not be able to command, had at the last gasp been restored and the movement could now realistically present itself to all sides as the protectors of both property and civil rights in the county. The very real potential for widespread civil disorder which would have been beyond the control of the revolutionary cadre was now averted. From proclaiming 'Hail Russia' just a few months previously, the Sinn Féin controlled *Galway Express* was now denouncing 'Bolshevism in Kinvara by manly men' since any remaining agrarianism beyond the movement's control was by now intolerable. In an editorial entitled, 'The Lowering of an Ideal' the paper decried that, 'The men of the west have wrapped the green flag around them and gone forth to conquer land. We cannot agree that the means used by our young men are honourable in every case.'⁷⁴

The agitation over Menlo Woods encapsulates the complexities of the situation in relation to land and the difficulties it posed for the republican movement. Menlo demesne had been the

⁷² See *Connacht Tribune*, 23 April 1920.

⁷³ The Galway Grand Jury in July, 1920 comprised Pierce Joyce, JM Meldon, Martin MacDonagh, Major T Wilson-Lynch, Francis Blake, Captain James D'Arcy, Walter Joyce, Captain Walter Lambert, Burton W Persse, Colonel CP Doig, John Baggott, N.A. Lushington-Tulloch, Francis J.S. Turnley, James Cooke, Arthur Jackson, Martin Hynes.

⁷⁴ *Galway Express*, 3 May 1920. The murder of Ward is fully discussed in Chapter Five.

subject of a violent agitation for some time to force Sir Thomas Blake to sell his land to the Estates Commissioners. A herdsman on the estate, James Ward, was shot dead in February as 'feeling against him was imputed to his continued employment with the landlord, whose retention of the land is held to be an injustice.'⁷⁵ Sinn Féin and the Volunteers in Menlo and Castlegar were at the forefront of the agitation and Brian Molloy, who acted as their spokesman, was justifiably regarded as one of the few very committed IRA officers in the county. His company in Castlegar was possibly the best organised and most committed in the county and while the agitation over the woods was ongoing, Molloy and his men carried out attacks on the police at Oranmore, where an RIC constable was shot dead, and an assault on Loughgeorge RIC barracks completely destroyed the building.⁷⁶

The position became even more difficult for Sinn Féin when it was announced in 1920 that the Galway County Council, with its strong Sinn Fein representation, had purchased part of the demesne in order to develop a civic amenity for local people. When the first delegation from the council arrived in Menlo, they were unceremoniously greeted by the local agitators who, armed with ash plants, made their feelings abundantly clear. At the next council meeting, a decision was unilaterally taken not to proceed with the purchase of the Wood and the idea was not raised by the council again.⁷⁷ Following the incident William Flaherty, the former Labour representative on the Council, noted 'buy it today and get a bullet tomorrow.'⁷⁸

Local republicans took a leading role in the agitation which was responsible for the murder of Ward (who was not an outsider as many herds were in these circumstances, but came from the area). Their subsequent intimidation of the elected representatives of the town, including those from their own party, may have been a further catalyst in forcing Sinn Féin into creating some kind of semi-autonomous mechanism whereby such disputes could be settled. The fact that the Menlo case was never brought before a Sinn Fein court, even though the agitation was

⁷⁵ *Galway Express*, 14 February 1920. Ward was shot dead on 6 February in the presence of a neighbour and his son. He had survived two previous attempts on his life. The inquest returned a verdict of murder and his wife Julia was awarded £100 at Galway Quarter sessions in July 1920. *Connacht Tribune*, 1 May 1920 and 10 July 1920.

⁷⁶ The Castlegar Company was also responsible for the death of Constable Whelan in Easter Week 1916.

⁷⁷ *Galway Express*, 10 April 1920. The property had been bought for £1,500 from Sir William Blake.

⁷⁸ *Irish Times*, 17 April 1920.

led by the IRA, shows just how much power a strong local leader could command and that ultimately local IRA companies were prepared to ride roughshod over Sinn Féin rulings, especially where land was concerned. Menlo proved to be an exception and despite agrarianism remaining a factor throughout the summer of 1920, the success of the land arbitration courts gave republicans a new standing amongst land owners in the county. The Volunteers now enforced the decrees of the local courts, which had a strong clerical and professional influence, regardless of where their own sympathies lay.

4.3 Sectarianism

The reputation of the IRA as a non-partisan force has come under considerable scrutiny in recent years with a study of West Cork leading one historian to conclude that sectarianism was ‘embedded in the vocabulary and syntax of the revolution.’⁷⁹ Galway has not escaped the attention of historians in this regard and Hart has asserted that a campaign of ethnic cleansing took place in many parts of the country including the east Galway countryside. Noting the ‘dreary steeples of Ballinasloe’, he concludes that, ‘as revolutionary violence spiralled upwards, more and more of its victims were civilians and more and more of them were Protestant.’⁸⁰ Hart’s assertion is based on an article in the *Church of Ireland Gazette* in June 1922 which described a campaign of intimidation being waged against the minority community in the town of Ballinasloe. The paper noted:

The campaign is carried out in the night time by unnamed persons who give no reason for their actions. The system which usually follows is, at first, the dispatch of an anonymous letter giving the recipient so many days or hours to clear out. If this notice is disregarded, bullets are fired at night through his windows, bombs are thrown at his house or his house is burned down... the list of those prescribed is added to constantly and every Protestant is simply waiting for their turn to come.⁸¹

The intimidation in Galway was carried out by local people. However, there was no active IRA unit in the town (although there may have been individual members who were not active, living in the town) and Ballinasloe had consistently proven hostile to the republican

⁷⁹ Hart, *The IRA at War*, p. 240.

⁸⁰ Hart, *The IRA at War*, p. 234.

⁸¹ *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 16 June 1922.

movement. Nonetheless, a number of Protestants fled the town and, as will be discussed, local elected representatives inflamed the situation with blatantly sectarian rhetoric which contributed to the climate of hostility. A local historian later recalled, 'fearing reprisals, a few Protestant businessmen left Ballinasloe and retired to the north but those who remained were not molested.'⁸² Far from being a republican stronghold, Ballinasloe had the highest level of recruitment to the British army in the county and twenty men from the town joined the local Black and Tan regiment in January 1921.⁸³ Thus, whilst Ballinasloe was generally hostile towards the IRA, it could equally become the focus of religious intolerance against Protestants. It is not inconsequential to note that Ballinasloe also won the county Gaelic football championship for a record six consecutive times from 1914 onwards, a feat never since repeated in county Galway. Thus, a tradition of service in the Crown Forces and persistent hostility towards the IRA, could co-exist within the same local culture which also fostered both persistent sectarianism and achievement in Gaelic games.

Galway had one of the smallest Protestant populations in the country, with 3,544 members of the Church of Ireland community representing only 1.95% of the total population in 1911 and only 495 Presbyterians and 152 Methodists resident in the entire county.⁸⁴ The Protestant community were concentrated in the Ballinasloe hinterland, in Galway town and in south Connemara. In May 1918, the conscription crisis proved to be a trigger for latent sectarianism in Ballinasloe and a campaign of intimidation was sporadically carried out in the town over the proceeding four years. The Board of Guardians debated the statement of the Presbyterian Assembly of Ireland in 1918 which had advocated conscription and a resolution condemning, not just the actions of the Presbyterian leadership but also the local Protestant community for their perceived support for their Church leaders' stance was passed. The subsequent statements of local nationalist and republican politicians were sectarian in both tone and content and the local Protestant community was publicly threatened with retaliation should conscription be enforced. UIL Councillor A.D. Cahill informed the meeting:

You have people at home in Ballinasloe refusing to sign against conscription. And in fact, advocating that the conscription Act should be enforced. I have it on the utmost reliable

⁸² Rev P.K. Egan, *The Parish of Ballinasloe: Its History from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (Dublin, 1960), p. 293.

⁸³ *Connacht Tribune*, 21 January 1921.

⁸⁴ *Census of Ireland, 1911* (London, 1913), p. 211.

authority that the majority of Ballinasloe Presbyterians are supporting conscription. They are only fifteen families altogether but little or much, they made well by their connection with the Ballinasloe people. We will know what to say and what to do when the time comes.

Every single one of these families has thrived, got rich and was protected and trusted in every way by the people of Ballinasloe. They were treated as our own brothers and here is their gratitude and compensation. I think we ought to strongly condemn the Ballinasloe Presbyterians as well as the Belfast people. They have motor cars, land and horses now which they had not when they first got here.... We should know who is for us and who is against us. The time will come when we will defeat this crisis and we will be able to show those people what way and manner we look on their conduct. The records of the conscription pledge should be kept, so afterwards we will know who's who.⁸⁵

The ill feeling towards the local minority community did not recede as the threat of conscription passed, although the language of retaliation from politicians, in public at least, subsided for another two years. 1920 saw a dramatic increase in gun crime in the district as the new tide of agrarianism swept east Galway. At the Galway Assizes in March, there were five murders, and robberies with arms, malicious injuries cases, cases of firing into dwellings and cases of intimidation rose from forty-two such cases during the previous year to a total of two hundred and eighty-one cases.⁸⁶ Amidst the climate of intimidation generated by the ongoing land agitation in the countryside around the town, elements in Ballinasloe were clearly intent on generating sectarian ill-feeling, possibly motivated by resentment over the relatively privileged economic status of the local Protestant community.

The loyalist pogroms in Belfast in 1920 initiated a second period of recriminations toward Protestants in the town, as once again they were perceived by some in the community as not being vocal enough in condemning the actions of their co-religionists in the north. Nonetheless, in September a local Protestant, Edmund Hill, wrote to the *Connacht Tribune* suggesting that 'the Protestants of Galway come together and publicly denounce the sectarian acts being carried out in Belfast.'⁸⁷ The paper welcomed the sentiments, noting that that 'there is little likelihood that anything of this nature will ever blight the lives of people who have

⁸⁵ *Connacht Tribune*, 8 May 1918.

⁸⁶ *Irish Times*, 23 March 1920.

⁸⁷ *Connacht Tribune*, 11 September 1920.

always lived on good terms with one another.’ The Protestant community responded to Hill’s idea and at a subsequent meeting of various Protestant denominations in Ballinasloe, a resolution was passed:

Condemning the victimisation and intimidation of Roman Catholics that is taking place at the current time in the north of Ireland and no provocation caused by other outrages could justify such a policy. At all times the most friendly relationship and goodwill have been extended to us by the Roman Catholic community in this town and district. Religious intolerance is unknown in this part of Ireland.⁸⁸

However, the unequivocal action of the Protestant community did not satisfy some local politicians. UIL stalwart Thomas Costello of the Tuam Board of Guardians asked ‘why the Protestants of the west, who never got insult from a Catholic majority because of creed, did not speak out and condemn the actions of their co-religionists in the north. The Protestants of the West are absolutely silent.’⁸⁹ The following week, a local Protestant, James Elder, presided at a meeting in the Town Hall to devise a means of helping the Belfast Catholics and a local subscription fund was set up to aid the victims.⁹⁰ Elder subsequently wrote to the local paper urging all local people to join them in their endeavours.⁹¹ At the Galway Urban Council a motion was proposed that Galway employers should be asked to sack their Protestant workers in retaliation for the Belfast riots. However, it was quickly dismissed and a resolution supporting the Belfast boycott endorsed instead.⁹² In the subsequent edition of the *Connacht Tribune*, another letter from ‘A Galway Protestant’ testified to ‘the tolerance experienced between Galway Catholics and Protestants long resident in this city.’ The letter went on to say that a circular condemning the actions of loyalists in Belfast was currently being circulated amongst the community and would soon be published.⁹³

Both communities contained individuals who were intent on stirring up sectarian ill-feeling. A Galway Protestant, William Oliver, wrote to the local press in September rebuking the earlier

⁸⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 9 September 1920.

⁸⁹ *Connacht Tribune*, 11 September 1920.

⁹⁰ Elder was previously chairman of the Ballinasloe Board of Guardians, see *Connacht Tribune*, 21 June, 1913.

⁹¹ *Connacht Tribune*, 18 September 1920.

⁹² *Galway Express*, 14 August 1920.

⁹³ *Connacht Tribune*, 18 September 1920.

efforts of Elder and other local Protestants and promoting the idea of a local Protestant Association for the county:

Which would safeguard their interests and those of their fellow Protestants. This would be more dignified than dealing back-handed blows to their co-religionists in the north. Is it not time that we heard their voices in cold condemnation of the murders in our midst... things are beginning to look ugly and unless there is a little more commonsense and toleration on all sides, goodness knows how it will all end.⁹⁴

For their part, the IRA leadership in Dublin was adamant that such action should cease and they were clearly referring to the west of Ireland when they warned:

The IRA has found it necessary to take drastic measures in the enforcement of law and order in various parts of Ireland, evil disposed persons have endeavoured to take advantage of the disturbed situation resulting from the present warfare to indulge in an unauthorised interference with the rights of individuals. The activities of certain persons motivated by land greed or the desire for personal advantage have had their activities firmly put to an end.⁹⁵

Sectarian tension remained a problem in Ballinasloe, however, and in November a riot broke out between rival groups. The *Galway Express* subsequently gloated that the 'orange ascendancy gang have showed their bigotry by cursing the Pope in the streets, some today have a colour other than orange on their skulls.'⁹⁶ A similar riot took place in 1917 when local soldiers clashed with republicans in the town and a three-hour fracas ensued. Sticks and bottles were used and a girl was badly beaten by local separation women. The riot had begun when a crowd of people defied a group of republicans to take down a Union Jack which they had erected in the town square and only the intervention of Fr Joyce eventually restored peace.⁹⁷

Bitterness towards the Protestant community only found full expression in Galway following the truce with the Crown Forces in 1921, and the uncertainty which the prelude to the Civil War generated, fostered an unprecedented level of attacks against ex-RIC men, Protestants

⁹⁴ *Connacht Tribune*, 25 September 1920.

⁹⁵ *An tOglach*, 1 May 1920.

⁹⁶ *Galway Express*, 17 November 1920.

⁹⁷ *East Galway Democrat*, 28 July 1917.

and the gentry. It was not IRA violence, per say, which was responsible for the victimisation of these sections of society, but the lacuna in law and order which encouraged long-simmering resentments to erupt into violent recrimination, behind a veil of idealism. In Loughrea and Athenry, the homes of a number of RIC men were attacked with gun-fire in June 1922, ex-sergeant John Kelly was kidnapped, and a number of men ordered to leave the district.⁹⁸ In this environment an unprecedented resolution was passed in April 1922 and signed by the entire Ballinasloe Rural District Council. This 'desired to bring under the notice of the Public the following':

- The failure of non-Catholics in Ballinasloe and District to take any action in connection with the atrocities in Belfast.
- The non-Catholics here, as in other parts of Ireland, are amongst the most prosperous in the community.
- It is time a Conference of the leading people of Southern Ireland was held with a view to making an exchange of the Catholic Workers on Belfast for some of the large non-Catholic landowners and businessmen, or as an alternative that families be migrated from Belfast and billeted on non-Catholic families outside the Six County Area, as this seems to be the only remedy to avoid the possible extinction of the Northern Catholics.⁹⁹

Sectarian violence formed another strand of resentment that fed into a complex web of social unrest in the area. Violence against Protestants took place in an environment where graziers and landlords were being intimidated on a wide scale, the vast majority of whom were Catholic. Republicans were attacked on a number of occasions in the streets of Galway, Loughrea and Ballinasloe and in the villages of Craughwell and Turloughmore. The general atmosphere of uncertainty during the period facilitated the settling of old scores as a window of opportunity arose where base motives could be concealed behind a transparent veil of ideology. In this context there was a gloomy inevitability that sectarianism would rear its head at some point, however, it remained isolated and confined to one district. Thus, the experience in Galway was considerably different from that which Hart investigated in west Cork. The Galway experience largely conforms to the situation described by Michael Farry in Sligo and David Fitzpatrick in Clare; with The IRA refraining from sectarian impulses despite the

⁹⁸ *Irish Times*, 17 June 1922.

⁹⁹ *East Galway Democrat*, 19 April 1922.

growing prevalence of religious animosity and what might be termed 'sectarian opportunism' within the community at large.¹⁰⁰ These impulses reached a peak during the climate of uncertainty and insecurity which characterized the first six months of 1922, as the country slid into civil war. The grim reality presents itself however, that had the IRA aggressively pursued the resources of the minority community in east Galway, they many well have garnered a greater degree of popular support amongst sections of the local community.

Similarly, the burning of big houses, whilst a feature of the War of Independence in Galway, also reached its peak during the Civil War as another sustained campaign of agrarianism swept the county. The motivation for these attacks was for perceived military reasons during the War of Independence but for a mixture of agrarian and military reasons during the Civil War. Whilst the land surrounding big houses was coveted by tenants, mansions were only burned by the IRA when it was suspected that the Crown Forces were to be stationed there. When the gentry fled in terror from local agitators, their mansions were targeted by the state as billets for troops and it was for this reason they were then burned by the IRA. Lady Gregory recorded the terror that spread amongst the ascendancy as the tide of rural unrest gathered momentum in early 1920:

An exodus from county Galway. The Goughs leave this week and Lough Cutra is to be shut up, until they see how things are... Lord Killanin has dismissed all his guards and gone to London. The Lopdells, because of their motors being put out of action the night they were going to the Roxboro dance are going to live in England. The big houses are falling.¹⁰¹

Castlelambert House in Athenry was burned down on 8 September 1920 when it was rumoured that the military would be stationed there. Tyrone House, the home of the St Georges at Ballinderreen, unoccupied at the time, was burned down in August and the home of C.D. O'Rourke was burned down at Birmingham, near Tuam in July. Moyode Castle and Tallyho House in Athenry and Monatigue House in Craughwell were all burned down for similar reasons in early 1921. Both Castlelambert, Bermingham House and Monatigue were

¹⁰⁰ See, Michael Farry, 'Sligo Protestants after the Revolution' in *Aftermath of Revolution; Sligo, 1921-23* (Dublin, 2000), pp 177-201; Fitzpatrick, 'Protestants and Unionists', in *Politics and Irish Life*, pp 40-71.

¹⁰¹ Lennox Robinson, (ed.) *Lady Gregory's Journals, 1916-1930* (New York, 1947), entry for 22 January 1920.

also the subjects of long running agrarian agitations and this was a factor in their demise. Thomas Hannon, O'Rourke's land agent, was shot dead by the IRA as an informer in April 1921.¹⁰² With arms raids taking place on a weekly basis in the county, local privileged elites became targets for those who coveted land, goods and firearms. The Galway Lawn Tennis Club, which was burnt down in July, was one of the social centres of the local elite and the Athenry Cricket club and the Tuam Golf club were burned down for similar reasons in 1922. There were other attacks on the gentry during the period and the Volunteers ambushed a number of vehicles on their way to a ball at Major Persse's house at Roxboro near Loughrea in January 1921.¹⁰³ At Athenry, Walter Lambert received the support of the local community including the Sinn Fein cumann when he was threatened by local men posing as the 'Irish Republican Killing Squad'. The men had warned him to give up his demesne land so that it could be divided amongst local tenants, and his employees were warned not to return to work on the estate. Following word of the threats a delegation of republicans visited the local men involved, warning them to cease their activity and the workmen returned to their employment.¹⁰⁴

With the RIC helpless to stem the tide of unrest spreading across the countryside, it was inevitable that local groups would take it upon themselves to try to counter the activities of the Volunteers and land agitators. In early 1918, Martin Egan of the Galway Farmers Association advocated the establishment of Vigilance Committees 'in every parish to prevent the perpetration of criminal injuries to people and property for which the rate payer has to pay'.¹⁰⁵ The *Connacht Tribune* which claimed to have originally devised the idea, congratulated Egan, calling it 'an encouraging sign of the times'. Athenry was the first area to form a committee and Thomas Kenny dedicated an editorial to the topic, noting that the work of the new committee was not going to be for the fainthearted:

Athenry has earned the congratulations of all righteous and courageous men. It has established a Vigilance Committee which is composed of all classes in the little township. The committee is not to be an organisation for the passing of pious resolutions and the paying of unctuous compliments. It is to be an active and virile force. Its primary object is to rid the district of the

¹⁰² This will be fully discussed in Chapter Five.

¹⁰³ *Freeman's Journal*, 16 January 1921.

¹⁰⁴ *Connacht Tribune*, 17 January 1920.

¹⁰⁵ *Connacht Tribune*, 12 January 1918.

mauvaises forces that bring disgrace and discredit upon law abiding citizens. Soon the midnight prowler for unlawful purpose, the coward who fires into his neighbour's home or criminally injures his property, the ruffian who dares stoop to unspeakable crimes that should not be mentioned among righteous men, will find himself in moral Coventry. Athenry will become too hot for him, for in all crimes, the committee will aid the police to run the criminal to earth.¹⁰⁶

Ultimately the Vigilance Committees were a short lived expression of the frustration and impotence felt by strong farmers and shopkeepers in the face of the unrest and they were confined to the Oughterard, Loughrea and Athenry districts. Whether the local committee was a factor or not, the papers were keenly aware of the formative influence of local businessmen during the period:

Perhaps few towns in Ireland have kept their heads, so to speak, as well as Athenry during these days and weeks of crisis. The storm centre of the old land league days and the period of fitful and agitation that followed, having solved its domestic problems to its own satisfaction settled down to enjoy a well earned peace. Storms may rage around but the common sense and shrewdness of the Athenry businessman asserts and I hope will continue to assert itself.¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

Whilst the party clearly retreated from its radical, although under-articulated, stance on the land question, Sinn Féin never became truly conservative. However, by 1919 social considerations were overwhelmed by the need to ensure support for the movement's political aims from all sections of nationalist society. The irony of the Irish revolution lies in the fact that it remained socially conservative despite being driven by small farmers and workers. The evolution of the movement's social agenda in the county was most obvious during the new Land War, but a softening of the party's previous denunciations of those whom it had unceremoniously labeled 'enemies of the Irish people' had been ongoing. From 1918 to 1919, the *Galway Express* printed a series of editorials denouncing the character and moral fortitude of the county's urban dwellers and the merchant class in particular. The vitriol used to condemn all classes of town dwellers for their lack of nationalist fervour reached fever pitch

¹⁰⁶ *Connacht Tribune*, 2 March 1918.

¹⁰⁷ *Connacht Tribune*, 6 November 1920.

in 1919 in a series of articles on the Irish language, the co-operative movement and the perceived role of the local merchant class in 'supporting the British'.

Following the small attendance at a Feis Cheol in Galway town in May 1919, the paper attacked the attitude of townspeople to the national language. The editorial went on to note that in the county with the highest number of Gaelic speakers, eleven of its towns lacked a Gaelic League Branch.¹⁰⁸ The paper went on to question the moral fibre of townspeople claiming 'the transitionists of the more favoured and anglicised centres, so long imitated the foreigners' language and civilisation that they have now become lost in imitation and are now neither themselves or those whom they attempt to ape.'¹⁰⁹ Galway town was later labeled 'a sickening old city' inhabited by 'the garrison and its hangers on', 'what is wrong with Galway that it never interests itself in anything Gaelic? There is no city in Ireland less Gaelic in spirit.'¹¹⁰ As well as Gaelic culture, the paper devoted frequent editorials to the merits of the co-operative movement as a means countering the profiteering of the town merchants. In November, the editor queried, 'Why Mr. McDonagh and the merchant class are so anxious to show their goodwill towards the government, while showing their ill will to the majority of the Irish people.'¹¹¹ The paper had previously condemned the national educational system for not encouraging scientific farming methods, as 'to be a farmer is an honourable profession, but our national schools are now preparing our young men to become shop boys.'¹¹²

In November 1919, Sinn Féin declared its unequivocal support for the co-operative movement as a means of countering the influence of the merchant classes:

If the co-operative movement threatens to eliminate the merchant class from the economic life of Ireland, the merchants have only themselves to blame. If the merchants take sides against Sinn Féin, which is nothing more or less than against the Irish people; if the merchants support the English government in its fight against the Irish People, then they can hardly expect the Irish people to support them. It is true than many honest merchants are members of

¹⁰⁸ Ballinasloe, Tuam, Mountbellew, Athenry, Portumna, Dunmore, Oranmore, Clarenbridge, Oughterard, Spiddal and Moycullen.

¹⁰⁹ *Galway Express*, 10 May 1919.

¹¹⁰ *Galway Express*, 9 August 1919.

¹¹¹ *Galway Express*, 8 November 1919.

¹¹² *Galway Express*, 8 October 1919.

Sinn Féin. These merchants however are in the minority and so have been only able to exert a small influence on the economic policy of Sinn Féin. The majority of merchants are supporters of the English government in Ireland and opponents of the great majority of Irish people. If the Irish merchant supported the Irish people then the Irish people would support the Irish merchant.¹¹³

Sinn Féin's attacks on the mercantile elite were greatly tempered during the following month with a sharp retreat from their earlier strident support for the co-operative movement. Leading with a front page editorial condemning the co-operative movement on moral, theological and economic grounds:

He (AE, editor of the *Irish Homestead*) must surely admit that the sudden and immediate establishment of co-op stores all over the country would partake of the nature of an immoral act unless shopkeepers and their employees are absorbed wholesale into the movement and guaranteed a means of living equal to that which they presently enjoy.¹¹⁴

Having previously noted that the co-operative movement was opposed 'by people in high places' in the town, the paper later condemned the smashing of the windows of the new co-operative store in the Galway.¹¹⁵ If the movement was moving away from its uncompromising criticism of the local merchant elite, its position in relation to land agitation and the rural elite, was also evolving and the strike of farm labourers on the Pollock estate in east Galway and the dispute over grazing on the Martyn estate in south Galway, both in late 1919, illustrated the *volte face* the organisation was prepared to make.

