

Border States: Destroying Partition and Defending the Realm, 1949-1961

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Border States: Destroying Partition and Defending the Realm, 1949-1961

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Irish Republicans found themselves at a crisis moment in 1949. Legislation enacted by each state on the island affirmed the political reality of Ireland's partition. The Southern state declared an Irish Republic while the Northern state affirmed the continued integration of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. The partition of island between these two governments was reinforced by the Irish border in the 1950s as it had been for the previous three decades. The Irish Republican Army remained committed to ending the separation through force while the Northern Ireland security apparatus steadfastly safeguarded the realm against any foreign incursion or domestic insurrection. Irish Republicanism reorganized and the IRA launched a disastrously planned and under-resourced Border Campaign between 1956 and 1962. The IRA was fully repelled by the Northern security forces: the Royal Ulster Constabulary supported by the Special Constabulary with security assistance from the governments in Belfast, London and, eventually, Dublin. The militant aspect was accompanied by political measures that reaped electoral gains and signs of public support peaking in the mid-1950s before a clear repudiation of the movement by the end of the decade. By the start of the 1960s, the IRA had been defeated and Irish Republicanism was reeling, unsure of its future political vitality and social relevance. Northern Ireland and the Irish border was more secure than at any point in its previous 40 years of existing, ruled by a strong, confident British Unionist hegemony. For Irish Republicans living on the frontier of the Northern Ireland state, new modes of political thinking and confrontational actions with the state had been attempted and ultimately abandoned. This project examines the main dynamics at play along the Irish border between 1949 and 1961. Focus will be on the Sinn Féin, the IRA and Liam Kelly's Republican splinter group Saor Uladh, the RUC, B-Specials and militant-political Unionism, and the role of governments in Belfast, Dublin and London during the costly decade of the 1950s.

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NOMENCLATURE

There are a small number of language items I would like to speak to at the outset of this work. The language of a quote has been maintained, even if names have multiple spellings or minor annotation errors, as in the Gardaí recording of Joseph McGurk “Joseph McGuirk.” I have left intact the more common Anglo-Hiberno English spellings in quotations, for example “colour