In August of 1919, Sinn Féin described the tenants on the Tulira estate of Edward Martyn as 'political renegades and traitors to the Irish Republic.'¹¹⁶ Martyn was one of the leading cultural nationalists of the decade and had been one of Sinn Féin first public supporters. He had disavowed the movement by the time the Irish Volunteers were formed and did not involve himself with any section of the movement after 1914. The tenants had drawn the wrath of the republican movement by their refusal to abide by the decree of a local Dáil land

¹¹³ *Galway Express*, November 1919.

¹¹⁴ *Galway Express*, 13 December 1919.

¹¹⁵ *Galway Express*, 15 November 1919.

¹¹⁶ *Galway Express*, 3 August 1919.

court that the auction of land belonging to the Tulira estate be allowed to proceed unmolested and that an agitation to compel Martyn to offer his land for re-distribution amongst his tenants cease immediately. The tenants' refusal to abide by the ruling and their forcible disruption of the auction of the farm earned them a stark warning from the IRA that 'this disloyal and rebellious act of humiliation of Sinn Féin will be shown no toleration.'¹¹⁷ Martyn had shown contempt for the proceeding throughout and did not attend the land court which was held in a Loughrea hotel in front of a large audience. The dispute had the potential to embarrass the movement, nationally and locally, as Martyn remained a well known figure in literary circles and the decision incensed local tenants.

A similar, though somewhat more serious dispute, illustrated Sinn Féin's new disposition later in the same month, when an eight-week strike of farm labourers on the Pollock estate in Clonfert and Laurencetown collapsed after demobilised soldiers were brought in to smash it. A group calling itself the 'East Galway Employers' and Farmers' Association' recruited, the local papers claimed, from 'the ascendancy class' successfully brought in over one hundred strike breakers, whilst refusing to negotiate with the farm labourers who were demanding an increased wage. The labourers were forced to go back to work without any of their demands being met and at no point did Sinn Féin or the Volunteers become involved in the dispute. Timothy Killeen noted at the Ballinasloe Rural District Council that the 'men were badly beaten and there is discontent all round'.¹¹⁸

Whilst there was some activity displayed by the ITGWU in the county during the later part of the revolutionary era, at no time was it supported in any meaningful way by Sinn Féin or the Volunteers. Despite the *Galway Express* declaring its support for the one big union and even going so far as to proclaim 'Hail Russia' in 1919, this apparent enthusiasm did not develop into active support for trade union activists.¹¹⁹ In June of that year, two local men were sentenced to jail in Gort after being prosecuted for marching behind the red flag during a transport workers parade in the town. Noting that the 'the green flag is not good enough for you, you must use the flag of bloody revolution and terrorism,'¹²⁰ the Judge granted bail of £5 and £10 each. However, the men were forced to serve their sentences because, as they told

¹¹⁷ *Galway Express*, 3 August 1919.

¹¹⁸ *Galway Express*, 6 August 1919.

¹¹⁹ *Galway Express*, 22 November 1919.

¹²⁰ *Galway Express*, 26 June 1919.

the court 'there is no one in Gort who will bail us.'¹²¹ The unwillingness of Sinn Féin to support the men and the inability of their union to do likewise, graphically illustrates the unfortunate position of any labour activist unlucky enough to be arrested.

Sinn Féin continued to make ambiguous statements in defense of organised labour and a councillor told the Ballinasloe Rural District Council, 'Poor men were always at the back of every great movement, the Land League, the Tenant Defense Association and Sinn Féin. Some very great changes are coming and they might yet get better terms and be their own masters.'¹²² The reality was somewhat different as during the same month Frank Fahey warned the rural poor through the pages of the *Galway Express* that 'lawlessness and injustice would not be sanctioned by the South Galway Comhairle Ceantar of Sinn Féin and the organisation must prevent disunity and disruption by counseling patience, for the enemy would give much to break Ireland's solidarity.'¹²³

The relatively conservative nature of the republican counter state was an understandable manifestation by the leadership of the conservative rural communities from which they sprang. The Volunteers simply had to reflect the innate social conservatism of rural Ireland, if they were to garner popular support. Ernie O'Malley, the foremost republican intellectual the revolution produced, recalled that, 'at the beginning it was the poor who stood by us':¹²⁴

The people were conservative; they had a hatred of change. They had been driven in on themselves too long, clinging for centuries to Gaelic usage in land and law, and suspicious of changes that had been forced on them by the conquerors. What was good enough for their fathers was good enough for them.¹²⁵

Liam Mellows interpreted this aspect of the revolutionary leadership in stridently Marxist terms:

Sinn Féin, while nominally a non-class nationalist Party, was in fact a bourgeois national

¹²¹ *Galway Express*, 26 June 1919.

¹²² *Galway Express*, 5 July 1919.

¹²³ *Galway Express*, 26 July 1919.

¹²⁴ Ernie O'Malley, *Army Without Banner: Adventures of an Irish Volunteer* (Boston, 1937), p. 143.

¹²⁵ O'Malley, *Army Without Banners*, p. 141.

party. The fact that it included the bulk of the advanced workers did not make it any the less bourgeois in character. It represented bourgeois interests. Its non-class appearance carefully cultivated a piece of camouflage behind which a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie was established.¹²⁶

Contemporary radicals were keen to stress the formative role that class antagonism played in the evolution of the struggle for independence. The *Voice of Irish Labour* pondered what the outcome of the War of Independence held for ordinary workers in the country:

Need we argue that in Ireland our shopkeepers, farmers and mill owners, from the meanest hucksters to the chairman of the big limited company is indefinitely divorced in outlook and sympathy from the working class. Probably in no other country in Europe is the conflict of interest between the least of the small property owner and those who own no property so apparent.¹²⁷

Even the greatest patience has its limits. The time is coming when those men and women will take ways and means of keeping their souls in their bodies, ways and means which will not commend themselves to the most pacific minded people.¹²⁸

Dan Breen recalled the sudden change in people's views as the revolution turned toward an inevitable settlement. Venturing into the town from his base in the Tipperary countryside, he and his comrades were 'everywhere welcomed and acclaimed as heroes, even by the people who, two years before, had been describing us as murderers and assassins.'¹²⁹ Peadar O'Donnell was even more strident: 'the middle classes, which lurked in the shadow of the republican movement from its rise to popularity, were no part of the freedom forces, they had no aim that could not be realised within the Home Rule Empire.'¹³⁰ To O'Donnell and his comrades on the republican left, the revolutionary activities of the republican movement took place in what he later termed 'the climate of innocence'¹³¹ as the eradication of the social and economic institutions which the state had engendered were put aside by the leadership in

¹²⁶ Liam Mellows, *Notes from Mountjoy Jail* (London, 1925), p. 9.

¹²⁷ *Voice of Labour*, 29 October 1921.

¹²⁸ *Voice of Labour*, 3 December 1920.

¹²⁹ Dan Breen, *My Fight for Irish Freedom* (Dublin, 1924), p. 239.

¹³⁰ Peadar O'Donnell, *There Will Be Another Day* (Dublin, 1963), p. 11.

¹³¹ O'Donnell, *There Will Be Another Day*, p. 12.

favour of preserving nationalist unity. Liam Mellows believed that the British had 'destroyed the republic by exploiting the contradictions that existed within the national movement. These contradictions were class contradictions':¹³²

The medium sized Irish bourgeoisie deserted Imperialism, joined the national movement and took control of it. They were satisfied with the imperialist concession of Dominion status as it permitted them to become the ruling class in Ireland... Thus while the Anglo-Irish War was fought by the working class and the petty bourgeois, it was fought in the interests of the bourgeoisie.¹³³

The revolution in Galway was not fundamentally sectarian and it would conceivably have attracted more support had the Volunteers actively targeted the disproportionate wealth of the minority community. Galway town, which had a similar number of Protestants as Ballinasloe, had no history of sectarianism of any kind. The latent sectarianism in east Galway reflected the popular resentments of the period and the collapse of the RIC gave elements in society the opportunity to target those whose resources they coveted and to which they felt they were entitled. It was a frightening time to be a petty landlord or a Protestant and to be both could leave one open to being raided for arms or having one's property and land seized by local tenants. The Presbyterian community could be perceived as a more legitimate target for sectarian intimidation when the legitimacy of their perceived political opinions, could be linked to lingering historical resentment at their generally more enhanced economic status, *vis-à-vis* their Catholic neighbours. Nevertheless, the exodus of the gentry in early 1920 had its roots in the agrarian land seizures rather than any ethnic or religious imperative and their homes were not burned by an anarchic peasantry, but by the IRA, and for perceived military reasons. In Ballinasloe, Protestants who were targeted were amongst the town's leading merchants. Their perceived unionist sympathies was simply an excuse to terrorise the local merchant elite, who had suddenly and unexpectedly become vulnerable. The majority of the local community were not actively republican and the prospect of an exodus of merchants, many of whom had long established credit arrangements with local customers, was a significant factor. No Catholic businessmen were targeted in a similar fashion in the town, underlying the fundamentally sectarian impulses which could legitimise attacks on property, which would otherwise have been viewed as unacceptable by the community.

¹³² Mellows, *Notes from Mountjoy Jail*, p. 7.

¹³³ Mellows, *Notes from Mountjoy Jail*, p. 10.

In the context of the humiliation that the 1918 elections represented for UIL supporters and their very public 'misgivings' about the legitimacy of the republican movement, the new Land War gave both sides the opportunity each needed to move their political constituency to the centre and expand their influence and support base. For former UIL supporters, the land arbitration courts and republican police provided them with the opportunity to have a role in the new movement, whilst moderating the social agenda of the more radical elements of the movement. Without losing face, former UIL members could now support the new forces of 'law and order' which were seen to be contributing to restoring 'normality' to the countryside. From being abruptly shut out of the political process, respectable elites like William Duffy now attended arbitration courts and made favourable comments on their findings. Thomas Kenny, arch-conservative and editor of the *Connacht Tribune*, gave ample coverage to the courts' findings and highlighted their effectiveness in quelling what was developing into a revolutionary transfer of land ownership in the east of the county. For republicans on the other hand, they now had the opportunity to spread their influence and membership beyond their traditional narrow base and the significant resources and expertise of middle class professionals gave the movement the opportunity to bridge the rural/urban political divide. If the organisation made a tactical trade off, largely at the behest of the national leadership, they lost some of their core strength in the process and the Volunteers reflected this conversion to 'law and order' by losing many of their strongest companies. As will be discussed in the following chapter, the War of Independence was not to be fought in the traditional centre of secret society unrest, in the east of the county, but in the north, in the hinterland around Tuam.

Sinn Féin's success was aided by their devotion to an abstract image of a new Ireland. As Laffan notes, 'It is probable that many Sinn Fein supporters regarded 'the republic' as a slogan or battle cry, rather than as a concrete objective which must be obtained.'¹³⁴ This ambiguity was a crucial means to avoid the sectional political arguments which a detailed programme of reform might engender amongst the nationalist constituency. However, this 'common patriotism' also involved reneging on seminal aspects of what republicanism was popularly perceived to represent.

¹³⁴ Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland*, p. 245.

Chapter Five: The War of Independence

This chapter examines the actions of the IRA and the Crown Forces during the War of Independence and analyses what kind of people fought on the republican side, what kind of communities active companies came from and to what extent local people supported them. The Crown Forces' campaign is also analysed and in light of recent research and the degree to which the force conformed to the traditional nationalist perception of indiscipline is considered.¹ When one examines the actions of the Crown Forces and the IRA, coherent patterns of action and reaction emerge, where local communities were the subject of reprisals following attacks by the IRA on the police and military. This is the only study of the War of Independence in the west of Ireland which informs the key debates concerning the regional dynamics of political violence which has been pioneered by Rumpf and Hepburn, Fitzpatrick, Hart, Coleman and Augusteijn.²

The evolution of the IRA's campaign is discussed in three distinct phases from January 1920 until the truce in July 1921. Detectable patterns involving the reorganisation of resources and tactics emerge as the number of active IRA Volunteers contracts and the level of violence on

¹ Joost Augusteijn, 'Motivation: Why did they Fight for Ireland? The Motivation of Volunteers in the Revolution' in *idem*, *The Irish Revolution 1913-1923* (London, 2002), pp 103-20.

² Ernest Rumpf and Anthony Hepburn, *Nationalism and Socialism in Twentieth Century Ireland* (Liverpool, 1977); David Fitzpatrick, 'The Geography of Irish Nationalism' in *Past and Present*, Vol 78, (1978), pp 113-44; *Politics and Irish Life 1913-1921, Provincial Experience of War and Revolution* (Dublin, 1977); Joost Augusteijn (ed.) *The Irish Revolution, 1913-1923* (London, 2002); Peter Hart, 'The Geography of Revolution in Ireland 1917 - 1923' in *Past and Present*, Vol 154, (1997), pp 142-73. Peter Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies, Violence and Community in Cork, 1916-1923* (Oxford, 1998); Peter Hart, *The IRA at War, 1916-1923* (Oxford, 2003); Marie Coleman, *County Longford and the Irish Revolution, 1910-1923* (Dublin, 2003); Joost Augusteijn, *From Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare. The Experience of Ordinary Volunteers in the Irish War of Independence 1916-1921*. (Dublin, 1996); Joost Augusteijn, 'Accounting for the emergence of violent activism among Irish revolutionaries, 1916-21' in *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol xxxv, no 139 (May 2007), pp 327-44; Tom Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics* (Dublin, 1981); Charles Townshend, 'The Irish Republican Army and the Development of Guerrilla Warfare, 1916-21' in *English Historical Review*, xciv (1979), pp 318-45; Charles Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland: Government and Resistance Since 1948* (Oxford, 1983).

both sides escalates. The development of the republican campaign in the county largely conforms to the evolution of IRA violence witnessed in other active counties. In terms of the regional distribution of levels of support for the IRA, a key theme in the literature on political violence has been the disparate regional variations between active and non-active areas: not only between different parts of the country but also within counties themselves. Marie Coleman has noted the stridently militant nature of the IRA rank and file in north Longford which contrasted with their somewhat less enthusiastic comrades in the south of the county.³ In Galway a similar spatial differentiation of violence emerges as the north of the county, in the hinterland between Tuam and Galway town, bore the brunt of the Crown Forces' reprisals while the south and east of the county remained considerably less violent.⁴ There were no active companies in any of the towns and all the attacks on police barracks took place in rural areas, apart from one occasion when the IRA ventured into Clifden to attack the police.⁵ The decidedly less active nature of the urban IRA has been noted in Longford and Clare but the almost total absence of republican activity is considerably more pronounced in urban areas in Galway than in other active counties.⁶

Whilst Galway was more active in terms of attacks on the Crown Forces than most counties in the east and north of the country, it was some way behind Munster, Mayo, Belfast and Dublin. In terms of the intensity of the Volunteers' campaign nationwide, the five most violent counties were all in Munster with Cork, Tipperary, Limerick, Kerry and Clare experiencing the highest levels of violence. Next came Dublin, Mayo and Antrim followed by Galway, Sligo and Roscommon.⁷ A total of fifty-eight people lost their lives in the county as a direct result of the conflict, with fifty-one fatalities occurring in the east of the county. Both Hart and Augusteijn have analysed the development of IRA violence. This thesis examines the totality of violence carried out by the Crown Forces, within which IRA activity evolved. The IRA attack on Castlehacket Barracks on 9 January 1920 marked the opening of the War of

³ Marie Coleman, *County Longford and the Irish Revolution, 1910 - 1923*, p. 172.

⁴ See Appendix for 'Map showing the distribution of fatalities during the War of Independence', Map showing location of Crown Forces' and 'Map showing the main IRA attacks on the Crown Forces.'

⁵ The West Connemara flying column attacked the police in Clifden on 16 March 1921, killing two RIC men.

⁶ Fitzpatrick, 'The Geography of Irish Nationalism', p. 130; Coleman, *County Longford and the Irish Revolution*, p. 150.

⁷ Rumpf and Hepburn, *Nationalism and Socialism in Twentieth Century Ireland*, p. 40.

Independence in Galway, with the first RIC man shot dead in the county in July and the first civilian killed by the Crown Forces in September.⁸ The campaign in Galway began at the same time as in other active parts of the country, with the IRA leadership sanctioning attacks on the police for the first time in January of 1920. The IRA killed eighteen people in Galway, fourteen of whom were shot in the east of the county. Ten were members of the RIC who were killed whilst on duty, three were members of the Crown Forces and five were civilians. Of the civilian fatalities, three were believed to have been actively informing on local republicans, one was the wife of the district inspector caught up in an ambush and one was a civilian, accidentally shot dead in a raid for arms. The IRA also attacked six police barracks between January 1920 and the truce, five of which were in the east of the county, as well as carrying out fifteen ambushes where Crown Forces suffered either loss of life or serious injury. The police barracks attacked were at Castlehacket, Castlegrove, Bookeen, Loughgeorge, Spideal and Headford.⁹

Cumann na mBan is not analysed in this study as their role was peripheral to the campaign of the IRA in the county. Like most active areas nationwide, the organisation had a small number of hardcore members who were generally sisters or 'sweethearts' of active Volunteers.¹⁰ Their activities were confined to carrying messages to IRA members and reporting on the activities of the Crown Forces. In Galway town, a small number were involved in luring soldiers to 'lover's lanes' where they were promptly relieved of their rifles by waiting Volunteers.¹¹ Three prominent Cumann na mBan members had their hair shorn by the Crown Forces in Galway town in retaliation for a similar attack carried out by the IRA on a girl who had testified at a court martial against local IRA members in September 1920.¹²

Whilst the IRA's campaign in the county was episodic, the actions of the Crown Forces instilled terror in the general population. Augusteijn states that in many areas, the Crown Forces 'did not behave according to the image portrayed of them by the local IRA' and that

⁸ Constables Burke and Carey were killed by the IRA in an ambush at Gallagher, near Tuam on 19 July 1920. The first civilian killed by Crown Forces was Joseph Athy shot dead in Oranmore on 17 September 1920. See Appendix for full details.

⁹ See Appendix for complete list of dates, locations and details.

¹⁰ See Michael Hopkinson, *The War of Independence* (Dublin, 2002), p. 108.

¹¹ BMH, WS 1,682 (Mrs Margaret Broderick-Nicholson).

¹² *Irish Times*, 25 September 1920.

the wide acceptance of this reputation, 'represented a discrepancy between perception and reality which did not convince many in the Volunteers, their sympathisers and many in the general population.'¹³ This study analyses the totality of political violence in the county including that of both the Crown Forces and the IRA in order to comprehensively discuss the development of political violence and the evolution of public opinion.

The Crown Forces carried out ten reprisal burnings in towns and villages from July 1920 until May 1921 with seven in the east of the county.¹⁴ The state's most sustained campaign of violence took place in Galway town where a campaign of arson, robbery, intimidation and murder lasted for over a month, becoming known locally as 'the Terror'. The Crown Forces killed twenty-six people, all of whom, except one man, were unarmed. Of these twenty-five, thirteen were either members of Sinn Fein or associated in some way with the Volunteers. The remaining twelve were civilians killed at random or for no apparent reason. The bodies of some republicans killed in custody showed signs of extensive torture and Harry and Patrick Loughnane from Shanaglish had their skulls broken, grenades set off in their mouths and their bodies set alight.¹⁵ A number of girls in the Gort area were sexually assaulted by Crown troops during a period between 30 November 1920 and 20 February 1921 when the Crown Forces killed thirteen people in 'reprisals', without corresponding IRA attacks of any kind.¹⁶ In terms of the destruction of property, loss of life and general impact, the Crown Forces' campaign had a much greater effect on people's day-to-day lives than the activities of republican insurgents. State violence had an immediate effect on the IRA campaign and the movement all but collapsed for several months from September 1920 until early 1921, as Volunteer officers refrained from carrying out attacks for fear of drawing the Crown Forces into their districts.

Four groups were involved in killing people in the east Galway countryside: local agrarian secret societies; The IRA; Crown Force troops; and British military intelligence. Secret

¹³ Joost Augusteijn, 'Motivation: Why did they Fight for Ireland? The Motivation of Volunteers in the Revolution' in Augusteijn (ed.) *The Irish Revolution, 1913-1923* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp 103-20.

¹⁴ See Appendix for 'Map of reprisals carried out by Crown Forces' and Appendix three for details of attacks

¹⁵ Harry and Michael Loughnane, Beagh, south Galway, see *Irish Times*, 7 December 1920.

¹⁶ Lennox Robinson (ed.) *Lady Gregory's Journals, 1916-1930* (New York, 1947), entry for 20 November 1920.

agrarian societies killed two local men during the period, landlord Frank Shawe-Taylor and James Ward, a herd for Sir William Blake, both of whom were shot in March 1920. Secret societies were possibly also involved in a number of murders carried out during the truce, between July 1921 and the shelling of the Four Courts in April 1922. Three men lost their lives in mysterious circumstances on 15 March 1922, when two former RIC men and a farmer who had previously worked for the Congested Districts Board were murdered in a co-ordinated attack in St Brides Workhouse, Galway town.¹⁷ A number of people were also shot dead in their homes during the conflict by unknown assassins and their bodies labelled with signs claiming they had been killed as spies by the IRA. The RIC Inspectors colluded in the killings by inventing fictitious motives for their deaths and blaming their murder on local people.¹⁸ The community at large believed these men had been killed by the Crown Forces and this view was publicly shared by the local press, the clergy and family members of the deceased.¹⁹ The degree to which many killings are shrouded in uncertainty is remarkable and it is unclear in many cases, which group was actually responsible, what their motive was, from whom they gained their information and why the particular victim was singled out.

Revolutionary theorists such as Fitzpatrick initially adopted a statistical approach to studying the factors which influenced the emergence of political activists and political violence generally.²⁰ This approach has been broadened by historians such as Augusteijn and Hart to encompass the interaction between revolutionaries and their environment. This study takes the latter approach following an analysis of the social composition of the IRA in Galway produced by Fergus Campbell, which has utilised census figures and other available data.²¹ It is not the intention of this chapter to duplicate this process but to analyse the evolution of the totality of the conflict and contribute to the ongoing debates surrounding political violence.

¹⁷ See *Irish Times*, 18 March, 21 March & 25 March 1922.

¹⁸ See CI monthly report, west Galway, May 1921, CO 904/115, for the case of Thomas McKeever discussed later in this Chapter.

¹⁹ *Connacht Tribune*, 28 May 1921.

²⁰ See, Fitzpatrick, 'The Geography of Irish Nationalism' and Hart 'The Geography of Revolution in Ireland 1917-1923'.

²¹ Campbell, *Land & Revolution*, pp 260-1.

I. The IRA Campaign in Galway

5.1 The Structure of the IRA

Until the summer of 1919, the Galway Volunteers, as in all counties, were structured as one brigade, under an eight-man county executive led by Seamus Murphy.²² The brigade was restructured as part of a national re-organisation in 1920, with several new brigades formed and a new command structure put in place. The north of the county, excluding Connemara, became the north Galway brigade, consisting of two separate battalions, Tuam and Glenamaddy, with ten parish companies in each battalion. Galway, west of the Corrib, was formed into the West Connemara and East Connemara brigades, with four local parish companies in each. The Galway Number One brigade consisted of four battalions and covered the countryside to the east of Galway town from Castlegar along the banks of the Corrib as far as Kilcoona. In the south of the county, the Gort brigade consisted of ten companies stretching from Ardahan, along the coast to the Slieve Aughty mountains and the Clare border. There was also a south east brigade covering Ballinasloe and Portumna and an east Galway brigade consisting of the Athenry and Loughrea battalions. In reality, the former brigade existed on paper only after September 1920 and the latter was relatively inactive following the attack on Bookeen Barracks in July 1920.

The organisation's formal structures became meaningless from September 1920 onwards, following the arrest of most the leading officers in the county and the decision of many of the remaining senior Volunteers to go into hiding. Seamus Murphy, the commanding officer for the county fled to Dublin, leaving the organisation without any command structure. In theory, a brigade, battalion and company structure continued to exist, but no brigade O/C was ever appointed to replace Murphy, no centralised authority or communications system was ever put into place and areas were left to act on their own initiative with no over-arching strategy, leadership, co-ordination, training or objectives. This, more than any other factor, damaged the morale of local companies and led to a situation where the capacity of the movement was

²² Details of Murphy's life and career are difficult to trace. He was employed by the Lights Commission in Dublin following independence. Originally from Dublin, he worked for the *Galway Express* newspaper where, in his role as a reporter, he could travel around the county without attracting too much suspicion from the authorities.

dependent on the initiative and ingenuity of local leaders who managed to avoid imprisonment.

Whilst the internal organisational structure of the IRA collapsed, the situation was exacerbated by the lack of interest taken by GHQ in Dublin in organising or directing the movement in the county. In common with other western areas, the IRA leadership were unwilling to commit resources to directing and organising the prosecution of the IRA campaign in Galway and this compounded the poor state of the organisation. With an extremely limited supply of weapons, some IRA men genuinely set about 'getting things going' in their areas but this was limited to less than a dozen active officers by September 1920 and most companies quickly ceased to function as distinct units or folded altogether. From this point on, individual Volunteers from neighbouring areas in more active parts of the countryside came together to act as one unit in larger operations, such as an attack on a barracks, whilst carrying out more low-key duties, such as enforcing the rulings of republican courts in their respective areas. There were simply not enough active Volunteers in each area to maintain the fiction of an organisational structure based on the parish companies from September 1920 onwards.

Coleman has shown that GHQ in Dublin exercised considerable control over the activities of the IRA in Longford, giving a direct boost to the movement in terms of organisation, training and equipment.²³ Similarly, Augusteijn has pointed out that direct intervention and control by GHQ was weaker in the west and that the low level of training, organisation and support offered to the Volunteers in Connacht affected their capacity to prosecute their campaigns effectively. Ernie O'Malley's account of his time organising the movement across Munster and south Leinster described a fundamentally more co-ordinated and consequently better motivated, centrally directed organisation, comprising a formidable hierarchical structure than existed in Galway.²⁴ Whilst in Mayo, the lack of contact with the Dublin leadership was compensated for by the ability and resolve of a number of determined local leaders like Michael Kilroy and Tom Maguire, in Galway, no such figures emerged. Seamus Murphy, who was in charge of the county, was neither a popular nor an effective officer, and his leadership, and later his decision to flee the country in September 1920, became the source of

²³ Coleman, *County Longford and the Irish Revolution, 1910-1923*, pp 164-5.

²⁴ See Ernie O'Malley, *On Another Man's Wound*, pp 329-42.

much bitterness, with many officers subsequently blaming him for the failure of their campaign.²⁵ Without another outside organiser operating in the role previously held by Liam Mellows, the movement was reduced to relying on the initiative of local companies and many areas quickly became demoralised and dropped out. A number of strong local officers did remain active but their influence, though considerable, was confined to their own localities.

The IRA nationwide was restructured in March 1921 and Galway's inclusion into divisions dominated by neighbouring counties was indicative of the low esteem in which the Galway IRA were held by GHQ. The whole of the county, south of the railway line from Galway to Ballinasloe was incorporated into the First Western Division, led by Michael Brennan. The division comprised county Clare with the addition of south Galway and all its officers were from Clare. North-east Galway was subsumed into the Second Western Division dominated by Mayo and led by Thomas Maguire. Connemara became subsumed in the Fourth Western Division, comprising west Mayo and Sligo.²⁶ The re-organisation was ultimately meaningless as it came so late in the campaign and it never made any practical difference. It did, nevertheless represent a humiliation for the local movement in terms of the rivalry with neighbouring counties and recognition of the failure of the Volunteer leadership in the county.

5.2 The Evolution of the IRA Campaign

The IRA campaign in Galway can be analysed in three distinct phases which broadly conform to the evolution of the movement nationwide. In each consecutive phase the pool of Volunteers involved became smaller as the less committed, the older, those with full time occupations and more responsible family men, increasingly dropped out. In their stead remained younger men, sons of small tenant farmers who were generally free from the constraints of careers, property, regular working hours, dependant families or strict parental control. In January 1920, the IRA leadership officially sanctioned attacks on the Crown Forces in response to the suppression of Dáil Éireann and the failure of Irish nationalists to have their case considered at the Versailles Peace Conference. In the first phase of their campaign in Galway, attacks were characterised by large-scale operations involving groups of

²⁵ BMH, WS 1,137 (Patrick Connaughton).

²⁶ Dorothy Macardle, *The Irish Republic. A Documented Chronicle of the Anglo-Irish Conflict and the Partitioning of Ireland, with a Detailed Account of the Period 1916-1923* (Dublin, 1937), p. 964.

between fifty and one hundred badly armed men attacking local police barracks in the hope of capturing rifles and ammunition. Castlehacket and Castlegrove barracks in the north of the county were attacked in January and March of 1920 respectively, and Loughgeorge Barracks in Claregalway and Bookeen Barracks in Killimordaly were attacked in May and July.²⁷ Neither the Volunteers nor the RIC suffered loss of life in any of these attacks and only a small number of policemen sustained minor injuries. The IRA failed to successfully seize any of the barracks and in all cases the police defended their barracks and forced their attackers to retreat. All the attacks were against rural barracks with no police stations attacked in any of the towns. (Throughout the War of Independence no barracks in any of the relatively larger towns of Gort, Loughrea, Tuam, Galway, Portumna or Athenry were attacked.) In addition to these incidents, the RIC barracks at Ballinagar was rocked by a bomb in March and the police were ambushed on three occasions, at Monivea, Caltra and Ardahan. As part of the Volunteers' nationwide offensive, four customs and excise offices were also raided and much of their contents destroyed during Easter Week 1920. Thirty evacuated barracks were also burnt down or otherwise destroyed between April and July after the RIC moved into centralised garrisons.²⁸

In the second phase of their campaign, the IRA became more ruthless and their revised tactics proved more efficient. The impetus for the development of the new phase of the campaign was the withdrawal of the RIC to much larger fortified barracks in urban centres and the virtual abandonment of the countryside to the IRA. With the success of the boycott of the RIC, the IRA now set out to kill policemen for the first time and they could only achieve this by ambushing patrols on narrow rural roads. Most ambush attempts ended in failure when the Crown Forces did not appear as hoped, but a number of successful attacks were staged for the first time. With much smaller units of men, armed with rifles and sufficient ammunition, specially selected units attacked the RIC at Gallagher Hill near Tuam in July, killing two RIC men; at Merlin Park near Oranmore in August, killing one RIC man; and at Castledaly, near Kilchreest in October, killing one RIC man.²⁹ These attacks, although few in number, represented an increasing professionalism on the part of the IRA as the rivalry between local

²⁷ Castlehacket was attacked on 10 January 1920, Castlegrove on 25 March 1920, Loughgeorge on 25 May 1920 and Bookeen on 2 July 1920. See Appendix of IRA Attacks for details.

²⁸ See Appendix of IRA Attacks for details.

²⁹ The police were attacked at Gallagher on 19 July 1920; at Merlin Park on 21 August 1920; at Castledaly on 30 October 1920. See Appendix of IRA Attacks for details.

companies was overruled by local officers who selected a handful of men from neighbouring areas to take part in attacks.

Augusteijn has noted how attacks on the RIC were generally unpopular in the early phases of the IRA's campaign and an increasing differentiation between areas in the county began manifest itself in earnest at this juncture.³⁰ Many Volunteers dropped out of the organisation rather than take part in these attacks, about which they may have had reservations, and which placed their own lives and livelihoods at risk. The company structure now only had meaning in relation to policing duties and the burden of fighting was placed on the few areas which were still willing to 'go out' against the enemy. The majority were content with local duties and sometimes played a supporting role such as blocking roads and disrupting communications when an ambush was imminent. There was also considerable opposition by Volunteer officers themselves to attacks taking place in this period. Patrick Connaughton remembered 'the Leitrim company [Leitrim, county Galway] were intent on drawing us away from their own area to the Ballinakill company area. The Ballinakill company objected to any attack in their area and a row developed.'³¹ Michael Hynes of Kinvara remembered calling off several attacks for fear of reprisals and noted that it was simply not possible to mobilise sufficient numbers of local Volunteers to attack the RIC.³²

Augusteijn has recognised the trend of accelerating cycles of violence in areas which were active early on in the IRA campaign nationwide.³³ In Galway, self reinforcing 'local wars' developed in isolation from other districts as cycles of violence stimulated reprisals and further IRA activity. A self sustaining process of escalating violence is evident in north Galway, which subsequently became the most active part of the county with attacks on Castlehacket and Castlegrove RIC stations taking place early in the campaign, in the same area which was later to become the heartland of the Tuam flying column. The process of further radicalisation that active Volunteers underwent as they were initiated into the secretive violence of the IRA, clearly produced more determined and energetic fighters in these areas, with other districts, whose campaigns had started less enthusiastically, simply being left behind.

³⁰ Augusteijn, *From Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 85.

³¹ BMH, WS 1,137 (Patrick Connaughton).

³² BMH, WS 1,173 (Michael Hynes).

³³ Augusteijn, *From Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 343.

The indiscriminate reactions of the Crown Forces and the atrocities they carried out led to an increasing radicalisation of both the population at large and IRA fighters. In Galway, however, the Crown Forces' campaign, though counter-productive in the long term, was extremely successful in the short term in destroying the Volunteer movement in a very brief space of time. Following the introduction of several measures under the Restoration of Order Act in August 1920, combined with the arrival of the Black and Tans in the county throughout August and September, the expanded Crown Forces were able to arrest anyone suspected of 'criminality' and entitled to hold them for an indefinite period. As a result the Galway IRA was practically inactive from October until January 1921. The Brigadier General of the 5th Division reported in early December that in the Galway Brigade area, practically all known leaders of the IRA, not on the run, have been arrested.³⁴ In this phase of the struggle most Volunteers who still resided at home or who had children or dependants and who were not willing to leave their jobs and jeopardise their livelihoods, generally refused to engage in IRA activity. Joseph Stanford recalled, 'except for the few who meant to see it through, the average company now dwindled down, in most cases to around ten men.'³⁵ The leadership of the IRA were distinctly aware of the failure of the organisation in the west to match its counterparts in Munster but had little sympathy for their plight. According to *An t'Oglach*:

In the west, the guerrilla warfare was not sufficiently energetic to greatly relax the grip of the old RIC on the countryside, therefore where the RIC were not broken, they gave greater assistance to Tans, hence greater Terror in quieter areas. The Volunteers of those parts of the West where this campaign of Terror is being carried out, have only themselves to blame for this.³⁶

Reprisals now took two forms: the burning of villages when an IRA attack took place and secondly, more low key, but extremely effective attacks on the homes of Volunteers who were believed to be active. With attitudes considerably hardened on both sides, only the very committed, who were free of social, professional or martial constraints now remained active. The organisation also became geographically limited to the more isolated districts of the county as they could not operate in the more populated districts:

³⁴ HQ 5th Division, WO 35/93A/2, TNA.

³⁵ BMH, WS 1,334 (Joseph Stanford).

³⁶ *An t'Oglach*, Vol xi, no 20, 15 September 1920.

The IRA are now confined to the outlying, backward areas where Sinn Fein still lives. There is a bitter undercurrent of hatred against the government and Crown Forces. If the present pressure was relaxed, Sinn Fein would once again renew its old sway in a more rigorous and determined manner. It had such a reign of terror that it will take a long period to remove its evil and ruinous affects.³⁷

The success of the Crown Forces in rounding up Volunteer suspects forced the organisation to fundamentally change its tactics. With the movement moribund for a number of months, the final phase of the IRA's campaign began in March 1921 with the formation of three flying columns composed of men who were on the run and could not return to their homes. The columns acted independently of any IRA authority and had no contact with each other or with the IRA in other counties. In the north, around the Tuam countryside, in the south, in the region of the Slieve Aughty Mountains, and in West Connemara, groups of between ten and twenty full-time Volunteers, all of whom were unable to return to their homes, formed flying columns and carried out a number of fatal attacks. Local IRA men sometimes joined the columns whilst they operated in their districts as the local companies which remained active, blocked roads, disrupted communications and provided food and shelter to the columns. The West Connemara column carried out three attacks, at Clifden, Muntir Owen and Screebe, killing three police men. The north Galway column was involved in four ambushes where two RIC men were killed. The south Galway column was involved in the Ballyturin ambush where three members of the Crown Forces and one woman accomplice were shot dead. During this period, local units also began to re-organise and carried out attacks on the RIC at Headford, Kilroe and Spiddal, wounding a number of Crown Forces.³⁸

It was a matter of some disagreement nationwide as to how strong a position the IRA were throughout the country when the truce was called in July. Augusteijn suggests that most active areas would have been militarily unable to keep their flying columns in the field much longer.³⁹ In Galway, despite the reorganisation in April, the IRA was not capable of functioning at a high level for much longer. Daniel Ryan of the south Galway column

³⁷ CI monthly report, west Galway, March 1921, CO 904/114.

³⁸ The IRA attacked the Crown Forces at Kilroe on 19 January 1921, the RIC Barracks at Headford on 30 April 1921 and Spideal RIC Barracks on 13 May 192. See Appendix for full details.

³⁹ Augusteijn, *From Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 184.

reflected, 'we were more or less on the defensive... and it was no easy job. It was our hardest time, there was no enemy party coming our way small enough to be attacked with the arms available to us'.⁴⁰

5.3 Factors Which Influenced the Emergence of Republican Activists

Why young men decided to join the IRA has been the subject of considerable historical enquiry. Nonetheless, investigation into the process of radicalisation has thrown up such strong variations as to suggest the futility of extrapolating the findings of studies based on research carried out in one part of the country into nationwide assumptions. Why some areas were active and others inactive is not always as obvious as one might assume and in terms of motivation, a duality of focus is necessary to try and identify firstly, what type of communities the IRA drew strength from, and secondly, what kind of individual joined the IRA from these communities. The role of ideology as a motivating factor has been problematic. Rumpf and Hepburn's pioneering research into the factors motivating political violence in Ireland noted that whilst radical nationalism tended towards socialism, it usually remained distinct from socialist analysis of the existing social system.⁴¹ Peadar O'Donnell, for instance, believed that small farmers and industrial workers of Dublin and Cork were ready to channel their social discontent into support for the party and the republican leadership, had it not been held back by its lower middle class character.⁴² Sympathy with the downtrodden by rank and file Volunteers was a natural reflection of the proletarianism of the movement, as well as members' view of themselves as liberators. Nationalism was also understood in a very general and romantic sense by ordinary Volunteers, with many noting in their Bureau of Military History interviews that an interest in history had a significant impact on their political outlook. The leadership of the organisation, on the other hand, remained anxious to provide 'responsible and respectable' government and dispel the alarm created by IRA violence. The movement had an ambivalent attitude towards ideology: happy to court socialist support and echo vaguely socialist rhetoric, whilst implementing relatively conservative social policies and dampening down radicalism in its own ranks. As will be discussed in this chapter, this has often led researchers to assert the primacy of materialistic motives, to

⁴⁰ BMH, WS 1,007 (Daniel Ryan).

⁴¹ Rumpf & Hepburn, *Nationalism and Socialism in Twentieth Century Ireland*, pp 24-5.

⁴² O'Donnell, Peadar, *There Will Be Another Day*, p. 36.

account for what were, to a significant degree, ideological convictions.

This section examines the factors which influenced the emergence of republican fighters in Galway and the salience of social, geographic and economic influences identified in other parts of the country. Campbell has accurately described the IRA's roots in Galway amongst the young sons of small farmers. His analysis of IRA membership shows that sixty-three per cent of IRA members in the south Galway IRA were farmers' sons between 1919-21, with a further thirteen per cent listed as artisans and eleven per cent listed as labourers.⁴³ When it is taken into account that a significant proportion of those listed as labourers and artisans would also have been the sons of small farmers forced to seek work outside of farming, the overall character of the movement is obvious. Only four per cent of Volunteers were clerks or shop assistants, with an additional four per cent involved in business and three percent were students. The number of Volunteers between 1919 and 1921 whose address was listed in an urban area was eleven percent, compared with eighty-nine percent who lived in the countryside.⁴⁴ The generational gap is as obvious as the rural/urban divide, with seventy-eight percent of those studied in the south Galway IRA in 1918 aged twenty-nine years old or younger with an additional twenty percent in their thirties. Only two per cent of fighters were older than thirty-nine.⁴⁵

Hart has concluded that cultural nationalism and the teaching of Irish in particular played a key role in the development of radical republicanism. In this context, education by the Christian Brothers has been seen as a pivotal factor, with Hart concluding that 'in teaching patriotism, the brothers created gunmen'.⁴⁶ Interest in the Irish language and in cultural nationalism in general was negligible amongst Volunteers in Galway and the Gaelic League remained weak in the county throughout the era. Knowledge of Irish was not a serious aspiration amongst IRA members and very few attended classes or displayed any interest in cultural nationalism generally. In this regard, the *Galway Express* continually emphasised the need for republicans to take an interest in Gaelic culture and was continually at pains to stress the lack of interest amongst Galway nationalists in cultural nationalism.⁴⁷

⁴³ Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, p. 260, Table 22.

⁴⁴ Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, p. 261, Table 26.

⁴⁵ Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, p. 261, Table 26.

⁴⁶ Peter Hart, 'The Geography of Revolution in Ireland', p. 171.

⁴⁷ See in particular, an editorial entitled 'The Language-Dying After All' in *Galway Express*, 10 May

Whilst many Volunteers did play Gaelic games (football in the north of the county and hurling in the south), Volunteers were no more likely than other young men of their age to be members of the GAA. Ballinasloe, which had the strongest tradition of recruitment to the British army in the county, were also the county Gaelic football champions for six years running between 1914 and 1919 – a feat never again achieved. Furthermore, the GAA had split along political lines in 1914 in the county, with a Remondite faction breaking away and organizing a rival organisation in south Galway, in protest at the influence of prominent republicans on the county hurling board.⁴⁸ Eight clubs continued to play in their own separate league for a number of years and their stance required considerable support from grassroots supporters in the clubs to endorse such a radical schism. The GAA was heavily influenced at an administrative level by the IRB and active republicans. However, given the popularity of Gaelic games, it is not surprising that not all clubs shared the ideals of Sinn Fein and players of all political persuasions joined its ranks. Thus, the role of cultural nationalism as a formative experience influence on IRA Volunteers in Galway can be discounted.

As previously discussed, in order to remain active in the IRA, Volunteers needed to be free of parental control, or at least obtain some degree of sanction from their parents to spend long periods of time away from their families. Cautious parents of young men who placed firm restrictions on their behaviour could prevent any son from remaining active for very long. Secondly, the burning of homesteads belonging to Volunteers, along with attacks on their families and neighbours, deterred the most determined of fighters, who were unwilling to leave their families to fend for themselves against the excesses of Crown Forces which included rape, murder and arson. Thus, in the context of the State's campaign discussed later in this chapter, only the most determined of fighters, generally free from parental control, without property, family dependants or the constraints of standard working hours, could realistically commit to being full-time IRA men.

Rumpf and Hepburn identified a number of key social and geographic features as important factors in preconditioning 'republican areas'.⁴⁹ They found that social unanimity was a

1919. (The paper noted that there was no Gaelic League branch in ten Galway towns.) See also, an editorial entitled 'A Sickening Old City', *Galway Express*, 9 August 1919.

⁴⁸ This is discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

⁴⁹ Rumpf and Hepburn, *Nationalism and Socialism in Twentieth Century Ireland*, pp 41-57.

significant factor in facilitating republican violence and where a considerable section of the population was indifferent or opposed to the IRA, the movement's actions remained sporadic. In Galway, IRA activity was a purely rural phenomenon with ideological or adventure-seeking young men from the towns much more likely to join the British army. As the towns and large parts of the countryside remained aloof from the national movement throughout the period, the IRA could only operate in those distinct parts of the countryside where local communities were willing to provide food and shelter. This urban/rural divide was not unique to Galway, with similar patterns observed in Tipperary, Longford and Clare, although the degree to which the IRA was exclusively rural in Galway is exceptional.⁵⁰ Augusteijn believes that the presence of a confrontational local population radicalised republicans and was a significant factor in directly encouraging the growth of the movement.⁵¹ This was the case in Galway and local opposition in the towns was so strong that the movement never developed in urban areas. Thus, Fitzpatrick's conclusion that 'Irish nationalism was above all else a rural preoccupation. Its most violent manifestations were concentrated in the countryside,' conforms closely to the dynamics of republican activity in Galway.⁵²

The presence of strong local leadership has been identified as an important factor in motivating a local company. Coleman has noted that in Longford, Sean MacEoin exercised considerable local authority and the respect with which he was held generated self-belief in his men.⁵³ His strength of character partially explains the distinct variation in IRA activity between north Longford, where he was based, and south Longford, which remained less active. Rumpf and Hepburn concluded that local leadership was more important than the political and social climate in a region and that strong autonomous local leaders could activate a whole area.⁵⁴ However, Fitzpatrick disagrees with this analysis, stating that 'the prevalence of violence was not a function of the presence or absence of strong willed and bellicose leaders of men'.⁵⁵ The evidence of this study suggests that more than any other single factor, the presence of strong local leadership, often comprising only a few tightly knit families, was

⁵⁰ See Fitzpatrick, 'The Geography of Irish Nationalism', p. 130; Coleman, *County Longford and the Irish Revolution*, p. 172; Augusteijn, *From Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 347.

⁵¹ Augusteijn, *From Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare*, p. 333-4.

⁵² Fitzpatrick, 'The Geography of Irish Nationalism', p. 423.

⁵³ Coleman, *County Longford and the Irish Revolution*, p. 162.

⁵⁴ Rumpf & Hepburn, *Nationalism and Socialism in Twentieth Century Ireland*, pp 41-2.

⁵⁵ Fitzpatrick, 'The Geography of Irish Nationalism', p. 117.

the single most important factor in mobilising and motivating a company in Galway. The presence of local autonomous leadership, or more patently, the absence of it, generally overrode local social, economic or cultural conditions as motivating factors. In terms of engagements with the Crown Forces, the Tuam battalion was the most active, and also contained several committed officers, including Michael Moran, in particular and these men later went on to form a flying column in February 1921. The death of Moran, who was shot by the Crown Forces in revenge for the Gallagher ambush in September 1920, was a massive blow and the Tuam brigade was subsequently inactive for four months following his death. Similarly, the murder of Louis Darcy, killed in police custody in early 1921, marked the immediate decline of the IRA in Headford which had previously been involved in the attacks carried out by the Number One brigade. The killing of Joseph Howley from Oranmore, in reprisal for the Merlin Park ambush in December 1920 resulted in the immediate decline of the Oranmore company also, and they did not carry out any more attacks for the duration of the conflict.

Along with the Tuam Brigade, the Gort Brigade under Joe Stanford, the west Connemara brigade under Thomas O'Maille and the Galway Number One brigade which comprised the districts of Oranmore, Headford and Castlegar, led by Thomas Duggan and Brian Molloy, were the only areas that remained active throughout the conflict. The strength of a local leader was amply demonstrated in the conflict over Menlo Woods discussed in Chapter Four, when through force of conviction and the threat of violence, Molloy was able to prevent the Galway County Council from proceeding with the purchase of the Wood and despite the support of Sinn Fein on the council, forced the owner to sell the estate for division amongst the tenants.

Rumpf and Hepburn identified economic factors which they found were responsible for the relative inactivity of the Volunteers in the west of Ireland. Noting that the most violent districts were not the poorest, but those concentrated in middling prosperous farming districts in the south, they concluded that the social aspirations of the rural poor in the west were not primarily reflected in the national struggle but in the land struggle.⁵⁶ Rumpf is partially correct in this assumption, as discussed in Chapter Four, although he did considerably underestimate

⁵⁶ Rumpf & Hepburn, *Nationalism and Socialism in Twentieth Century Ireland*, p. 55. Conversely, Rumpf's economic argument sought to explain the inactivity of the east and the north of the country in terms of their strong farming and economic ties with England, which generated a greater degree of sympathy for the maintenance of the union with England.

the level of violence in counties Galway, Roscommon and Mayo. Furthermore, they somewhat contradict their own analysis by arguing that the lack of violence in the west of Ireland could be accounted for primarily by 'a more Gaelic outlook generated by economic and geographic backwardness'.⁵⁷ The presence or absence of a prosperous rural middle class as a key factor in driving the violence of the IRA has been dismissed by Fitzpatrick, but Rumpf is correct in his assertion about the absence of both the upper and bottom echelons of rural society in the ranks of the IRA.⁵⁸ (In his short story, *The Road to Bright City*, Mairtin O'Cadhain, who was a member of the IRA in Galway, explained the absence of the very poorest section of Galway rural society from the revolution with the simple remark, 'the poor as ever, had to struggle on'.⁵⁹) In relation to the top tier of rural society, Fitzpatrick has noted that those with property were extremely wary of being involved as the struggle progressed and a similar pattern is evident in Galway.⁶⁰ The prosperous middle class that Rumpf refers to is absent in Galway but if his assertions are applied to the next tier of society, the small but not completely impoverished small tenant farmers, the picture in Galway is more accurately described.

Topography was frequently cited by combatants as a reason for the relative inactivity of their areas whilst defending their record to their IRA superiors in GHQ. Augusteijn notes that in Wexford, which was an inactive county, topography was frequently cited as the main reason for the lack of any functioning flying column and officers claimed IRA columns would have been immediately obvious to the Crown Forces due to the flat nature of the terrain. Whilst topography was discounted as an excuse by Volunteer leaders anxious to broaden the scale of their struggle, there is some validity in the argument. In Galway, there were three active flying columns, the west Connemara column, active from March 1921 until the truce, made their base in the Twelve Pins mountains, only venturing down to the coastal plains to attack the police. In south Galway, the flying column was based in the Slieve Aughty hills and only ventured down to ambush the military at Ballyturn in May 1921. The north Galway column, on the other hand, operated in the boggy undulating countryside around Tuam and managed to carry out a number of fatal attacks without the aid of mountain retreats. In other parts of the

⁵⁷ Rumpf & Hepburn, *Nationalism and Socialism in Twentieth Century Ireland*, p. 62.

⁵⁸ Fitzpatrick, 'The Geography of Irish Nationalism', p. 120.

⁵⁹ Mairtin O'Cadhain, 'The Road to Bright City' in *The Road to Bright City and Other Stories* (Dublin, 1981), p. 62.

⁶⁰ Fitzpatrick, 'The Geography of Irish Nationalism', p. 115.

country, the most successful columns operated in hilly countryside with the most aggressive columns in Tipperary and west Cork being the obvious examples. Thus, whilst hilly countryside helped the IRA, it was not an essential prerequisite.⁶¹

The lack of proper weapons was the most often cited reason, along with topography, for the failure of non-active areas to pursue their campaigns. Whilst it is clear that the IRA had a constant problem in keeping their Volunteers supplied with adequate arms and that the lack of ammunitions and other vital supplies was a major problem for the organisation in Galway, it does not explain the lack of IRA activity in many areas. Both Hart and Coleman have acknowledged that the IRA in Cork and Longford were chronically short of arms but as their campaigns progressed, the more determined fighters managed to arm themselves sufficiently to be able to mount guerrilla campaigns and keep small numbers of well-armed fighters active in flying columns.⁶² In Galway, even the west Connemara column, which was virtually cut off from the rest of the country, managed to fully arm more than twenty men, which was more than enough to fight a short guerrilla campaign for a number of months before the truce. A relatively small number of weapons was required to arm a column sufficiently and shortage of arms was not a defining factor.

Hopkins has highlighted the importance a strong nationalist tradition as an important factor in conditioning support for the IRA.⁶³ Similarly, Fitzpatrick has pointed out that the rhetorical affirming of communal sovereignty over the 'nation's soil and all its reserves was a commonplace of radical nationalists'.⁶⁴ Whilst not discounting the obvious importance of various versions of history in influencing the nature of any revolution, the previous land struggle in Galway, whilst a seminal part of folk history and featuring prominently in the political rhetoric of the era, must be discounted as a motivating factor. The areas in Galway where the Land War and the Plan of Campaign had been most bitterly fought, the districts of Athenry, Loughrea and Woodford, had no active Volunteer companies during the latter phase of the IRA campaign and Woodford was completely inactive throughout the period.⁶⁵ In this

⁶¹ Hart, 'The Geography of Revolution in Ireland', p. 158.

⁶² Hart, 'The Geography of Revolution in Ireland', pp 155-6.

⁶³ Michael Hopkinson, *The War of Independence*, (Dublin, 2002), p. 201.

⁶⁴ David Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands, 1912-1939* (New York, 1998), p. 30.

⁶⁵ It is instructive to examine the volume of folk stories of the Land War in the Galway volumes of the National Folklore Archive in comparison to the small number of accounts collected about the War of

context Garvin's assertion that, 'the best discrimination between the two Volunteer organisations was the presence or absence of a Land War tradition in the area' needs to be reassessed.⁶⁶

The dynamics of revolutionary violence in east Galway display strong parallels to the IRA campaigns studied by Augusteijn in Tipperary and Mayo, Coleman in Longford and Fitzpatrick in Clare. Hart's findings in Cork contradict many of the trends found in Galway. He found that the number of Volunteers who worked on farms was disproportionately low, given their share of the working male population, with skilled workers, shop assistants and other typically urban trades overrepresented. These findings have led Hart to conclude that 'we can eliminate those explanations for violence based on wealth, class, occupation or rurality.'⁶⁷ This directly contradicts Campbell's findings on the social composition of the Volunteers in Galway and the evidence contained in this study on the profoundly rural nature of the revolutionary experience. As previously discussed, towns were completely absent from the revolutionary struggle and whilst there are parallels in Clare and elsewhere, it was considerably more pronounced in Galway, where local men actually joined the Black and Tans. Fitzpatrick concurs that a cultural chasm existed between town and country noting that in Clare, towns were not socially conducive to producing Volunteers as 'larger market towns had not developed a communal or political life comparable in intensity to that in the countryside'.⁶⁸

II. Political Violence and the Wider Community

5.4 Public Opinion

The ability of the IRA to exercise control over their communities and stifle dissent over republican activity was an important factor in active IRA districts. Hostility towards republicans from supporters of the UIL in urban areas was particularly pronounced in Galway where the polarisation of political opinion was more pronounced than in other counties. The urban population was sufficiently hostile to the IRA for information on the Volunteer

Independence.

⁶⁶ Tom Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics* (Dublin, 1981), p. 109.

⁶⁷ Hart, 'The Geography of Revolution in Ireland', p. 173.

⁶⁸ Fitzpatrick, 'The Geography of Irish Nationalism', p. 131.

movement to be passed to the authorities on a relatively wide scale and this was a significant factor in preventing the growth of urban IRA companies. As discussed in Chapter Three, a considerable number of people in Galway town had previously mobilised against the IRA during the 1916 Rebellion and had worked closely with the police and military. Similarly in Loughrea, Turloughmore and Craughwell, the National Volunteers manned the local RIC barracks when news of the Rising spread. This urban/rural chasm was still an important phenomenon and as already noted, in January 1921 twenty local men actually joined the Black and Tan regiment stationed at Ballinasloe.⁶⁹

Opposition to republicans was dependant on whether the IRA was in the ascendancy or in decline and an ebb and flow of support between the rival institutions of the state and the revolutionary movement was apparent. The Sinn Fein land courts and the republican police, on the one hand, and the RIC and the state court system on the other, vied for the allegiance of the rural community. Support for the police was at its lowest in the summer of 1920, shortly before the arrival of the Crown Forces, as the force was almost completely boycotted. In a revealing passage written in July 1920, the county inspector described the conditions under which his officers were working:

The life of the police is scarcely bearable. They are shamed and boycotted and for the most part cannot get the necessities of life unless they commandeer them. They are held up and shot at every opportunity. The order is to destroy them and during July two young men were shot dead in circumstances of cruelty and treachery. The people generally are out for a republic and they propose to get it.⁷⁰

In this climate it was difficult for people who objected to the republican movement to make their feelings known and for many people it was prudent to keep one's political opinions private. The boycott of the police was enforced across the county, isolating both the RIC and the considerable portion of the population who supported them. In these conditions:

The police have to take the necessities of life by force. Their wives are miserable and their children suffer in the schools and nobody cares. The Sinn Fein arbitration courts administer justice, magistrates have resigned their commission, and lunatics are committed to the asylum

⁶⁹ *Connacht Tribune*, 21 January 1921.

⁷⁰ CI monthly report, west Galway, July 1920, CO 904/112.

by Sinn Fein magistrates through the operations of the Irish Volunteers. Propertied classes who are able to do so, have left the country, the remainder have become Sinn Feiners. There is no other course open to them if they are to live in security.⁷¹

By the end of the year the IRA had been successfully driven underground, however, and many people had the opportunity, which they were previously denied, to express their opposition to the movement. The police now noted:

A good deal of sympathy among people with a stake in the country is due to fear and there are indications of a return to sanity and revulsion against Sinn Fein on the part of the more respectable people, now that the government are beginning to get a grip on the situation. As far as Galway is concerned Sinn Fein has largely lost its power.⁷²

By the end of 1920 the police reported to Dublin Castle that they were beginning to receive valuable information on the activities of the IRA:

The riding is in a peaceable state and nothing of a serious nature has occurred. There is no agrarian agitation and the feeling toward the police is much better with the people inclined toward friendship and there is no attempt anywhere to boycott them. I have received bone-fide information of two or three ambushes prepared for the police.⁷³

British military intelligence nationwide was co-ordinated by five regional centres during the War of Independence, with the western centre based in Galway town. The military sought to gain information through the interrogation of captured Volunteers, from sympathetic individuals opposed to the IRA and by the use of disguised officers sent out amongst the local population. In Galway, the military enjoyed obvious success in the intelligence war against the IRA, and as previously discussed, they were able to destroy the organisation in a matter of weeks, when they arrested practically all the leading officers in the county in October 1920. In response to Parliamentary questions in the House of Commons from Joseph Devlin MP, military intelligence had been warned not to discuss the use of civilians in intelligence gathering and to confine any replies to similar queries by simply stating that they were

⁷¹ CI monthly report, west Galway, August 1920, CO 904/112.

⁷² CI monthly report, west Galway, November 1920, CO 904/113.

⁷³ CI monthly report, west Galway, December 1920, CO 904/113.

pursuing political crime in Ireland under the confines of martial law.⁷⁴ (The Chief Secretary had been asked whether the government was conscripting the male population of west Cork to assist the Crown Forces in combatant service against the IRA.)⁷⁵

John King, an IRA member from Clifden, recalled that in his district there were many 'spies and touts and if Ernie O'Malley had come to inspect the area, some of those miserable creatures' carcasses would be found along the roadside.⁷⁶ Similarly, Joseph Stanford, a south Galway IRA officer recalled, 'there were some in the Gort area who did not hesitate to give information to the RIC as late as December 1920.'⁷⁷ From whom the police received their information on the IRA is not clear, however, there was a partial return to normal civic life in late 1920 and government agencies were increasingly able to go about their normal business once more. In an important report, the police noted at the time:

As an instance of steady improvement, I would mention an interview I had a few days ago with the chief inspector of the CDB. The latter, who is in close touch with the people, informed me that that he finds an extraordinary change compared to a few months ago. The people now fully recognise the authority of the Board and there is no difficulty, as formerly, in collecting the money due. Among other important instances may be mentioned the completion of the audit books, the formation of a ratepayers association in Galway, the auditors of which are keeping in close touch with the police. And finally, the surrender of arms in the Headford area and the resignation of 17 IRA members and the disbandment of two companies.⁷⁸

The reference to the Galway Rate Payers Association is intriguing for a number of reasons. The Association was founded at the start of February on a 'non-political basis' with the added provision that religion and politics would not be discussed at meetings.⁷⁹ The Clifden branch of the Association stated their determination to 'protect the interests of the rate payers generally, as well as for resisting and defending against exorbitant and malicious injury claims, now so common in the events of the district, and the county council refusing to do

⁷⁴ 'Enrolment of Civilians in Martial Law areas into Civil Guards', WO 35 / 66, TNA.

⁷⁵ 'Enrolment of Civilians in Martial Law areas into Civil Guards', WO 35 / 66, TNA.

⁷⁶ BMH, WS 1,731 (John C King).

⁷⁷ BMH, WS 1,334 (Joseph Stanford).

⁷⁸ CI monthly report, west Galway, February 1921, CO 904/114.

⁷⁹ *Connacht Tribune*, 1 January 1921.

so.⁸⁰ The organisation was somewhat less clear about how they were going to bring down the level of compensation which people were increasingly making for damage and loss of life sustained at the hands of Crown Forces. There was clear hostility to the IRA, thinly disguised in the Association's rhetoric and members felt sufficiently secure to openly organise without fear of retribution from republicans.

Rate Payers Associations had been set up in Galway and Headford in February of 1921, during the same month in which the police made significant progress against the IRA in these areas. As previously noted, in February alone, the police foiled three IRA ambushes by acting on information provided by the public in Galway town. In Headford, where another Ratepayers Association had been set up, the local IRA collapsed after a significant arms find in the home of local IRA officer Louis Darcy. He was subsequently arrested by the military and shot dead whilst in custody.⁸¹ In a confidential report, British military intelligence, singled out the capture of Darcy as an example of the best possible use of information on the IRA gathered from local sympathetic civilians.⁸² The Crown Forces had been informed of Darcy's movements in advance and it was also noted that the same source had been used to uncover the original arms find in Darcy's home.

The reference to the Congested Districts Board in the RIC inspector's report was significant also. The chief inspector for the CDB in Galway was Leslie Edmonds. He was an English ex-serviceman who had fought in the Boer War before moving to Ireland and joining the CDB. As previously mentioned, he was believed to have been aboard the navy gun boat, *The Gloucester* during East Week, helping the navy direct their shells on the Castlegar neighbourhood, where the local IRA were thought to have been gathered. Edmonds was shot dead in July 1922 when he was ambushed by the IRA in the Castlegar District. It was believed locally that he was an undercover spy and in the 1950s Bartley King, former TD for Connemara, deposited a letter in the History Department of University College Galway stating his conviction that Edmonds had merely used his position in the CDB as a cover for covert surveillance.⁸³

⁸⁰ *Connacht Tribune*, 1 January 1921.

⁸¹ The murder of Louis Darcy is discussed in the final section of this Chapter.

⁸² 'Report on the Intelligence Branch of the Chief of Police, Dublin Castle', WO 35 / 214, TNA, p. 32.

⁸³ 'Letterfrack/Leenane, Landing of arms at', POL2, Hardiman Library, NUIG.

There are a number of intriguing aspects to King's claim. He also deposited a letter, which he claimed the IRA had retrieved, written by Edmonds detailing the activities of local republicans in north Connemara and which had been addressed to military intelligence in Galway. Secondly, Edmonds was widely believed to have been responsible for the sinking of a small fishing vessel, *The Pretty Polly*, off the Galway coast in May 1918.⁸⁴ He had been spotted at the scene by local people and the vessel was sunk shortly before the general round up of republican suspects for their alleged involvement in 'the German Plot'. The authorities at the time claimed that the fishing vessel had been attacked by the German navy and that it corroborated their claims of a potential German invasion.

King's claim about the CDB may also explain the killing of three men in Galway town in 1922, in an attack which became known as the St Brides Workhouse killings.⁸⁵ Two RIC men, Sergeant Gibbons and Sergeant Gilmartin, along with Patrick Cassidy, a farmer and former official of the Congested Districts Board were shot dead in a co-ordinated attack carried out by unknown gunmen on 15 March 1922. A third RIC man, Constable Patrick McGloin survived the attacks but sustained severe wounds. The attacks took place during the truce and it is significant that the dead men were terminally ill and were in the workhouse for that reason. McGloin had previously been warned by the IRA for allegedly acting as a spy and in May 1920 he received a letter in the post warning him to desist. It stated, 'McGloin, we know you are a spy and an informer. Give up at once or your days are numbered. Final notice.'⁸⁶ The murder of three former government servants in such circumstances generated questions in the House of Commons at the time but no explanation was forthcoming for the attack.⁸⁷ However, if the IRA believed that there was an active spy ring operating under the cover of the CDB, it explains their determination to kill three seriously ill men. The professionalism of the attacks and the level of co-ordination involved also suggests that it was not the work of the Galway IRA and may have been carried out by Volunteers brought into the county by IRA GHQ specifically for the task.

Disgruntled people were, however, often willing to warn the military about the activities of republicans. The Crown Forces reported that they had received a written warning of an

⁸⁴ 'Letterfrack/Leenane, Landing of arms at', POL2, Hardiman Library, NUIG.

⁸⁵ *Irish Times*, 18 March & 25 March 1922.

⁸⁶ *Irish Times*, 10 May 1920.

⁸⁷ *Irish Times*, 21 March 1922.

ambush near Mountbellew on 2 December 1920 and as a consequence were able to avoid the attack and arrest Patrick Tully and John Loughnane of Ballinamore Bridge.⁸⁸ Two weeks later, the military received details of weapons hidden in the home of Thomas Mannion at Castlefrench and they subsequently raided his house and a small quantity of weapons were recovered.⁸⁹ During the same month, the military reported that they had received details of ‘an outsider’ trying to organise the IRA at Laurencetown and an IRA officer, George Patten was captured due to information provided by another local source.⁹⁰

The IRA killed three informers during the War of Independence. William Joyce, a school teacher from Barna, Thomas Hannon, a land agent from Clonbern, and Tom Morris, a small farmer from Kinvara, were all kidnapped and shot in the head after receiving the final sacraments. Joyce was killed for passing information on local republicans to the Crown Forces and a number of letters that he had written to the authorities about local republicans were produced at his ‘trial’.⁹¹ Hannon was believed by the IRA in north Galway to have given the location of Michael Moran, the leader of the Tuam battalion, to police in north Galway.⁹² Moran, as noted above was subsequently arrested and shot dead in custody by Crown Forces in November 1920.⁹³ Morris had been regularly socialising with the Crown Forces in South Galway and the amount of time he spent in their company convinced the IRA that he was passing information to them.⁹⁴

William Joyce had made little secret of his antipathy towards the republican movement and he had actively campaigned to have Michael O’Droighneain, the republican leader from Spideal, removed from his post as a primary school teacher. His fate was sealed when letters he had written to the police outlining O’Droighneain’s movements, as well as allegations against other Volunteers, were intercepted by Patrick Togher in the GPO in Galway and subsequently passed to the leadership of the movement in November 1920.⁹⁵ Joyce was taken from his

⁸⁸ HQ 5th Division, WO 35/93A/2, TNA.

⁸⁹ HQ 5th Division, WO 35/93A/2, TNA.

⁹⁰ HQ 5th Division, WO 35/93A/2, TNA.

⁹¹ BMH, WS 1,718 (O’Droighneain).

⁹² BMH, WS 1,408 (Thomas Mannion).

⁹³ The killing of Michael Moran is discussed in the final section of this Chapter.

⁹⁴ *Connacht Tribune*, 9 April 1920.

⁹⁵ BMH, WS 1,718 (O’Droighneain).

home by masked men and brought to east Connemara where he was tried by a three-man Volunteer court. Local people displayed little sympathy when he went missing and the police noted 'we have, not alone received no assistance, but in some instances the attitude of those questioned has been insolent and defiant'.⁹⁶ This rare show of communal solidarity over a local killing by the IRA was not typical of the attitude of the general community in Galway town and is more indicative of disdain for Joyce, rather than the fear of IRA retribution on anyone who assisted the police in their search.

Tom Morris, who was shot dead on 2 April 1921 near the village of Kinvara in south Galway, was killed due to the belief that he was informing on the local community.⁹⁷ Morris, 58, was an ex-Royal Irish Fusilier and an ex-RIC man and was taken from his house at night by masked men and later found shot dead at a nearby crossroads. His body was blindfolded and a notice hung around his neck claiming he was a convicted spy and shot by the IRA. The local press stated that he had been unpopular in the district and had been under threat locally.⁹⁸ He was known to socialise with Crown Forces in the area and this marked him out from the community as a deviant. His house had previously been ransacked and he had subsequently fled the district and declared that he would not return. He came back to the area to convalesce after an illness and was staying with his sister. Giving evidence at the military inquest into his death, his sister stated that 'it was thought at the time that he was a spy'.⁹⁹

Thomas Hannon was a land agent for C.J. O'Rourke, near Clonberne in north Galway. He had been 'wanted' for some time by the local IRA due to their belief that he was a police informer. He was unfortunate to wander into an ambush that had been set up in the area for the RIC and was taken away and administered the last rights by a local priest before being shot in the head. His employer, who stumbled into the ambush along with him and who was a large landowner and a Justice of the Peace, was released unharmed. It was stated by a leading member of the Tuam brigade that Hannon had tipped off the authorities about the whereabouts of Michael Moran who was subsequently arrested and shot dead in December and for this reason he was shot.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ CI monthly report, west Galway, October 1920, CO 904/113.

⁹⁷ *Connacht Tribune*, 9 April 1921.

⁹⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 9 April 1921.

⁹⁹ *Connacht Tribune*, 9 April 1921.

¹⁰⁰ BMH, WS 1,408 (Thomas Mannion).

5.5 Ex-Servicemen

In urban areas the IRA were unable to silence their critics, prevent local people from fraternising with the Crown Forces or convince the general population of the righteousness of their cause. In these circumstances the IRA could not operate in the towns as the population was too hostile. In rural areas opposition was less vocal due to the increased support for the IRA. The Galway branch of the Ex-Servicemen and Sailors' Federation, who had a considerable number of members in Galway town, were quite adamant about what needed to be done to defeat the IRA. At a meeting of ex-servicemen in the town in March 1921, M.J. Hennon, the National General Secretary of the Federation, told his audience to loud cheers and applause, 'if the government cleared out of the country, it would be governed to the satisfaction of all Irish men by the ex-servicemen. Let the government clear out and the ex-servicemen will deal with the people who are kicking up trouble in the country. It may be talk, but you [ex-servicemen] could do it if you had co-operation behind you.'¹⁰¹ The militant rhetoric of the ex-servicemen concealed a considerable degree of bluff but the tone and content of their statements were unambiguous in their contempt for the IRA. Their members saw no compulsion to disguise their political sympathies and they had no fear of IRA retribution. Furthermore, it is likely that Hennon's remarks represented a moderated version of what was discussed at the meeting and which a responsible editor might subsequently print.

Ex-servicemen were always prominent at the funerals of the members of the Crown Forces killed by the IRA in Galway. Following the Ballyturin ambush in May of 1921, district inspector Cruise publicly forwarded a letter of thanks to Mr Montgomery, the honorary secretary of the Galway Ex-Soldiers Federation, noting that he 'desired to return thanks through you, to the ex-servicemen who turned out in such great numbers at the funerals yesterday'.¹⁰² There was little hostility towards ex-servicemen in the towns and their sacrifice during the Great War was acknowledged by both local government and the community at large. In November 1921, at the height of 'the terror' in Galway town, the Ex-Servicemen's Association held their annual armistice parade despite the curfew in the town, in front of large

¹⁰¹ *Connacht Tribune*, 19 March 1921.

¹⁰² *Connacht Tribune*, 21 May 1921.

crowds of cheering locals who lined the route of their parade in a heavy rain storm.¹⁰³ Notices had been placed around the town earlier in the week warning shops to stay shut on Armistice day 'in memory of the gallant lads who fell for the sake of dear old England and the RIC who were murdered by their own country men... Anybody that disobeys this order will have no roof over their heads in 24 hours.'¹⁰⁴ A band and flag bearers from the 6th Dragoon Guard entered the quad at the University and forced seventy students and their professors to stand for a recital of God Save the Queen. Three students who refused to remove their hats were taken away and later publicly flogged.¹⁰⁵ Businesses had been forced to shut for the day and following the procession, the four hundred or so ex-servicemen and their families were entertained at a reception at Earls Island army barracks courtesy of Colonel Sadler. J.F. Goulding of the Galway Ex-Sailors and Soldier's Federation later wrote an open letter to the *Connacht Tribune* claiming that 'in no other town in the country, could there be a response as was given to the appeal to local people to turn out for the parade'.¹⁰⁶ The army barracks at Earls Island was notorious for brutality and both Louis Darcy and Michael Moran were killed in custody there. The fact that so many local people were entertained at the camp whilst republicans were interned in the barracks, some of whom were tortured and killed, highlights the divided nature of Galway society.

The Galway Urban Council was very active throughout the War of Independence on the issue of the welfare of ex-servicemen and they took a number of steps to promote housing and employment opportunities for demobbed soldiers. The Council had considered a letter in November 1919 from the local Discharged Soldiers' Association asking that their members get preference of employment in connection with housing schemes.¹⁰⁷ Whilst the council did not implicitly state that it was in favour of this policy, it promoted a number of schemes to provide housing and employment directly to the ex-servicemen of the town. They had hoped to provide direct employment by employing them exclusively on the erection of a new pier at Salthill, however, the plan was scuppered when no funds could be found to run the scheme.¹⁰⁸ In February 1921, the council passed a motion stating that 'the committee considers that every

¹⁰³ *Connacht Tribune*, 13 November 1920.

¹⁰⁴ *Connacht Tribune*, 13 November 1920.

¹⁰⁵ *Connacht Tribune*, 20 November 1920.

¹⁰⁶ *Connacht Tribune*, 11 December 1920.

¹⁰⁷ Minutes of the Galway Urban District Council, 23 November 1919, NUIG.

¹⁰⁸ Minutes of the Galway Urban District Council, 10 July 1919 & 11 August 1919, NUIG.

facility be given for the purpose of assisting the proposed scheme for erecting houses for ex-servicemen.’¹⁰⁹ A scheme of grant-in-aid to Claddagh fishermen whose boats and equipment needed repair following their return from the War received the council’s backing in March 1919. The Council also proposed opening a motor engineering department in the town for local fishermen who had served in the army and navy.¹¹⁰ The Ministry of Reconstruction advised them that their proposals were being taken up by the CDB.¹¹¹

In the towns, the Crown Forces continued to retain the confidence of the local population and as there was no fear of attack, they were free to carouse in local bars and hotels, with the officer class socialising with the local elite in the Galway Club in Salthill. In 1921, anti-Sinn Fein literature remained posted around Loughrea for some time with slogans such as ‘Up the Rebels = To Hell with Ireland’s Prosperity.’¹¹² However, a number of brutal assaults on individual ex-servicemen in the county were carried out by republicans. On 28 November 1920, men broke into the home of an ex-serviceman named Fahey, beating him badly and breaking his front teeth. He had been known to be socialising with the Crown Forces in the area.¹¹³ An ex-serviceman, W.H. Dryden was kidnapped in Galway town on 9 December and taken to Moycullen where he was told he was going to be drowned for collaborating with the Crown Forces. He managed to escape before the sentence was carried out and made his way safely back to Galway town.¹¹⁴ In January 1920, an ex-serviceman was shot in the legs in Oranmore. He had received a number of warnings to resign from his old job as a postman, which he had resumed after coming home from the War. The local man who had been carrying out his duties had been let go to allow him to have his old job back, and for this reason, he was unpopular in the district.¹¹⁵

Patrick Thornton was killed by a group of men as he was leaving a pub at Loughanbeg near Spiddal, accompanied by his two brothers, on the night of 2 February 1920. He was a demobilised soldier and the police noted that he had been unpopular in the area as he ‘was of

¹⁰⁹ Minutes of the Galway Urban District Council, 23 February 1921, NUIG.

¹¹⁰ Minutes of the Galway Urban District Council, 3 April 1919, NUIG.

¹¹¹ Minutes of the Galway Urban District Council, 8 May 1919, NUIG.

¹¹² *Connacht Tribune*, 21 January 1921.

¹¹³ HQ 5th Division, ‘Hostile Acts or Outrages’, WO 35/93A/2, TNA.

¹¹⁴ HQ 5th Division, ‘Hostile Acts or Outrages’, WO 35/93A/2, TNA.

¹¹⁵ *Irish Times*, 1 May 1920.

a bullying disposition' and that 'he and his brothers were opposed to Sinn Fein'.¹¹⁶ The police alleged that the leader of the group was a local Irish teacher who shot Thornton in the abdomen after the three brothers were knocked down and beaten with sticks by a group of local men. Four men were later arrested and subsequently released without charge. It is not clear if this was an official attempt to kill by the IRA and it is more likely that it was intended to be a beating, carried out by local republicans which suddenly escalated into murder.

Ex-servicemen were only part of a web of opposition to republicans in the county and they typified the attitudes of many of the former supporters of the urban UIL, previously discussed in this chapter. Being an ex-serviceman did not yet have stigma attached to it and in the context of the considerable opposition to the IRA in the county, expressed by groups such as the Rate Payers Association, the Church hierarchy and the local press, they were simply one group amongst many, who were hostile to the IRA. This does not mean that ex-servicemen were targeted by the IRA more than any other group; the Crown Forces had no shortage of potential informers in urban areas and for this reason alone, there was no IRA activity in the towns. Ex-servicemen in urban areas were unlikely to be killed as informers, as there was so little IRA activity to inform on, or so few IRA men to carry out such threats.

In the countryside, being an ex-serviceman did not single someone out as a target for the IRA – unless they were known to associate with the Crown Forces and believed to be passing information. In the case of Tom Morris and Patrick Thornton, discussed in the next section, there was personal animosity towards both men for their vocal contempt for republicans. In rural areas, ex-servicemen recovering from the trauma of the War were potentially more brazen in their opposition to the IRA and it was their public defiance, combined with the belief that they were informers, which led to these men's deaths. Although there were rural districts with few active IRA members in the county, unlike in the towns, fraternising with the Crown Forces was still stigmatised and it was this behaviour, more than any other factor, which singled these men out for retribution. Ex-servicemen were simply more likely than local farmers to defy convention as they struggled to rebuild their lives and many continued to seek the comradeship, danger and hard living experienced in the armed forces. Those who had remained at home and were more in tune with the tenor of local feeling and the moral conventions surrounding associating with the military were naturally reticent to socialise with

¹¹⁶ CI monthly report, west Galway, February 1920, CO 904/111.

troops. In the case of Tom Morris, it may simply have been the lack of company to drink with which led to his behaviour and ultimately his death. The role of alcohol in the death of Michael Thornton, discussed later in this chapter, must also be acknowledged and he was attacked after a night spent in a public house. He was also known for bullying local republicans, a fact which suggests a recklessness, fuelled by alcohol and the macho culture of army life.

5.6 Civilian fatalities

There were two civilians killed during the War of Independence in Galway for agrarian reasons, although the individuals responsible for the murders may have had connections to the Volunteers. James Ward was shot dead at the Gate Lodge at Menlo, where he lived as a caretaker and herd for Thomas Blake, in February 1920.¹¹⁷ Ward had been standing at his front door talking to a local man when he was shot from behind his garden wall. The local tenants had been agitating for the division of Menlo demesne for some time and for his association with the estate, Ward paid with his life. It is worth speculating whether this was a deliberate murder attempt or an outrage intended merely to intimidate, which then went wrong. Most shootings into homes tended to be carried out at night and houses were generally targeted through the windows. The fact that Ward was shot at close range whilst directly facing his attacker would tend to suggest a deadlier motive than a warning. A survey of attacks in Galway during the period would suggest that the local secret society, which generally sympathised strongly with, and membership with the IRA, was almost certainly responsible. As discussed in Chapter Four, the leader of the agitation over the Wood was IRA leader Brian Molloy, and there was considerable intimidation involved in the campaign. It is unlikely that the attackers would have killed Ward without at least consulting with Molloy.

The problem in establishing culpability is again very much an issue in the murder of Athenry landlord, Frank Shawe-Taylor, shot dead on the morning of the 2 March 1920. As discussed in Chapter One, he had been at the centre of a long running boycott by tenants for a number of years to compel him to sell his farm. He was shot at point-blank range as he sat in his car, after the road in front of his estate had been blocked by a felled tree. As in the Menlo killing, a number of local men were immediately arrested but subsequently released due to lack of

¹¹⁷ *Connacht Tribune*, 6 March 1920.

evidence.¹¹⁸ There is no doubt that the Athenry secret society at Coshla was involved in the killing but the exact nature of republican involvement is difficult to establish. The Volunteers were not the secret society nor vice versa, but it is clear that strong overlaps existed and neither the Volunteers nor Sinn Fein locally made any public condemnation of the killing.

This was also the case in the shooting dead of Martin Cullinane, killed when armed men with blackened faces raided a house at Ardskamore, Corofin, on the night of the 4 March 1920.¹¹⁹ Cullinane was shot whilst a group of up to fifteen intruders searched the dwelling for a shotgun they believed was concealed within. Raids for arms were rife in the county at the time and the authorities were quite certain who was responsible. Noting that twenty-two houses were raided and fifteen shotguns taken by masked men in the Loughrea, Athenry and Portumna, areas in January 1920, the police had 'no doubt that the raids were organised by Frank Fahey MP, who was down here previous to the raids. They all took place in his division.'¹²⁰ The IRA had earlier asked people to hand over arms to them, rather than the raiders and the relative accuracy of their information is born out by the fact that in fifteen of the twenty-two homes visited, they correctly identified that the occupiers possessed arms.¹²¹ Cullinane was probably killed by accident by men from the community, acting on information that there was a shotgun in the house that the owner was unwilling to hand over to the local IRA.

III. The Crown Forces' Campaign in Galway

5.6 Violence and Indiscipline

The actions of the Crown Forces in Ireland during the War of Independence has received scant academic attention, despite the wealth of information which the War Office has maintained on the operation of its troops during the period.¹²² Whilst historians have acknowledged that Crown Force's reprisals played a formative role in conditioning the

¹¹⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 6 March 1920.

¹¹⁹ *Connacht Tribune*, 7 February and 14 February 1920.

¹²⁰ CI monthly report, east Galway, January 1920, CO 904/111.

¹²¹ CI monthly report, east Galway, January 1920, CO 904/111.

¹²² 'General administration of the army in Ireland', WO 35, TNA.

response of both the IRA and the community at large, a comprehensive examination of the dynamics of state violence remains a pertinent lacuna in the historiography of the Irish revolution. The role of the Crown Forces needs to be comprehensively examined for any conclusive analysis of the totality of political violence to emerge. In this context, the following section discusses the actions of the Crown Forces in Galway and the impact which they had on both the IRA and the community at large. Augusteijn has acknowledged the pertinent role which the treatment of prisoners on hunger strike and raids and searches of private premises had on public opinion, but he also concludes that 'the poor image of the Crown Forces and in particular the Black and Tans and Auxiliaries, was of course, created by effective Sinn Fein propaganda.'¹²³ He also concedes that whilst a negative perception of Britain was an important motivation for IRA fighters, this image of the Crown Forces was 'fostered by the growing body of historical writing, which painted a very romantic image of an unscrupulous Britain violently oppressing an independent Ireland.'¹²⁴

County Galway was covered by the Galway Brigade of the British Armed Forces which formed part of the 5th Division during the War of Independence.¹²⁵ The 5th Division was commanded by Major General Sir H.S. Juedwine, whose headquarters was in the Curragh, from where he co-ordinated an operational area covering Roscommon, Longford, Leitrim, Galway, Mayo, Offaly, Kildare, Westmeath and Carlow.¹²⁶ The Galway Brigade under Major M.O. Wilson had its headquarters in Renmore Barracks in Galway town. There were no troops permanently stationed in west Galway but the towns of the east were heavily garrisoned due to the militancy of the IRA in the previous five years. Wilson had a number of different regiments under his control, stationed in six garrisons across the county. The 1st Royal Dragoons were based in Athenry and Ballinasloe; the 17th Lancers were based at Galway, Gort and Tuam; the 2nd Battalion Border Regiment were based at the military aerodrome in Oranmore; the 2nd Argyle and Southern Highlanders were based in Galway town, along with a small detachment of the Connacht Rangers, the No 5 Section of the

¹²³ Augusteijn, 'Motivation: Why did they fight for Ireland', p. 106.

¹²⁴ Augusteijn, 'Motivation: Why did they fight for Ireland', p. 109.

¹²⁵ See map, 'Distribution of Crown Forces in Galway in 1920 -21' in Appendix.

¹²⁶ The 5th Division was comprised of Cavalry, Royal Artillery, Royal Engineers, Royal Corps of Signals, 13th Infantry Brigade, 14th Infantry Brigade, Royal Army Service Corps, Royal Army Medical Corps, Royal Army Ordnance Corp, Royal Army Veterinary Corp, Corp of Military Police and the Royal Army Chaplain Department. HQ 5th Division, Location of Troops, WO 35/93A/2, TNA.

Armoured Car Company and detachments of the 6th Dragoon Guards (Carabineers).¹²⁷ In December 1920, there were 453 troops in Galway town, 352 troops stationed in Ballinasloe and 135 in Oranmore with detachments of 57 troops in both Gort and Athenry and 46 troops in Tuam.¹²⁸ In addition to these permanently based troops, detachments from other parts of the 5th Division area were co-ordinated in larger sweeps of specific areas towards the end of the conflict.

The British military operated a policy of holding the civilian population responsible for the Volunteers' actions during the War of Independence and subsequently punished local communities in reprisals following IRA attacks. Direct contact between the Crown Forces and the IRA in Galway was relatively rare, with the Volunteers carrying out only fifteen ambushes that resulted in loss of life or serious injury. However, the vast majority of these attacks involved ambushes on small patrols of the RIC rather than the army and on only two occasions, at Kilroe in January 1921 and at Moylough in June 1921, did the IRA actually manage to engage British troops.¹²⁹ Hence, the conflict was characterised by campaigns of attrition against the RIC by the IRA, and by the Crown Forces against the civilian population in general, including but not limited to, individual IRA members. The Crown Forces did not fight the IRA directly but attacked the communities which they believed, frequently incorrectly, supported the IRA, whilst trying to kill individual IRA men who they believed were involved in attacks on the RIC.

A total of twenty-six people were shot dead by the Crown Forces in Galway between October 1920 and May 1921, eleven of whom were republicans.¹³⁰ Twenty-five of the victims were killed in the east of the county, including a priest, a pregnant woman, a serving RIC officer and a retired army major. Attacks against the civilian population and IRA members can be analysed in three categories. Firstly, there were a series of killings carried out by troops travelling into districts in large numbers, taking no care to hide their actions or their identity. A total of nine people were killed by rampaging troops in this fashion, i.e. simply being caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. A second series of attacks were carried out by small units, usually numbering no more than five, who targeted specific individuals under the

¹²⁷ HQ 5th Division, Location of Troops, WO 35/93A/2, TNA.

¹²⁸ HQ 5th Division, Location of Troops, WO 35/93A/2, TNA.

¹²⁹ The IRA attacked the Crown Forces at Kilroe on 19 January 1921 and at Moylough on 5 June 1921.

¹³⁰ See Appendix for map showing distribution of fatalities and a statistical analysis of fatalities.

cover of darkness, acting on intelligence about their victim's whereabouts and habits. Nine men were taken from their homes at night and killed in this fashion and in most cases, their bodies were then labelled as spies to give the impression that they were killed by republicans. Finally, seven IRA members were killed after being taken into custody and subsequently described as being 'shot whilst trying to escape'.¹³¹

Reprisals were also carried out by the Crown Forces in the towns and villages of Tuam, Oranmore, Ardrahan, Barna, Headford, Clifden, Screebe, Moycullen and Gort.¹³² In all cases, the attacks were carried out following IRA ambushes on the Crown Forces and involved the burning of homes, shops, public houses and parochial houses, along with the shooting and beating of random individuals. The fear generated by these attacks created a general dread at the prospect of troops arriving in rural localities. Following an IRA ambush in May 1921, almost the entire population of Gort fled the town overnight in anticipation of the arrival of troops seeking revenge for the Ballyturin ambush. The military subsequently attacked at least twelve homes in the vicinity and shot dead a local RIC man whom they suspected was passing information to the IRA.¹³³

The military's behaviour had a profound affect on public opinion in a county which had previously been sharply divided between nationalists and republicans and where republicans had been subject of intense hostility from many sections of local society. More than any other factor, fear of reprisals stopped all but the most determined groups of Volunteers from carrying out attacks. The military's activity, however, completely discredited the force in the eyes of many nationalists, who otherwise would have been content to support a tough approach against the IRA. Whilst Bishop O'Dea publicly held the IRA as 'morally responsible' for the murder of four local men shot dead in reprisals by the Crown Forces in Headford in January 1921, Church leaders also denounced the loss of moral authority which the behaviour of troops represented.¹³⁴ Archbishop O'Dea and Bishop O'Doherty released a

¹³¹ John O'Hanlon, Turloughmore, 2 November 1920; Michael Moran, Tuam, 24 November 1920; Harry and Patrick Loughnane, Beagh, 27 November 1920; Laurence McDonagh, Inishmore, 22 December 1920; J.J. McDonnell, Clifden, 17 March 1921; Louis Darcy, Headford, 24 March 1921. See Appendix for details.

¹³² See Appendix for full details of attacks and map showing the distribution of reprisals.

¹³³ See *Freeman's Journal*, 18 May 1921.

¹³⁴ The Archbishop condemned the IRA for the Kilroe ambush as 'misguided criminals'. See, *Irish*

statement condemning the actions of the military in September 1920:

We, who live amongst the people, see with our eyes, that not only is protection not given, but for months past, a systematic campaign of terrorism, violence and destruction of life and property has been tolerated, connived at, helped and encouraged, so that amongst the bulk of the people, no life, liberty or property is safe any longer.¹³⁵

Murder and arson were part of a wider campaign of violence carried out by the Crown Forces and as well as reprisals, constant low level violence, such as the burning of homes, the destruction of property and the public whipping or beating of groups of men were frequent occurrences. Lady Gregory wrote of her concern in her personal diary in September 1920 that the parents of a number of girls in the Gort area had decided to keep things 'hush, hush' after their daughters were 'interfered with' by soldiers.¹³⁶ Mock executions, with victims taken from their homes and led away to what they believed was their death, only to be beaten after questioning, along with the shaving of young girls in their homes and random firing at work gangs also occurred on a weekly basis from September 1920 onwards. Troops arrived in Moycullen following Sunday Mass and separated the local men before marching them at gunpoint to a nearby field. They were told that the military were about to restore Richard Abbott, agent on the property of colonel Campbell, to his home, and that 'if a hair on his head was touched, six republicans would be killed'.¹³⁷ Uniformed men visited the villages of Corofin and Cummer on consecutive nights in October and dragged twenty local men from their beds, stripping them naked and flogged them on the roadside.¹³⁸ In the Tuam area, council workmen were no longer willing to work on the roads for fear of attack following an incident in which a group of local men had been taken from a public house at Turloughmore and publicly whipped by British troops.¹³⁹ On the day of Terence MacSwiney's funeral in Cork City, troops ran amok in Loughrea town, wounding three people.¹⁴⁰ Following the incident, the Bishop of Clonfert, Dr O'Doherty wrote to Hamar Greenwood informing him that 'a state of

Times, 25 January 1921.

¹³⁵ *Freeman's Journal*, 18 November 1920.

¹³⁶ Lennox Robinson (ed.) *Lady Gregory's Journals, 1916-1930* (New York, 1947), entry for 20 November 1920.

¹³⁷ *Irish Times*, 28 September 1920.

¹³⁸ *Freeman's Journal*, 19 October 1920.

¹³⁹ *Freeman's Journal*, 19 October, 1920.

¹⁴⁰ *Connacht Tribune*, 31 October 1920.

alarm existed in the countryside between Ballinasloe and Athlone on the day of the funeral, with shots fired, men beaten and homes destroyed'.¹⁴¹ On the same day in Ballinasloe, a number of young women had their heads shaven, in the first of a number of similar attacks.¹⁴² Mock executions became a frequent occurrence and Michael Fury was taken from his home in October 1920 and questioned about a recent ambush. He was then shot at close range and his house destroyed with grenades. Two other homes were visited on the same night and their occupants shot.¹⁴³ In early December a series of burglaries took place with whiskey and cash stolen by groups of soldiers at four public houses in Loughrea and Athenry.¹⁴⁴

5.7 'The Terror' in Galway Town

Regardless of its anti-republican atmosphere Galway town was to witness a sustained period of Crown Forces reprisals during September and October 1920.¹⁴⁵ The only British soldier to be killed in Galway town during the War of Independence was a Black and Tan named Edward Krum, who was shot dead at the railway station on 9 September 1920.¹⁴⁶ His death and the subsequent actions of troops led to a five week long curfew in Galway town which became known locally as 'the Terror.' During this period people were subjected to a nightly campaign of violence and intimidation by Crown Forces. The atmosphere of menace was heightened by the absence of street lighting, which the council had agreed to shut off, by a rigidly enforced stipulation that no lights could be turned on in any home or business after dark. Krum was an army taxi driver and was on duty at the Railway Station as the evening papers were being delivered.¹⁴⁷ On the night in question, a number of Volunteers were in the station, waiting for a container of explosives due to arrive from Dublin.¹⁴⁸ People had gathered to collect the evening papers and when the train arrived the crowd rushed the platform. Krum

¹⁴¹ *Irish Times*, 6 November 1920.

¹⁴² *Irish Times*, 6 November 1920.

¹⁴³ *Freeman's Journal*, 18 October 1920.

¹⁴⁴ 'Hostile Acts or Outrages', 5th Division War Diary, WO 35/93A, TNA.

¹⁴⁵ See *Irish Times*, 11 September, 13 September and 15 September 1920; *Connacht Tribune*, 11 September, 18 September and 25 September 1920.

¹⁴⁶ *Irish Times*, 10 September 1920. He is variously referred to as Krum, Krumm, Crom, Crumm and Crum in different newspaper reports.

¹⁴⁷ BMH, WS 1,107 (Louis O'Dea).

¹⁴⁸ BMH, WS 1,107 (Louis O'Dea).

instinctively drew his revolver and threatened the crowd.¹⁴⁹ The Volunteers at the scene surrounded him and Krum shot Volunteer Sean Mulvey dead before being mortally wounded.¹⁵⁰ Following the shooting Crown Forces went on the rampage across town, assaulting a number of people and damaging property, including the Thomas Ashe Sinn Fein Hall, which was burned to the ground. Soldiers arrived at the lodgings of Seamus Quirke, a 23 year old Volunteer who was originally from Cork, and dragged him to the docks where he was shot dead. Troops also arrived at the home of Volunteer Sean Broderick who was shot a number of times but survived by feigning death. They then shaved his young sister's head before locking family members in an upstairs room and setting fire to the house. (Neighbours came to the rescue and managed to put out the blaze before the inhabitants were overcome.) Many other men around the city were pulled from their beds in a similar fashion and severely beaten. Soldiers also ransacked the offices of the *Galway Express* and the paper was never printed again.¹⁵¹

On the following morning, the military imposed a curfew from nine at night until four in the morning and what the *Connacht Tribune* subsequently described as 'fifteen nights of unexampled terror' followed.¹⁵² In a letter to be read out to all his parishioners Bishop O'Dea later denounced:

The persistent shooting and flinging of grenades in the city and for miles around, almost every night since curfew began, the systematic campaign of house burning, destruction of property, eviction of families from their homes, dragging of people from their beds at revolver point and forcing them to act as spies, violence against weak women and girls, and I don't know what

¹⁴⁹ BMH, WS 714 (Thomas Hynes) It is possible he may have been drunk as he had been seen earlier in the day drinking on Abbeygate street and he had also threatened a schoolteacher on the platform with a gun, who then ran off.

¹⁵⁰ BMH, WS 1,107 (Louis O'Dea) Mulvey was then taken to the docks where he lingered for three hours, being ministered to by Fr. Griffin, before dying from his wounds.

¹⁵¹ County Solicitor Louis O'Dea later questioned whether Crum had intentionally set out to stir up trouble, 'in order to ginger up the RIC into hostile action'. He recalled that District Inspector Cruise had approached him at a social function and told him that his men had come to him in a body and said that they no longer wanted to do 'this dirty work'. Cruise told O'Dea that he had subsequently advised his men to circulate all RIC barracks in Ireland to look for support. BMH, WS 1,107 (Louis O'Dea).

¹⁵² *Connacht Tribune*, 2 October 1920.

other forms of terrorism.¹⁵³

The curfew was vigorously enforced by the military with troops clearing the streets at the stroke of nine and imprisoning anyone found on the streets. Three hundred Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were transferred to Renmore Barracks and at least twenty houses in Dominick Street were commandeered to accommodate further reinforcements, with the original occupants ejected and provisions commandeered from local stores at gunpoint.¹⁵⁴ A number of RIC men who had resigned in protest at events were badly beaten by fellow officers when they returned to barracks to collect their belongings.¹⁵⁵

Following the first week of violence a citizens' enquiry was organised at the Town Hall and notices were put up urging local people to come forward with testimony. Louis O'Dea acted as solicitor for the citizens of the town and Monsignor Considine, John Conroy, solicitor and coroner, Professor Tom Dillon from the University and Tom Ray representing the ex-servicemen of the town, acted as a panel of independent adjudicators. As the meeting was about to get under way, soldiers surrounded the building and district inspector Cruise ordered the crowd to disperse. A standoff ensued with the organisers refusing to stop the meeting until Fr Considine persuaded O'Dea to relent. His home and business premises were subsequently ransacked and set on fire, and their entire contents stolen. A black Cross was also placed at his home, similar to the ones also placed at the homes of Thomas Walsh and Fr Griffin, both of whom were subsequently shot dead.¹⁵⁶

Low-level violence continued for a number of weeks as troops carried out an incendiary campaign against local premises. Incendiary fires, arson and burglary became a nightly occurrence as business premises and private homes were damaged in seemingly random attacks. Amidst the violence, the funerals of Sean Mulvey and Seamus Quirke were presided over by Bishop O'Dea and were amongst the largest ever seen in Galway. All business premises and public houses in the town closed and all work was suspended in sympathy as 'even the employees of the county club drew all the blinds and went forth to attend the

¹⁵³ *Connacht Tribune*, 2 October 1920

¹⁵⁴ *Freeman's Journal*, 16 September 1920.

¹⁵⁵ *Freeman's Journal*, 15 September 1920.

¹⁵⁶ *Connacht Tribune*, 17 September 1920.

requiem mass.¹⁵⁷ As the coffins wound their way up Mainguard street towards Eyre Square, the military on horseback forcibly dispersed the mourners sending panic-stricken crowds running down side streets in terror.

The vast majority of soldiers involved in attacks against the civilian population were never brought before a military tribunal but occasionally troops were court-martialed. Constables James Murphy and Richard Oxford were court-martialed in May 1921 for the attempted murder of James Egan and J.P. Greene who had been taken from Reilly's Hotel in Salthill. After a lengthy inquiry with numerous sworn witnesses testifying to seeing the men kidnap Green and Egan and then marching them into the sea before shooting them, the case was dismissed by the investigating officer as 'a purely internal disciplinary matter'.¹⁵⁸

5.8 Official Reprisals

The first official reprisal in the county was carried out in Tuam on 20 July following the Gallagher ambush in which two RIC men were killed.¹⁵⁹ A number of premises and homes were burned to the ground and shooting, looting and random violence was engaged in by troops for a number of hours.¹⁶⁰ Troops visited the town again on two occasions in September and the Archbishop Gilmartin, described the second shooting up of the town as 'terrorism by those who turned the restful hours of night into a time of torture.'¹⁶¹

Homes in Oranmore were burned out in a similar fashion following the IRA ambush on the RIC on the 21 August in which Constable Foley was killed.¹⁶² Two public houses in the village were burned down and a number of other homes damaged on the night of the ambush.¹⁶³ The military eventually killed two local republicans in revenge for the attack. On the evening of 17 September, Joseph Athy was shot dead and his workmate, Patrick Burke,

¹⁵⁷ *Freeman's Journal*, 11 September 1920.

¹⁵⁸ 'Courts Martials of Civilians, ACT-BRO', WO 35/121, TNA.

¹⁵⁹ *Irish Times*, 21 July 1920. See Appendix for 'Map Showing Location of Crown Forces Reprisals in county Galway'.

¹⁶⁰ *Irish Times*, 22 July 1920.

¹⁶¹ *Freeman's Journal*, 27 September 1920.

¹⁶² *Irish Times*, 23 August 1920.

¹⁶³ *Irish Times*, 23 August 1920.

wounded by gunmen, as they travelled home from work near the village. Survivors of the ambush reported seeing men in army fatigues fleeing the scene.¹⁶⁴ Volunteer Joseph Howley, whom police had been seeking for since the ambush, was eventually arrested at Broadstone station in Dublin as he alighted from the Galway to Dublin train.¹⁶⁵ Howley was a leading republican in the Oranmore district and was blamed by police for organising the ambush. He was approached by a group of men on the platform and shot dead in front of other passengers. Police later recorded that he had been 'shot dead whilst trying to escape'.

In reprisal for the ambushing of police at Drumharna House, near Ardrahan, five homes and the village hall were burned in the village on 25 September, as local people were terrorised by armed and disguised men who dragged inhabitants into the local fields.¹⁶⁶ Following the Castledaly ambush, which resulted in the death of Constable Horan, troops killed Eileen Quinn, who was shot dead from a passing lorry near Kiltartan, a short distance from the ambush site.¹⁶⁷ At the court of military inquiry it was found that she was shot dead by one 'of a number of shots fired as a precautionary measure and in view of these facts a verdict of death by misadventure must be brought'.¹⁶⁸ Fr Considine visited the dying woman and sent word to the police at Gort, who arrived at the scene accompanied by the military. When the priest asked the Inspector to interview her, he refused to take her statement. Soldiers later burned down a number of homes in the vicinity of the ambush site.¹⁶⁹

On 2 October John O'Hanlon, secretary of the Turloughmore Sinn Fein club, was shot dead by the military who arrived at his home in the middle of the night.¹⁷⁰ O'Hanlon's body was found in a nearby field. His body had been searched and he was shot in the head. Once again, the RIC reported that he had been 'shot whilst trying to escape'.¹⁷¹ The month saw a general upsurge in violence following the abduction by the IRA on 15 October of William Joyce, who was believed to be an informer. Following his disappearance, notices were pinned up by the

¹⁶⁴ *Freeman's Journal*, 18 September 1920.

¹⁶⁵ *Irish Times*, 6 December 1920.

¹⁶⁶ *Freeman's Journal*, 29 September 1920.

¹⁶⁷ *Freeman's Journal*, 5 November 1920.

¹⁶⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 6 November 1920.

¹⁶⁹ *Freeman's Journal*, 5 November 1920.

¹⁷⁰ *Freeman's Journal*, 5 November 1920.

¹⁷¹ CI monthly report, west Galway, October 1920, CO 904/113.

police in Eyre square stating that if he was not returned, 'somebody would be made to pay the penalty'.¹⁷² Rev Davis of Rahoon subsequently visited the military and pleaded that there be no reprisals, but was told that the people in the district had until the end of the night for Joyce to be returned unharmed.¹⁷³ On the night of 14 October 1920, unknown persons called to the parochial house shared by Fr Griffin and Fr O'Meehan in Galway town. Fr O'Meehan had not been sleeping at the house for some time owing to threatening letters the two priests had been receiving.¹⁷⁴ After a conversation in Irish with the caller, Fr Griffin departed on what he thought was a sick call to one of his parishioners.¹⁷⁵ Local people believed he was being held prisoner by the military in Lenaboy Barracks in revenge for the earlier disappearance of Joyce. Fr Davis described the two men as 'rival protagonists' and 'it was feared that Joyce had a number of friends who were determined to avenge him and Fr Griffin appears to have used a string of language on the fourteenth of the month in which he told some of his congregation that they were as bad as the Black and Tans'.¹⁷⁶

Fr Griffin's body was eventually recovered after a large scale search organised by the clergy in the Barna district. A row of thatched houses was burnt out by the military after the body was recovered and the clergy refused to give possession of the remains to the Crown Forces. P. W. Joyce, who had been shot dead by the IRA, was from the village and the military, aided by some local people, left his body in Barna as a signal to the local community. It was widely believed that the caller who lured Fr Griffin to his death was a local man and the IRA was certain who was responsible. Joseph Togher later recalled:

We were convinced that the caller (a tout for the auxiliaries) was none other than William Joyce ... I intercepted a letter from Joyce to an Auxie, which, after being broken down, revealed that Joyce had the R.I.C. cipher which was in use that particular month. Michael Staines, our liaison officer, confronted Divisioner Cruise of the RIC with this information, as Cruise had continually denied Joyce's association with the RIC Had we had this information

¹⁷² *Freeman's Journal*, 18 October 1920.

¹⁷³ *Freeman's Journal*, 18 October 1920.

¹⁷⁴ BMH, WS 1,034 (Mrs Mary Leech, nee O'Meehan).

¹⁷⁵ Fr O'Meehan's family believed that their brother was the original target for the murderers but when he was not at home, Fr. Griffin was lured to his death instead. Following the disappearance of his friend, Fr O'Meehan fled to Scotland on the advice of his Bishop. He returned the next year following the truce and died prematurely in April 1923. BMH, WS 1,034 (Mrs Mary Leech, nee O'Meehan).

¹⁷⁶ *Freeman's Journal*, 20 October 1920.

earlier, Joyce would have been executed.¹⁷⁷

William Joyce was well known in the town for associating with the Crown Forces and had been seen accompanying them on their raids, helping them navigate the small local roads and identifying local people. Shortly after Fr Griffin's murder, he joined the 4th Worcester Regiment and departed with them to England.¹⁷⁸

On 21 October, Volunteer Thomas Walsh was taken from his family business at the Old Malt Pub in Galway town by a group of partially disguised men. He was taken to the Eglington canal where he was shot in the head and his body thrown into the water.¹⁷⁹ Two days later, another publican, Thomas Egan was shot dead near Athenry, when four disguised men entered his home.¹⁸⁰ Egan's pub was the centre of the local community and yards from the spot where landlord Frank Shawe-Taylor had been murdered earlier in the year. He was not involved in the republican movement and his murder was viewed locally as retaliation for the killing of Shawe-Taylor. The police and military denied involvement in the killing and claimed it was carried out by disgruntled locals who feared Egan was going to go to the authorities with information relating to the killing.¹⁸¹

November saw no let up in state violence and three republicans were killed in brutal circumstances in revenge for their participation in fatal attacks on the police. Michael Moran, 27, who had been one of the most effective IRA officers in the county and had led the Volunteer attacks in the north of the county earlier in the year, was shot dead whilst in the custody of British troops in the Earl's Island on 24 November.¹⁸² Moran was eventually picked up by the authorities after being on the run since the Gallagh ambush that resulted in two RIC men being shot dead. He was being taken by armed escort from Eglington barracks to Earls Island Barracks when he was shot. The military later claimed that he was 'shot whilst

¹⁷⁷ BMH, WS 1,729 (Joseph Togher). Despite the persistent popular belief, the informer P.H. Joyce and William Joyce, later Lord Haw Haw, who was believed to have lured Fr Griffin to his death in revenge, were not related. Joyce is a common name in the district.

¹⁷⁸ He later achieved infamy as the Nazi propagandist Lord Haw Haw and was subsequently hanged by the British government for treason.

¹⁷⁹ *Irish Times*, 21 October 1920.

¹⁸⁰ *Irish Times*, 26 October 1920.

¹⁸¹ CI monthly report, west Galway, October 1920, CO 904/113.

¹⁸² *Connacht Tribune*, 27 November 1920.

trying to escape'.¹⁸³ Two days later, the Loughnane brothers, Harry and Patrick, from Shanaglish in south Galway, were picked up by troops near their home. They were taken to Gort Barracks where they were tortured and eventually killed. Their badly mutilated bodies were found nearly three weeks later in a shallow pool of water at Umbriste, two miles from Ardahan. They had their hands and legs broken, were missing fingers, had been set alight and had hand grenades exploded in their mouths.¹⁸⁴ The men had taken part in the Castledaly ambush a few weeks earlier, where constable Horan had been shot dead by the IRA.

The final murder carried out by Crown Forces in 1920 took place on 20 December, during a naval search operation on Inishmore.¹⁸⁵ Three Navy vessels landed simultaneously, with disembarking troops systematically searching homes on the island, creating pandemonium amongst the local population, who hid out on the Island's rocks and caves. One man, Laurence MacDonagh, was shot dead whilst fleeing his home. He was unarmed and had been shot in the back with the authorities once again claiming that he had been 'shot dead whilst trying to escape'.¹⁸⁶

The killing continued in January and following the Kilroe ambush on 19 January, in which several Auxiliaries were injured, five men were murdered and the town of Headford partially destroyed by Crown Forces. Thomas Collins, 21, of Keelkill, Headford was shot dead, only hours after the attack, as he worked in the local fields with his horse and cart.¹⁸⁷ Throughout the following morning, lorry loads of troops roamed the narrow roads in the Headford district, firing indiscriminately into homes and fields. John Walsh, 30, of Clydagh, Headford, was taken from his home and shot dead on his farm by a group of soldiers.¹⁸⁸ An hour later, Michael Hoade was taken from his house near Caherlistrane and badly beaten before being shot dead.¹⁸⁹ A third man, John Kirwan, 22, from Ballinastack, near Tuam spent all morning working with his horse and cart when Crown Forces arrived and shot him dead after chasing

¹⁸³ *Connacht Tribune*, 27 November 1920.

¹⁸⁴ A photograph of the men's mutilated bodies appears in Marie McNamara & Maura Madden (eds.) *Beagh: A History & Heritage*, (Galway, 1995), p. 123.

¹⁸⁵ *Irish Times*, 21 December 1920.

¹⁸⁶ *Irish Times*, 22 December 1920.

¹⁸⁷ *Connacht Tribune*, 22 January 1921.

¹⁸⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 22 January 1921.

¹⁸⁹ *Connacht Tribune*, 22 January 1921.

him through his fields.¹⁹⁰ Three other men were seriously wounded on the same morning in Kilconly, Sylau and Glenamaddy after being shot from passing lorries.¹⁹¹ Troops then proceeded to Headford town where a number of shops and private homes, including the parochial house, were burned and looted. Revenge for the Kilroe attack did not end there however, and on 12 March, Thomas Mullins, of Killavoher, near Clonberne, was picked up by a lorry load of uniformed men, shot dead and his body dumped a few miles from where he was working.¹⁹² He had been doing a day's labour for a local farmer and had no connection with the IRA. Crown Forces had earlier raided local houses looking, they claimed, for men who had been involved in the ambush of troops.

The Crown Forces did manage to capture one of the key men involved in the ambush at Kilroe when they arrested Louis Darcy at Oranmore on the 23 March.¹⁹³ Troops had apparently grown suspicious of his claim that he was a labourer, during the routine questioning of rail passengers, due apparently, to his soft hands. When they eventually realised his true identity, he was taken away in a lorry and dragged from the back of the vehicle before being shot dead. Darcy had been a committed and competent Volunteer and had been on the run since a cache of explosives had been found at his home at Clydagh, Headford, where he was the local Volunteer Officer. Once again, he was officially listed as being 'shot whilst trying to escape'.¹⁹⁴

The military carried out three reprisals in west Galway in 1921. On 6 April, they burned down five homes in the vicinity of Screebe in south west Connemara following an IRA ambush where one policeman was seriously wounded.¹⁹⁵ A number of homes in the Moycullen area were also burned out following an attack by the IRA on the RIC station at Spidall on 13 May. The co-operative store was ransacked and two employees stripped naked and beaten.¹⁹⁶ The largest reprisal in west Galway took place in Clifden on St Patrick's Day following an IRA

¹⁹⁰ *Connacht Tribune*, 22 January 1921

¹⁹¹ At Kilconly, a man named Keveille was wounded, in Sylau, a man named Banks and in Glenamaddy a man named James Kelly was wounded. *Connacht Tribune*, 22 January 1921.

¹⁹² *Freeman's Journal*, 14 March 1921.

¹⁹³ *Irish Times*, 28 March 1921.

¹⁹⁴ *Irish Times*, 28 March 1921.

¹⁹⁵ *Irish Times*, 8 April 1921.

¹⁹⁶ *Irish Times*, 30 June 1921.

attack in which two RIC men were killed.¹⁹⁷ The police burned down a number of homes and premises in the town and shot dead a former British army major J.J. McDonnell, who was killed whilst helping to put out a fire which the military had started in a hotel. The police later claimed he had been shot after being arrested and whilst attempting to flee custody.¹⁹⁸

The final reprisal carried out by state troops followed the Ballyturin ambush near Gort on 15 May 1921. Constable Kearney, an RIC constable who had been passing information to the local IRA was shot dead by his colleagues, after he arrived at the ambush scene following the attack. Kearney's comrades suspected that he was sympathetic to the IRA and he was taken into the woods near the ambush site and shot dead. It was subsequently alleged by soldiers that he had been shot by the IRA some of whom it was claimed, had remained at the scene. Local sources confirmed that troops had boasted about his death and the local IRA officer subsequently confirmed that he was passing information on troop movements and was not killed by the IRA.¹⁹⁹ Following the attack, local people fled their homes in fear of reprisals as troops burned homes along the road from the ambush site into the town of Gort four miles away.

5.9 Targeted Assassinations

Following the murder of a number of local people in the winter of 1920, Dr Gilmartin, the Archbishop of Tuam claimed in January 1921 that in Galway, 'there are mysterious forces making for war'.²⁰⁰ If the IRA altered their tactics in the New Year, the Crown Forces developed their approach also, and new pattern of killing emerged which differed considerably from previous murders of local people carried out by the State. The earlier killings generally involved troops making no attempt to conceal their identity, with victims shot in broad daylight by troops. In 1921, the police inspector for Galway West Riding recorded a series of murders of local men allegedly carried out by the IRA in the county. Despite elaborate motives contained in the police reports, the evidence would strongly suggest

¹⁹⁷ *Irish Times*, 18 March 1921.

¹⁹⁸ *Irish Times*, 21 March 1921.

¹⁹⁹ See, Timothy G. McMahon (ed.) *Padraig O'Fathaigh's War of Independence; Recollections of a Galway Gaelic Leaguer* (Cork, 2000), p. 75.

²⁰⁰ *Freeman's Journal*, 7 January 1921.

that these men were in fact killed by Crown Forces and the motive and blame attributed to the Volunteers by the police to deflect attention away from the real killers. The six killings carried out in 1921 all bore strong similarities and were carried out by highly professional and competent groups of killers who, unlike previous shootings, worked in disguise, with considerable stealth and local knowledge, and their actions made to look as if they were the work of republicans.

On the night of 20 February 1921, John Geoghegan, 26, a Volunteer and Sinn Fein District Councillor from Moycullen was taken from his bed by unknown men and shot dead.²⁰¹ His body was dumped at the back of his home and a notice pinned to his chest which read, 'yours faithfully, M Collins.' The local community believed it was the work of the Crown Forces and not the IRA, as the notice on the body implied. The family of the deceased stated that the killers had Irish accents and wore policemen's caps.²⁰² Geoghegan received a republican funeral and was included in the Galway Roll of Honour, which indicates that his death was not an IRA execution. The County Inspector gave his killing one line in his monthly report, stating that 'a leading IRA officer was shot'.²⁰³

On the 6 April, another Volunteer, Patrick Cloonan, 27, from Maree, near Oranmore, was taken from his bed by a group of disguised men.²⁰⁴ He had been on the run for a number of months and was staying at the house of his aunt at Ballinacloughy, Oranmore. The killers went straight to his bedroom and led the victim from the house. His dead body was subsequently found on the seashore near Tawin Island. Despite a republican funeral and an annual commemoration, the police recorded that he had been killed by the local IRA as, 'he was at one time an advanced Sinn Feiner, but latterly it was reported that he was endeavouring to cut away from the movement and go to America. It is believed that some of the Sinn Feiners thought he was about to give them away before he left and therefore murdered him.'²⁰⁵

On 30 April, Patrick Molloy, 26, was taken from his bed at night by armed and masked men at

²⁰¹ *Irish Times*, 21 February and 25 February 1921.

²⁰² See *Irish Times*, 21 February 1921 and 25 February 1921.

²⁰³ CI monthly report, west Galway, February 1921, CO 904/114.

²⁰⁴ *Irish Times*, 7 April and 8 April 1921.

²⁰⁵ CI monthly report, west Galway, April 1921, CO 904/115.

his home, which was close to the scene of the Kilroe ambush.²⁰⁶ He was shot dead and his body dumped in a nearby ditch with a notice pinned to his chest stating, 'Beware, IRA'. Once again, local people believed that Molloy was an innocent man murdered by Crown Forces. The *Connacht Tribune* noted that he was 'the fifth man in the area to be killed since the Kilroe ambush'.²⁰⁷ The county inspector once provided a more elaborate motive for the murder, noting that local people were behind the killing and that 'the real motive would appear to be retaliation for a previous murder which Molloy is believed to have committed in connection with a land dispute'.²⁰⁸

Hugh Tully and Christopher Folan were both killed in their homes in Galway town, on the night of 12 May. Like the previous murders, the killers all wore disguises and arrived at night, quietly singling out their victims for execution.²⁰⁹ In the case of Christopher Folan, however, the assassins made a number of errors. According to his family, the men arrived at the Folan home at O'Donohue's Terrace wearing waterproofs and driving goggles and asked for James Folan. James was Christopher's brother and he had recently been released from Galway jail for IRA activity. James was not in the house, and when the killers realised that their intended target was not there, they took his two brothers into a room and shot them both, with Christopher dying instantly from his wounds.²¹⁰ A short time later, disguised men made their way to another house in the area and asked for Hugh Tully.²¹¹ Tully, a railway worker who had no involvement in politics, came to the door and was instantly shot in the head. Tully had been lucky to survive an earlier attack when troops broke into the house that he had previously shared with Stephen Broderick on 9 September. On that occasion, Broderick, who was a member of the IRA, was shot but managed to survive by feigning death.

Despite the horror in Galway over the two killings, the county inspector recorded that the men had been killed by local republicans. The motive for the Folan killing was recorded as 'fear of the Sinn Fein party that Folan might give information' and in the case of Tully, it was claimed

²⁰⁶ *Irish Times*, 2 May 1921.

²⁰⁷ *Connacht Tribune*, 7 May 1921.

²⁰⁸ CI monthly report, west Galway, May 1921, CO 904/115.

²⁰⁹ *Freeman's Journal*, 12 May and 13 May 1921.

²¹⁰ *Freeman's Journal*, 12 May and 13 May 1921.

²¹¹ *Freeman's Journal*, 12 May and 13 May 1921.

he 'was on good terms with the police and was probably suspected of giving information.'²¹² There is no indication that the police version of events had any credibility locally and the community accorded both victims large republican funerals.

A week after the murders in Galway town, Thomas McKeever, a shop assistant in Dunmore, north Galway was killed in a similar fashion to the previous five victims. He was taken from his lodgings by a group of disguised assassins who shot him and left his body in a local field. McKeever, a native of Cork, had no connection to politics. However, the county inspector incorrectly recorded that the dead man was a 'Sinn Féiner, and alleged to be giving information.'²¹³ Once again, the murder was made to look like the work of the local IRA and the body was labelled 'Convicted Spy-Traitors Beware.' As in previous cases, witnesses recalled seeing three men in waterproofs and goggles in the area acting mysteriously and even the *Connacht Tribune* noted that the deceased man lived an abstinent life and had no enemies in the area.²¹⁴ The local priest publicly refuted the inference from the altar that McKeever was a republican or a spy or that he had been murdered by the IRA.²¹⁵

These six killings, along with the murder of Thomas Walsh, who was led from the pub that he ran and shot dead in Galway town on 21 October; Thomas Egan, who was shot dead in his kitchen in Athenry on 23 October and John O'Hanlon who was shot dead in Turloughmore on 2 November; all bear striking similarities. All nine men were killed at night, by a small group of men who acted with stealth and poise and all the killings, except the O'Hanlon killing, were attributed to the IRA or local people by the county inspector despite the obvious involvement of the Crown Forces. A number of the bodies were also labelled as spies in an attempt to deflect attention away from the real killers. Furthermore, unlike the other killings carried out by troops, the perpetrators all wore disguises and many witnesses recalled that they wore long coats with the collars turned up and either driving goggles or caps pushed low over their faces to disguise their identities.

²¹² CI monthly report, west Galway, May 1921, CO 904/115.

²¹³ CI monthly report, west Galway, May 1921, CO 904/115.

²¹⁴ *Connacht Tribune*, 28 May 1921.

²¹⁵ *Connacht Tribune*, 28 May 1921.

Conclusion

In March 1921, Archbishop Gilmartin expressed his sympathy with the people of Galway 'in their feelings of horror and indignation at the actions of the Crown Forces.' However, he warned his flock against channelling their anger into support for the IRA, as:

What is called the IRA may contain the flower of Irish youth, but they have no authority from the Irish people or from any moral principle to wage war against unequal forces with the consequence of terror, arson and death to innocent people.²¹⁶

The Archbishop's analysis underlines the fundamental problem facing the IRA in Galway: the absence of popular moral sanction from the community, whom they claimed to represent, for their campaign against a superior military force, for which, not just republicans, but the local population as a whole were punished in violent reprisals. The young men who fought the Crown Forces in Galway were not adventure seekers who remained in the IRA for personal gain or social kudos; there was little to be gained from being involved in republican activity. Due to the amount of intelligence which the military possessed, the level of commitment necessary to remain active was simply too great for those doubting in the righteousness of the republican struggle to remain active in Galway after October 1920.

The authorities' success in arresting most active officers in the county in October 1920 fundamentally altered the dynamics of the IRA's war against the state which became solely reliant on the individual endeavour of isolated units. The shooting of a significant number of the remaining officers: Michael Moran of the Tuam battalion; Louis Darcy of Headford; Joseph Howley of Oranmore; Harry and Patrick Loughnane of Beagh; John Geoghegan of Moycullen and Fr Griffin in Galway town, reinforced the overwhelming danger facing active IRA men.²¹⁷ The remaining IRA leaders who avoided jail, such as Thomas Duggan and Brian Molloy of Castlegar, suffered serious loss of property and potential income and both these men, along with many others, had their homes destroyed and were forced to remain permanently on the run until the truce in July 1921.²¹⁸ The capture of many IRA members was

²¹⁶ *Irish Times*, 21 March 1921.

²¹⁷ Although not technically an active Volunteer, Fr Griffin was closely associated with the IRA in Galway and was their strongest public supporter.

²¹⁸ *Irish Times*, 15 February 1921.

facilitated by local people; British intelligence acknowledged that Louis Darcy was captured due to information from local informants;²¹⁹ Michael Moran was widely believed to have been betrayed by a man, who was himself, killed by the IRA;²²⁰ Fr Griffin was led to his death by a caller known personally to him after he condemned members of his own congregation 'for being as bad as the Black and Tans'.²²¹ Many more men killed by the military are likely to have been informed upon by elements from within their own community.

Despite killing fourteen members of the Crown Forces, the IRA in Galway were defeated by a combination of the ferocity of the Crown Force's violence, the accuracy of their military intelligence and the deep hostility of broad sections of the local community. IRA fighters believed they represented their community in the fight against an oppressor; in reality, most people did not celebrate the killing of policemen and the consequences for the community as a whole greatly outweighed any residual sense of disgust which the police may have generated by their activities.

The violence of the Crown Forces greatly exceeded that of the IRA, in terms of those killed, destruction to property and disruption to people's daily lives.²²² Why many of their civilian victims such as Thomas McKeever of Dunmore or Hugh Tully of Galway town were taken from their beds and shot dead is not clear and many fatalities were neither republicans nor political in any way. Their killers were clearly acting on intelligence about their victims' whereabouts and the IRA believed that there was organised collaboration with the military in the county.²²³ There is no concrete evidence that this was the case, but republicans acted on their conviction, killing a number of people they believed responsible and there is evidence which adds some substance to their claims.²²⁴ In contrast republican intelligence was poor and they relied on post office workers in the GPO in Galway to intercept suspicious mail en route to the military.²²⁵ Whilst a number of informers were revealed in this manner, there

²¹⁹ 'Report on the Intelligence Branch of the Chief of Police, Dublin Castle', WO 35 / 214, TNA, p.

32.

²²⁰ BMH, WS 1,408 (Thomas Mannion).

²²¹ *Freeman's Journal*, 20 October 1920.

²²² Augusteijn, 'Motivation: Why did they fight for Ireland', p. 109.

²²³ See discussion on informers in section two of this Chapter.

²²⁴ See discussion on informers in section two of this Chapter.

²²⁵ BMH, WS 1,729 (Joseph Togher).

were no major sources of formal intelligence and the movement relied on the casual goodwill of local people to gain sporadic information on the military. Policemen were not immune to passing information in the same manner, and for warning the IRA in south Galway about troop movements, Constable Kearney was shot dead at Ballyturin in May 1921.²²⁶

The IRA in Galway did not target civilians and the movement fought a far less brutal campaign in the county, than that which Hart has described in Cork.²²⁷ There is no evidence of torture being employed against alleged informers, three of whom were shot dead after an IRA 'trial' in the presence of a priest. As discussed in Chapter Three, a number of big houses were burned for perceived military reasons by the IRA when they were about to be used as billets for troops but not simply for agrarian or vindictive motives.²²⁸ The terror inflicted by the Crown Forces in Galway was not unique and reprisals were a nationwide phenomenon. The assassinations carried out in the county occurred in other active counties, with a particularly high level of similar attacks in Dublin and Cork, which were also local centers of military intelligence.²²⁹ There have not been enough local studies of other areas or sufficient academic focus on the campaign carried out by the Crown Forces to establish the degree to which the patterns described in Galway were common elsewhere.

The truce between the government and republicans in July 1921 was not greeted by either the IRA or the community as a whole as a victory for the republican movement or the Irish people generally; it was viewed as a welcome return to normality by most people and as a chance for a well-earned rest by active IRA members. Most people thought it would not last long and the negotiations would break down and violence erupt once more. The achievements of the revolution in Galway are discussed in the following chapter. However, the notion that the military stalemate represented a victory for the armed forces of the Republic would have been risible in Galway in July 1921. When Laurence Flynn, an IRA officer from Loughrea, eventually took control of the RIC barracks in the town in 1922, the officer in charge was unaware of the momentousness of the occasion telling the barrack's new hosts, 'Hurry up and

²²⁶ *Irish Times*, 17 May 1921.

²²⁷ See Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies*, pp 273-93.

²²⁸ See Chapter Four, section three, for a discussion on the burning of big houses in Galway.

²²⁹ See John Borgonovo, *'Spies, Informers and the 'Anti-Sinn Fein Society'; The Intelligence War in Cork City* (Cork, 2007), pp 105-14.

get finished with this farce, we will be back again soon.' ²³⁰

²³⁰ BMH, WS 1,061 (Laurence Flynn).

Conclusion

Confining historical enquiry to the IRA's campaign during the revolution, at the expense of the antagonism between conservative nationalism and radical republicanism conceals the undercurrents of insecurity and social conflict which the transient collapse of social deference temporarily evinced between 1916 and 1921. The creation of one political tradition required the destruction of another, and the bitterness and hostility which this destruction generated has often been overlooked in the historical record. Before the rise of militant republicanism, politics in east Galway had been fundamentally conservative and respectable, and to the local elites of the National Party the IRA represented the deviance of the young, the rural and the poor. The militancy of the latter constituency was nothing new; it had been the bedrock upon which the campaigns of the Land League and subsequently, the United Irish League, had shaped modern Ireland. The conservative instincts of local UIL elites barely masked the continuum of violent agrarian impulses which had continued unabated in the county since the beginning of the century. The crucial disjuncture which the emergence of the IRA represented, lay in their circumvention of the traditional paternal leadership of an older generation of nationalists and their consequent lack of deference towards perceived modes of political convention. The IRA were only sporadically active in the county after the arrival of further British regiments in August and September 1920, due primarily to the fact that large sections of the community simply did not support their aims, feared their intentions and derided their capabilities. Galway was not unique in this respect. However, the extent to which east Galway was polarised by the conflict is exceptional and has no parallel in comparative studies.

Analysis of the revolutionary era must be fully cognisant of the nuances of local communities and sufficiently contextualise the many expressions of civic nationalism which existed during the period. The IRA and political violence cannot be comprehensively analysed in isolation from the communities from which they sprang. The rhetoric of the Town Tenants' Association or the Vigilance Committees of east Galway, far from being of peripheral interest, were representative expressions of contemporary political opinion. When the gaze of historical enquiry is broadened to encompass, not only movements which served as engines of political change, such as Sinn Fein, but other civic associations, such as the County Galway

Farmers' Association, the degree to which revolutionary change was initially opposed, gradually resisted and eventually undermined by conservative nationalism, becomes apparent.

Republicans in east Galway were derided by their opponents because of their youth, their roots in the rural poor, their perceived lack of 'manliness' and for their political naivety. From 1917 onwards, the UIL were attacked by Sinn Fein for being, elitist, urban, old and out of touch with the culture of the common people. The battle lines were clearly articulated by a partisan press, the speeches of local activists, and the nature of popular mobilisation and political organisation. A stark dichotomy of political and moral worth was expounded by rival nationalist and republican activists. In this respect, the nature of political insult and petty humiliation is instructive. At a UIL meeting in Ballinasloe in 1917, J.P. Farrell described Sinn Fein members in the county as 'fellows who the Land League had given a touch to in the past'.¹ In the same month, at a meeting of the Ballinasloe Board of Guardians, Mr Cahill told the members that, 'he never saw them [Sinn Fein] carrying a Land League banner or anything else to advance the movement, except their straw hats; it is the landlord crowd that is behind them, they were in their swaddling clothes when we were fighting the land fight.'²

Rather than the nationalist solidarity of the Land League struggle, which facilitated an 'us and them' mentality in relation to contemporary vested interests, an equally stark, but very different choice was presented to nationalist Ireland in the early decades of the twentieth century. Instead of focusing outwardly at a common enemy, nationalists were first required to confront each other and choose between the old and the new, or more accurately, 'the old and respectable' and 'the new, the young and the unknown'. This thesis has analysed the uncertainty which the republican campaign generated and which, in east Galway, fundamentally exacerbated four key social antagonisms:

1. A generational cleavage between younger republicans and older generations of nationalists.
2. An economic cleavage between small tenants and stronger farmers.
3. A political chasm between the urban world of the small town and its rural environs.
4. A sectarian cleavage between the small Church of Ireland community and the Catholic

¹ *East Galway Democrat*, 8 September 1917.

² *East Galway Democrat*, 7 July 1917.

majority.

The Generational Aspect of the Revolution

Stephen Gwynn, MP for Galway Borough, observed at first hand, the generational aspect of the revolution in Galway:

Such men as these [veterans of the original Land War] who had been in jail half a dozen times for their part in the fight, were incapable of believing that the country would ever turn from them, or refuse to accept their guidance. Yet, already, in 1905, there was a generation, to whom the story of the Land War of the eighties and their whole tradition, was only a story, of which they were tired. They were weary also of being put down by their elders, who told them that they had never known what it was to do a hard day's work for Ireland.³

The IRA in east Galway conformed to nationwide trends as youth culture played a formative role in the movement.⁴ Ernie O'Malley observed this phenomenon in north Munster noting, 'often the mother would think I was leading her son astray or the father would not approve of what the boys were doing.'⁵ William O'Malley, MP for Connemara, believed that the coercion and thuggery of gangs of young men played a key role in the eclipse of his party by local republicans 'The old people as a rule hated Sinn Fein, but the young terrorised them into joining their clubs and certainly terrorised them on the day of the election.'⁶

Most individual IRA officers paid a heavy price for their involvement in the republican campaign. Those who were active from July 1920, faced the probability of death, imprisonment and attacks by the Crown Forces on their homes and families. The killing of leading republicans such as Joe Howley, Michael Moran, Patrick and Harry Loughnane, Louis Darcy and Michael Walsh sent a clear signal to those who had not gone on the run: few active officers could expect to live, should they be arrested by Crown Forces. In these circumstances, it was predominantly the young, the single, and those unhindered by

³ Stephen Gwynn, *The Irish Situation* (London, 1921), p. 11.

⁴ See Hart, 'Youth Culture and the IRA in Cork' in Fitzpatrick (ed.) *Revolution, Ireland, 1917-1923*.

⁵ Ernie O'Malley, *Army Without Banner: Adventures of an Irish Volunteer* (Boston, 1937), p. 143.

⁶ William O'Malley, *Glancing Back: 70 years' Experiences and Reminiscences of Pressman, Sportsman and Member of Parliament* (London, 1933), p. 138.

conventional working hours or the provision of dependants who remained active.

The Rural Class Dimension of the Revolution

Resistance to the state during the period 1914-1921 did not run solely along the lines of nationalism. Fitzpatrick correctly recognised the continuity between the UIL's harnessing of the potential for agrarian violence and the later manipulation of the same phenomenon by Sinn Fein, who effectively assumed the role of broker between the state and the 'agrarian other' in early 1918. However, there is much more that can be elucidated about larger processes of change when a coherent analysis of the complexities of agrarianism has been achieved. The small tenant agitations, though viewed by cosmopolitan urban elites as typical of the lazy peasant, represented a continuum of struggle against the social inequality inherent in the dominant land tenure system in areas where the grazing system predominated. A range of unsavoury and dishonourable incidents sheltered under the cloak of agrarian emancipation. Nonetheless, the campaigns against petty landlordism were also a claim to nationhood, albeit cloaked in under-articulated social grievance.

If subsequent generations of historians have failed to agree on the intersection between land hunger and political mobilisation, the authorities in Galway were equally divided on the consequences of land purchase. District Inspector Clayton believed that the policy of the CDB was directly responsible for rural unrest in the county as 'some of the most worthless and disloyal have received farms from the CDB in preference to the worthy and loyal. This policy has had a bad affect.'⁷ District Inspector Rutledge, on the other hand, believed that the distribution of large estates had a positive affect on unrest, as 'when a man gets his land, he settles down and there is no one more conservative than an Irish small farmer. The day of the paid politician and agitator in this country will be over when the people have the land in their hands.'⁸ Similarly, when questioned about larger farmers and their lack of participation in the Rising in Galway, Rutledge told the Rebellion Commission, 'they don't care to lose money. I don't think the farmers were ever better off. They are not too willing to be disturbed - that is so, the farming classes are never too willing to be disturbed.'⁹

⁷ CI monthly confidential report, east Galway, October 1917, CO 904/104.

⁸ CI monthly confidential report, west Galway, January 1917, CO 904/102.

⁹ *The Royal Commission on the Rebellion in Ireland; minutes of evidence and appendix of documents*

There was no contradiction between the Police Inspectors' seemingly rival analysis. In respect of political violence, the crucial formative aspect of the land question in east Galway was not simply the pressure or desire for land redistribution on the part of the small tenants. The sheer scale of land transferred by the state from landlord to tenant in Galway was unprecedented nationwide, and was both a continuing result of, and a stimulus for, future communal agrarian violence. In the countryside, violence clearly worked; but this should not be extrapolated into a similar potential for political violence amongst the land hungry rural poor. In east Galway, both the urban and rural proletariat ultimately became a brake on revolution. The rural collectivities' compulsion towards violence, their essentially diffuse and individualistic struggles, their impenetrability and localism militated against the formation of a broader, co-ordinated, disciplined, associational movement, such as the Irish Republican Army. These disparate struggles could not ultimately be welded to a national movement encompassing broad social support. In this regard, Hobsbawm has similarly noted the problems that rural proletarian movements faced worldwide in forming national movements and has concluded that such agitations tend to remain scattered and regional.¹⁰ In east Galway, the potential power of communal agitations was enormous, but their actual influence and effectiveness was ultimately much more limited.

The elites of the national movement regarded the small tenant agitations as the debasement of the national ideal and their disdain has been noted. The lack of Volunteer activity in the heart of the grazier belt in east Galway was directly related to the activities of ongoing communal agitations which became the real loci of violent belligerence against the status quo. Sinn Fein elites also came to perceive this violence as typical of a lazy and cowardly tenantry and the language of republican condemnation in the summer of 1920, closely mimicked that of the authorities in both phrase and tenor. The refusal to comprehend and conform to the demands the national movement however, often reinforced by a functional stupidity, real or imagined, was a formidable force. The refusal of the tenant groups to refrain from agitation was both a survival mechanism and a powerful manifestation of social struggle.¹¹ The tenants in the areas dominated by the grazing system had nothing to lose and everything to gain by agrarian

H.C. (1916), p. 77.

¹⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, 'Peasants and Politics' in *idem, Uncommon People, Resistance, Rebellion and Jazz* (New York, 1998), p. 157.

¹¹ See, Hobsbawm, 'Peasants and Politics', p. 157.

violence and unlike their urban counterparts, were keenly aware of the transforming potential of violence. Thus, to be subaltern was not the same as being apathetic or powerless. The most seemingly submissive tenants were capable not only of working the system to their advantage, but also of resisting and attacking those whom they perceived as their oppressors. Thus, for many small tenants during the revolutionary era, political confrontation could be quite non-revolutionary and many rejected joining the IRA in preference to achieving their own economic independence.

The Political Chasm Between Town and Country

A higher level of republican mobilisation in rural areas has already been noted in comparative studies.¹² In Limerick, Mossie Hartnet, a local IRA officer, was conscious of the sectional nature of republicanism, noting ‘the people in general looked upon us as madmen and the big farmers did not give us much support, our best friends being among the small farmers and labourers. Well-to-do shopkeepers in the towns derided our efforts and were hostile to us.’¹³ Thus, whilst a rural/urban divide was not unique to Galway, the visceral and pronounced nature of the cleavage was remarkable. In east Galway, the modes of popular urban mobilisation differed in form, character and allegiance from the militancy of popular rural mobilisation. Urban mobilisation, as evinced by the fortunes of the Town Tenants’ Association tended to be conservative, episodic and dominated by an entrenched merchant elite. The towns produced the bulk of men for the British army with Ballinasloe providing the second largest number of recruits, next to Roscommon town, in the whole of Connacht. The urban UIL remained a significant presence in the towns following its official rural demise in the 1918 election. The craving for respectability and pronounced social deference which characterised urban political organisation was evident in the profound apathy towards trade unionism, the Ancient Order of Hibernians (which itself tended to be conservative) and the lack lustre state of the Gaelic League in Galway towns. In contrast to the militancy of rural tenants, the urban poor rarely engaged in violent political confrontations. On the few occasions when they did, it was to attack local republicans, as happened in Galway town in

¹² See Coleman, *The Revolution in Longford*, p. 172; Fitzpatrick, ‘The Geography of Irish Nationalism’, p. 130.

¹³ James H Hoy (ed.) *Mossie Hartnett, Victory and Woe: The West Limerick Brigade in the War of Independence* (Dublin, 2002), p.16.

October 1914, in Loughrea in December 1918 and Ballinasloe in July 1918.¹⁴ Republicans' main opponents in the towns came, not only from amongst the well-to-do, but as previously illustrated, from 'the stone and bottle throwing types' from the labourers' cottages and the Claddagh fishing village.

The IRA never managed to gain any significant support in the towns and their campaign remained exclusively rural. Throughout the period, young men from the town who sought adventure and a living wage continued to join the British army. The armed campaign of the IRA was never conceived of as legitimate in places such as Loughrea and Ballinasloe and men actually joined the local Black and Tan regiments in these towns.¹⁵ Their equivalent from the countryside generally joined the IRA or became involved in anti-grazier agitation. Anti-Sinn Fein literature, rhetoric and violence was confined to the towns and Galway, Loughrea and Ballinasloe formed a trio of empire nationalist 'garrison towns'. Galway Urban Council was the only city in the country which offered an official pledge of welcome to the King when he visited in 1903 and the craven welcome afforded Lord Wimborne in 1916. The bunting and banners proclaiming 'One navy, One Throne, One King' which adorned a thronged Eyre Square, typified urban political culture.¹⁶ The influence of the educated, urban, reactionary elites of the National Party in east Galway, their lack of practical links with the mass of the rural people, combined with their social conservatism, represented a stumbling block, both to communal unanimity and social progress. The lobbying by local officers of the Town Tenants' Association against the formation of co-operative stores in Galway town, the campaign to prevent a rent strike in Ballinasloe and the championing of a clearly corrupt allocation of land to a local MP in Loughrea, were indicative of the profound stasis in which urban political culture was immersed.¹⁷

A vote for Sinn Fein could reflect many different concerns, only one of which, may or may not have been, the desire for an Irish Republic. In this respect, the results of the 1918 elections and the local elections of 1920 demand close scrutiny. In the local elections of 1920, the town of Portumna returned eight Sinn Fein candidates despite having no active cumann or any

¹⁴ See *Connacht Tribune*, October 1914, December 1918 and the *East Galway Democrat*, July 1918.

¹⁵ See *Connacht Tribune*, 21 January 1921.

¹⁶ See Senia Paseta, 'Nationalist responses to two royal visits to Ireland, 1900 and 1903' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxxi (1999), pp 488-504.

¹⁷ See discussion on Town Tenants' Association in Chapter Two.

Volunteer company. However, the eight Sinn Fein representatives were actually returned unopposed with no other candidates standing. Similar scenarios recurred across the county and thus, election results can give a somewhat misleading impression of the depth of republican support. Galway Urban District Council was the only major council outside the north east that did not elect a republican majority, with the National Party retaining control with a majority of a single seat. Had the old Galway Borough constituency that represented the town not been abolished before the 1918 election, it would undoubtedly have returned a Nationalist candidate. The siege mentality of the 'garrison towns' was exemplified by an exchange at the Loughrea District Council in 1920, when local nationalist councillor Martin Ward, who had opposed a motion to rescind the original council resolution condemning the 1916 Rising, was told by an angry opponent 'Everybody knows you, you could not go five miles outside the town without getting your skull battered.'¹⁸

Sectarianism, Ex-Servicemen and Public Opinion

The prevalence of co-operation with the Crown Forces in towns was obvious and occurred through formal structures, such as the Ex-Soldiers and Sailors Federation and the Rate Payers Association, and casually, on an individual basis. The national Chief of Police, Military Intelligence Branch at Dublin Castle actually noted the use of civilian informants in Galway as a model in combating the republican movement nationwide.¹⁹ As discussed in Chapter Four, ex-servicemen made frequent public statements condemning the IRA and even threatening to 'clear them out of the country, if the government did not take a stronger line against them'. In Galway town, they were just one group in society with strong links with the military. The elite of Galway society socialised with the officer class in the County Club in Salthill and the urban poor could not avoid them in the pubs of the town. In the same period that the Crown Forces killed seventeen unarmed local people in the county, over two hundred ex-servicemen and their families were 'treated' in Earls Island Barracks by the 17th Lancers.²⁰ As discussed in Chapter Four, social convention in rural areas prevented local ex-servicemen, if they had so desired, from mixing with the military and the breaking of this taboo could have

¹⁸ *Connacht Tribune*, 6 March 1920. The *East Galway Democrat* also referred to Sinn Fein as 'nocturnal ramblers' on 4 August 1917.

¹⁹ Report on the Intelligence Branch of the Chief of Police, Dublin Castle, WO 35/214, NA Kew, p. 32.

²⁰ See conclusion of Chapter Four.

deadly repercussions. In some cases, it was simply the want of drinking companions and the camaraderie of the armed services which singled men out for attack by the republicans. Thus ex-servicemen were targeted by republicans when it was believed they were informing on the IRA, but they were not disproportionately targeted as a group. In Galway town, considerable enmity between ex-servicemen and republicans had been ongoing since 1914 and both groups engaged in physical attacks on each other through out the period.

The IRA in east Galway did not target Protestants and all four informers killed by the movement were Catholic. Nonetheless, in Ballinasloe, one of the few towns to have a small Protestant population, a number of Protestants left the area in fear for their property and livelihoods. They had been subject to a campaign of intimidation and local political representatives continued to make inflammatory statements, questioning the nationalist credentials of the minority community. The campaign of low level intimidation was clearly carried out with the connivance of local Sinn Fein and nationalist representatives. However, there was no active IRA company in the town, and local nationalists had continually shown deep hostility to the Volunteers. The base sentiment of sections of the local community was not dissimilar to the resentments of rural communities at the privileged economic position of local graziers. The majority of those targeted in the town were from the local merchant elite and several shop fronts were damaged in attacks.²¹ The loyalist pogroms in Belfast merely provided the pretext for disgruntled locals to give expression to long simmering resentments against sections of the merchant class, whose business depended on the facilitation of long standing credit to customers. The departure of a number of businessmen from the town was welcome news for some of customers.

The Evolution of a Revolution

As we have seen, the split in the Volunteer movement in 1914 lay behind numerous other disputes in the county including a damaging split in the GAA and violent disputes between semi-organised factions in Galway town, Turloughmore and Loughrea.²² Politics in Galway became remarkably polarised because of the Volunteers' identification with violent communal agitations in 1914, the violence that followed the split and the events of Easter

²¹ See discussion on sectarianism in Chapter Four.

²² See Chapter Two for discussion on the sectional nature of local politics in east Galway.

Week 1916. The mass mobilisation of both nationalist and republican Volunteers across the east of the county and the belief amongst many that 'a peasant army' was about to 'invade' the towns of east Galway during Easter Week led to an unprecedented level of popular mobilisation and the very real threat of civil conflict. It also introduced what was to become an underlying well of suspicion for many republicans in the county: If so many nationalists were prepared to enlist in the Special Constables and work closely with the Crown Forces in 1916, were they prepared to do likewise in 1920 and 1921 ?

Frantz Fanon has pointed out that anti-colonial struggles, for the most part, fail to fulfil their larger promise, as all too often the national bourgeoisie simply assume the mask of neo-colonialism and independent states tend to be structured in accordance with the ideology of hegemonic elites created by the colonial enterprise.²³ The irony of republicanism's ultimate 'victory' in Galway lay in the fact that they were forced to acquiesce to conventional conceptions of property rights and labour relations in order to conform to traditional interpretations of political legitimacy. The local republican newspaper, the *Galway Express* altered its social agenda in response to the direction of the national leadership generally, which was determined to clamp down on any socially divisive issues such as land redistribution, co-operatives and labour unrest. On a broader level, the movement simply had to reflect the innate conservatism of a rural society which continued to regard any social upheaval with deep suspicion and hostility. The collapse of social deference which the rise of the movement in the county from March 1917 until June 1920 represented, allied to the agrarian campaigns of communal collectivities in the spring of 1918 and 1920, was ultimately a transitory phenomenon. The radical impulse within the new movement existed, but it was defeated by a combination of the conservative instincts of rural society, the reactionary character of local urban elites, the complacency of the urban poor, the brutality of the Crown Forces and the lack of co-ordination and leadership within the IRA itself. It is the evolution of the republican leadership's battle for the hearts and minds of the more conservative instincts in Irish society which ultimately defined the course of the Independence struggle. How far the revolutionaries were prepared to compromise their initial ideals, in order to accommodate nationalist solidarity, and the degree to which this fundamentally altered the character of their movement is of paramount significance in defining the nature of the republican struggle.

²³ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, 1965), p. 31.

Whilst the campaign against the property rights of large landowners played a key role in the initial appeal of the movement, there were no obvious signs of any ideological identification with, or even a general cognisance of, socialist ideology, amongst republicans in Galway. The *Galway Express* presented the republican case in pragmatic, rather than ideological terms. In this sense, declaring support for the co-operative movement and labour generally, whilst condemning the merchant class in general was essentially a populist appeal for support from the mass of ordinary people, who could be roused by an appeal to perennial class resentments. James Connolly could be quoted as a martyr for Ireland but his socialist writings never penetrated rural political discourse. Thus, whilst the initial populist demands made by republicans represented radical aspirations, simply by virtue of the fact that they supported wealth redistribution in the form of the break up of large farms, this should not be interpreted in terms of dialectally sophisticated social radicalism. Thus, the desire to appropriate ones' wealthier neighbours' land was not necessarily indicative of a sophisticated class analysis of rural discontent on the part of a socially radical rural proletariat.

From 1919 onwards, the republican political trajectory in east Galway could be more accurately described as a coalition of the vested interests of both nationalist and republican support bases, rather than a political revolution of the radical forces of social change. The boycott of the police and state courts became so successful that republicans were able to present themselves as the legitimate arbitrators of justice and the new upholders of law and order. The new republican counter-state centred on arbitration courts and the republican police and was the movement's greatest achievement in the county, as for the first time Sinn Fein began to win the approval of broad sections of local society, including those who had previously stood aloof from the organisation. Republicans now sought the legitimacy and support that the new institutions demanded by assuring conservative nationalists that the revolution would not involve radical social change, and in particular, any danger to property rights and established privilege. Consequently, a perceptible change occurred in the movement's stance on the co-operative movement, land redistribution and a number of important local labour disputes.²⁴ Thus, by jettisoning their commitment to social change in an effort to consolidate their support, Sinn Fein became increasingly indistinguishable from their predecessors in the United Irish League.

²⁴ See Chapter Four for a discussion on 'the retreat from revolution.'

However, the achievements of the republican movement in Galway cannot simply be dismissed as a 'so-called revolution'.²⁵ The success of the republican movement in attracting the allegiance, albeit briefly, of the general population, to their alternative counter-state, should not be underestimated. Furthermore, the relative conservatism of the republican courts and the republican police testifies to the inclusive aspirations of the movement. Of the twenty-six victims of Crown violence, one was an armed Volunteer, with the remainder being unarmed republicans killed in custody or civilians simply killed at random. The Crown Forces also tortured men in custody, violated local girls and terrorised local communities with a succession of violent reprisals. The irony of Crown Force reprisals is that they were often carried out in towns where there was little or no support for the IRA, such as Galway or Tuam. In this context, the absence of widescale violence directed against those whom republicans, amongst others in society, had long harboured grievances: merchants, Protestants, large farmers and landlords, rival local politicians and leading businessmen, was clearly the revolution's greatest achievement. Despite the labelling of agrarian outbreaks as the anarchy of the peasantry, agrarian unrest consisted of a clearly understood sequence of escalating violence, carried out by recognisable categories of collectivities which pursued their own logical progression. The fact that ethnic cleansing or widespread land seizures did not take place in east Galway was testimony to the ability of individual Volunteer officers to restrain the potentially vindictive impulses of rank and file republicans.

Memory, History and Forgetting

Heather Laird has highlighted the problems non-nationalist organisations present for the historiography of post colonial states, when these groups have not been absorbed into the logic of the new state.²⁶ All too frequently such groups simply fall out the domain of history and this has been the case for many groups examined in this thesis. It is the Volunteers' path from degeneracy to local heroes which presents critical questions about how the period 1914-1921 has been re-interpreted in the popular consciousness.²⁷ As we have seen, most Galway

²⁵ See Tom Garvin, 'Revolution? Revolutions are what happen to Wheels' in David Fitzpatrick (ed.) *Revolution ? 1917-1923* (Dublin, 1990).

²⁶ Heather Laird, *Subversive Law in Ireland, 1879-1920; From Unwritten Law to Dail Courts* (Four Courts, 2005), p. 121.

²⁷ Following the 1916 Rising the *Tuam Herald* described the Galway rebels as 'degenerate sons', the *Connacht Tribune* printed a month-long series of articles commemorating the Rising in April 1966.

people did not regard the IRA as heroic during the War of Independence and they were held responsible by many for the atrocities of the Crown Forces. The revolutionary era left in its wake a society in east Galway which was fractured by the mutual suspicions, resentments and many perceived betrayals which the period fostered. As discussed in Chapter Three, many families who had played an active role in the movement remained bitterly dejected and utterly defeated following the outcome of the Independence struggle.²⁸ With the coming of Independence in 1922, nationalists in east Galway were faced with the task of accommodating the level of antagonism toward the forces of the Republic, with the collective demand for a heroic national ethno-genesis. The only adequate solution was a collective silence which permitted the complexities of the revolution to be quietly jettisoned from the popular narrative.²⁹

Paul Ricoeur has explored the popular historical phenomenon of the reciprocal relationship between remembering and forgetting, which can profoundly alter the perception of historical experience and the production of historical narrative.³⁰ At times of great historical moment, an excess of remembering of some events, at the expense of an excess of forgetting about others, can profoundly influence the collective consciousness of a nation. In east Galway, the necessity of forgetting aspects of the revolutionary era was paramount to the evolution of an imagined, functional and collective 'historical' experience. Whilst local memory became obligated and manipulated by a functional imperviousness to historical reality, the inauthentic could still occasionally be punctured by personal recollection.³¹

The irony of the historiographical debates which have surrounded the narrative of violent republicanism lie in the realisation that the suppression of the historical narrative which fostered the annihilation of the rebel voice also facilitates the death of the conservative response.³² The dynamics of silence briefly facilitated the construction of nationalist interpretations of history which removed the complexities of the revolution itself. The

²⁸ The Fleming family of Clarinbridge are discussed in Chapter Three.

²⁹ The only account of the 1916 Rising in the county which existed until Desmond Greave's *Liam Mellows and the Irish Revolution* was a brief article by Mattie Neilan in the *Capuchin Annual*, 1966.

³⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago, 2004).

³¹ See, BMH, WS 714 (Thomas Hynes); BMH, WS 447 (Thomas Courtney); BMH WS 1,203 (Patrick Coy).

³² See, Ella O'Dwyer, *The Rising of the Moon, The Language of Power* (London, 2003), p. 51.

caricature of revolution which briefly emerged in the decades after the founding of the state, however, should not simply be replaced with an equally simplistic interpretation.³³ Republicanism was not an expression of irrationalism or a conduit for anarchy. The IRA in east Galway did not live their lives as if they were a work of art or feel compelled to construct a consoling image of themselves as standard bearers for an ancient civilization.³⁴ Their goals were infinitely rational and their campaign reflective of the dynamics of the conservative social milieu, with its profound complexities, prejudice and consequent potential for redemption.

³³ Damian Kiberd, 'The Elephant of Revolutionary Forgetfulness' in Mairin Ni Dhonnchadha and Theo Dorgan (eds.) *Revising the Rising* (Derry, 1991).

³⁴ See, William Irwin Thompson, *The Imagination of an Insurrection; Dublin Easter 1916* (Oxford, 1967); F.S.L. Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland 1890-1939* (Oxford, 1979), p. 11.

Table 1.**List of casualties in County Galway, January 1920- July 1921**

Name	Date	Location	Status	Perpetrator
Patrick Thorton	08/02/1920	An Spideall	Civilian, ex-serviceman	Local republicans
James Ward	06/02/1920	Menlo	Civilian, herd	Local secret society
Frank Shawe-Taylor	03/03/1920	Athenry	Civilian, unionist, landlord	Local secret society
Martin Cullinane	05/03/1920	Corofin	Civilian, small farmer	Local IRA
Constable Burke	19/07/1920	Gallagh	RIC	IRA, Tuam batt
Constable Carey	19/07/1920	Gallagh	RIC	IRA, Tuam batt
Constable Foley	21/08/1920	Merlin Park	RIC	IRA, Castlegar Coy
Private Edward Krum	09/09/1920	Galway town	Crown Forces	IRA, City batt
Sean Mulvoy	09/09/1920	Galway town	IRA	Crown Forces
James Quirke	09/09/1920	Galway town	IRA	Crown Forces
Joseph Athy	17/09/1920	Oramore	IRA	Crown Forces
PW Joyce	16/10/1920	Galway town	Civilian, active loyalist	IRA
Thomas Egan	24/10/1920	Athenry	Civilian	Crown Forces
Con. Timothy Horan	30/10/1920	Castledaly	RIC	IRA, Beagh Coy
Michael Walsh	19/10/1920	Galway Town	IRA	Crown Forces
John O'Hanlon	02/10/1920	Turloghmore	IRA	Crown Forces
Eileen Quinn	01/11/1920	Kiltartan	Civilian	Crown Forces
Fr Michael Griffin	15/11/1920	Galway town	Civilian, republican	Crown Forces
Michael Moran	24/11/1920	Galway Town	IRA	Crown Forces
Harry Loughnane	27/11/1920	Beagh	IRA	Crown Forces
Patrick Loughnane	27/11/1920	Beagh	IRA	Crown Forces
Joseph Howley	09/12/1920	Dublin	IRA	Crown Forces
Laurence McDonagh	22/12/1920	Inis Mor	Civilian	Crown Forces
John Kirwan	22/01/1921	Tuam	Civilian	Crown Forces
John Walsh	22/01/1921	Headford	Civilian	Crown Forces
Michael Hoade	22/01/1920	Caherlistrane	Civilian	Crown Forces
John Geoghegan	20/02/1920	Moyculen	IRA	Crown Forces
Con. Charles Reynolds	16/03/1921	Clifden	RIC	IRA
Con. Thomas Sweeney	18/03/1921	Clifden	RIC	IRA
J.J. McDonnell	17/03/1921	Clifden	Civilian, ex-serviceman	Crown Forces
Louis D'Arcy	24/03/1921	Oranmore	IRA	Crown Forces
Tom Morris	02/04/1921	Kinvara	Civilian, ex-service man	IRA
Patrick Cloonan	06/04/1921	Kinvara	IRA	Crown Forces
Constable John Boylan	23/04/1921	Connemara	RIC	IRA
Thomas Hannon	26/04/1921	Clonberne	Civilian	IRA
Hugh Tully	11/05/1921	Galway town	Civilian	Crown Forces
Thomas McKeever	20/05/1921	Dunmore	Civilian	Crown Forces
Christopher Folan	11/05/1921	Galway town	Civilian	Crown Forces
Capt. Cecil Blake D.I.	15/05/1921	Gort	RIC	IRA
Capt. Fiennes Cornwallis	15/05/1921	Gort	Crown Forces	IRA
Eliza Blake	15/05/1921	Gort	Civilian, wife of D.I.	IRA
Con. John Kearney	21/05/1921	Gort	RIC	Crown Forces
Lieut. Robert McCreery	15/05/1921	Gort	Crown Forces	IRA
Patrick Molloy	30/04/1921	Kilroe	Civilian	Crown Forces
Sergeant James Murren	27/06/1921	Milltown	RIC	IRA
Con. Edgar Day	27/06/1921	Milltown	RIC	IRA
Atkins, A.M.	17/09/1920	Galway town	Crown Forces	Accident
Robert Bishop	06/05/1920	Galway town	Crown Forces	Accident
Herbert Thomspan	13/06/1920	Galway town	Crown Forces	Accident
Michael Mullins	30/12/1920	Galway town	Civilian	Crown Forces

Table 2.**Significant attacks on Crown Forces in County Galway**

Date	Place	Notes
10/01/1920	Castlehacket Barracks	Large scale attack
25/03/1920	Castlegrove Barracks	Large scale attack
Apr-20	Custums & Excise	Galway Custom house and 3 income tax offices raided
Apr-20	Evacuated Barracks	11 barracks burned across the county
25/05/1920	Loughgeorge Barracks	Large scale attack
24/06/1920	Monivea	RIC and civilian ambushed (agrarian motive)
May-20	Evacuated Barracks	19 barracks destroyed across the county
02/07/1920	Bookeen Barracks	Barracks destroyed
14/07/1921	Caltra	Police ambushed and two RIC wounded
19/07/1920	Gallagh Ambush	Two RIC men killed, Tuam burnt in reprisal
21/08/1920	Merlin park Ambush	One RIC man killed, Reprisals in Ornamore
30/10/1920	Castledaly Ambush	Ambush kills two RIC men
12/01/1921	Kilconly Ambush	Ambush wounds two RIC men, coming out of public house
19/01/1921	Kilroe Ambush	Large scale ambush, 9 Auxiliaries wounded, reprisals follow
16/03/1921	Clifden	IRA kill 2 RIC men in Clifden, reprisals follow
06/04/1921	Screebe, Connemara	IRA ambush RIC, one seriously wounded, reprisal
23/04/1921	Muitir Owen, Connemara	IRA kill one RIC man in ambush
30/04/1920	Headford Barracks	Attacked by local IRA
13/05/1921	An Spiddeal	RIC ambused, no casualties
15/05/1921	Gort	Police attacked in ambush, 5 killed, reprisals follow
05/06/1921	Moylough	Crown Forces ambushed and nine seriously wounded
27/06/1921	Milltown	Police ambushed, two RIC men shot dead

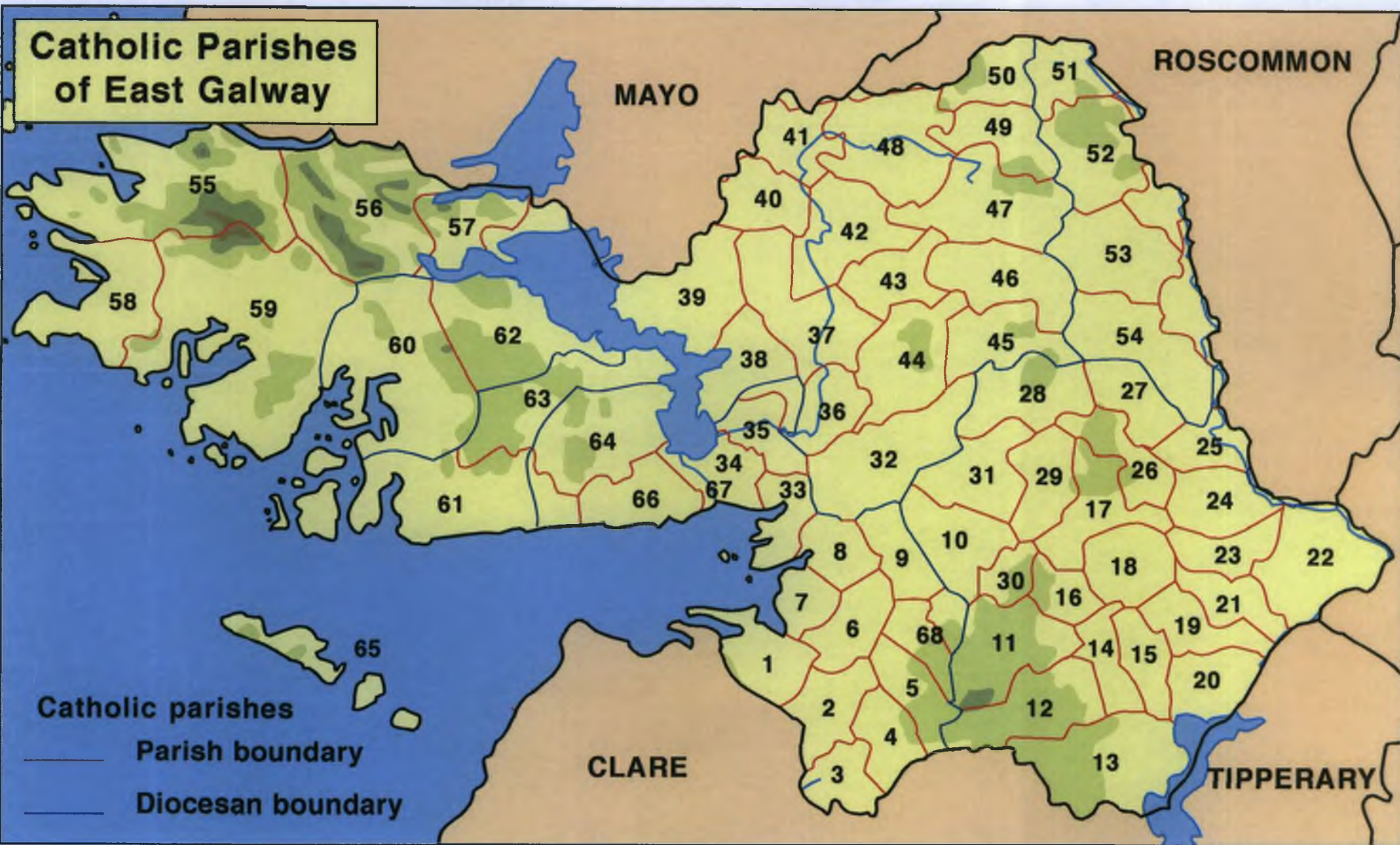
Table 3.**Reprisals by Crown Forces in County Galway**

Date	Reprisal
20/07/1920	House and shops burned and looted following Gallagh ambush.
21/08/1920	Reprisal burnings in Oranmore following Merlin Park ambush.
09/09/1920	Reprisals and looting in Galway town following shooting dead of soldier.
25/09/1920	Homes burned in Ardrahan following shooting at police.
22/11/1920	Homes burned in Barna following discovery of Fr Griffin's body.
22/01/1921	Homes destroyed and 3 men shot dead in Headford following Kilroe ambush.
17/03/1921	Homes and shops destroyed and one man shot dead in Clifden following ambush.
06/04/1921	Five homes burned down in vicinity of ambush site at Screebe, Connemara.
13/05/1921	Homes destroyed and locals beaten in Moycullen following attack at Spiddal.
15/05/1921	Homes destroyed between Gort and Kilbeacanty following Ballyturin ambush.

Towns and villages in County Galway



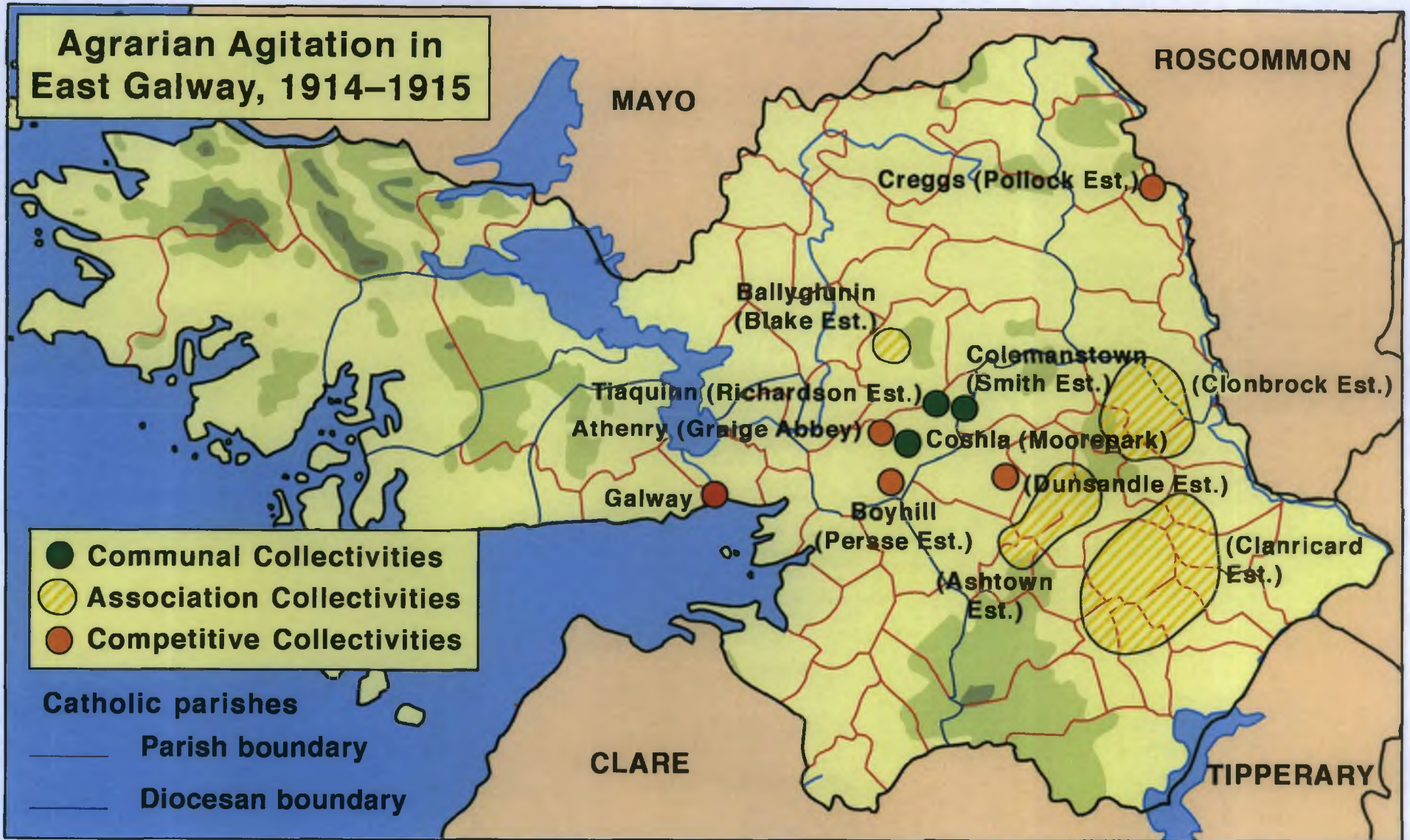
Catholic Parishes of East Galway



The Catholic Parishes of County Galway

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 Kinvara | 23 Kiltormer | 45 Killascobe |
| 2 Gort | 24 Clontuskert | 46 Mountbellew/Moylough |
| 3 Beagh | 25 Ballinasloe | 47 Killkerrin/Clonbern |
| 4 Kilbecanty | 26 Kilconnell/Aughrim | 48 Dunmore |
| 5 Peterswell | 27 Fohenagh | 49 Glenamdaay |
| 6 Ardrahan | 28 Ballymacward/Gurteen | 50 Williamstown |
| 7 Ballindeerren | 29 Bullaun/New Inn | 51 Ballymoe |
| 8 Clarinbridge | 30 Loughrea | 52 Glinsk/Kilbegnet |
| 9 Craughwell | 31 Killimordaly | 53 Ballygar |
| 10 Kilconiron/Closetoken | 32 Athenry | 54 Ahascragh/Caltra |
| 11 Kilnadeema | 33 Oranmore | 55 Clifden |
| 12 Derrybrien/Ballinakill | 34 Castlegar | 56 Leenane |
| 13 Woodford | 35 Claregalway | 57 Clonbur |
| 14 Abbey/Duniry | 36 Lackagh/Turloughmore | 58 Moyrus |
| 15 Tynagh | 37 Cummer/Kilmoylan | 59 Roundstone |
| 16 Leitrim | 38 Annaghdown | 60 Rosmuc |
| 17 Killreeckle | 39 Donaghpatrick/Kilcoona | 61 Spiddal |
| 18 Mullagh | 40 Kilconly/Killbannon | 62 Oughterard |
| 19 Killimor | 41 Milltown | 63 Killanin |
| 20 Portumna | 42 Tuam | 64 Moycullen |
| 21 Fahy | 43 Killererin | 65 Aran |
| 22 Mellick/Eyrecourt | 44 Abbeyknockmoy | 66 Barna |
| 67 Galway | 68 Kilchreest | |

Agrarian Agitation in East Galway, 1914–1915



**Location of Crown Forces
in Galway, 1920–1921**



MAYO

ROSCOMMON

Tuam

17th Lancers

1st Royal Dragoons

Galway

Athenry

1st Royal Dragoons

Oranmore

Ballinasloe

17th Lancers
2nd Argyle and
Southern Highlanders
Connacht Rangers
No. 5 section Armoured
Car Company
6th Dragoon Guards

2nd Battalion
Border Regiment

Gort

17th Lancers

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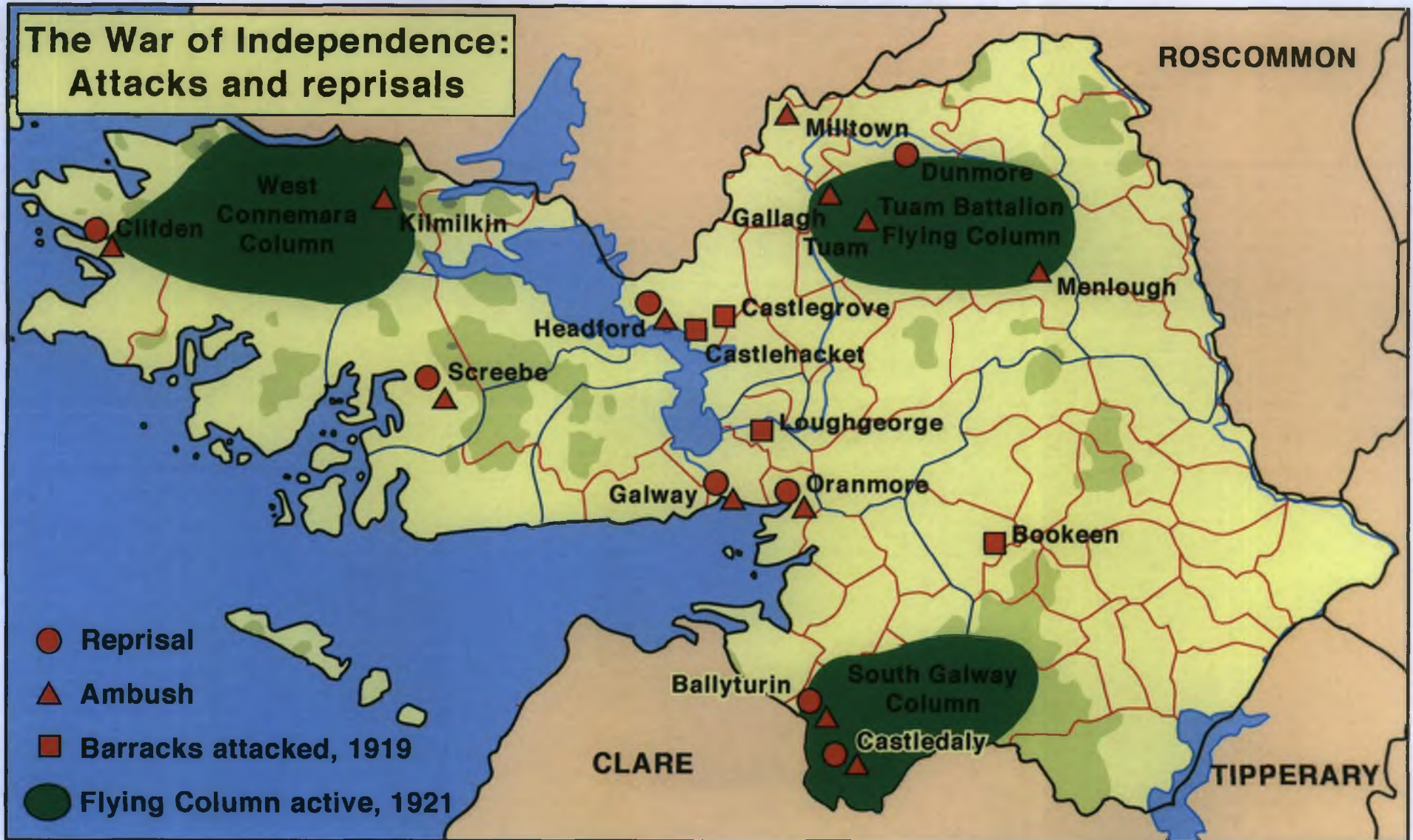
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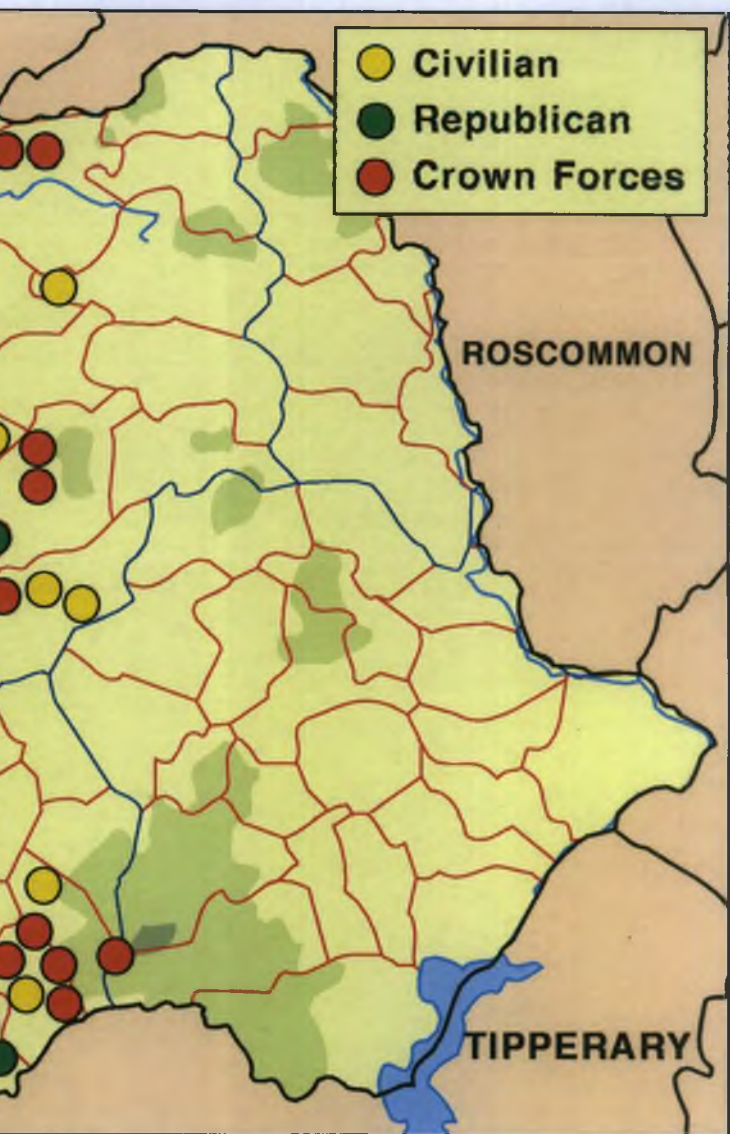
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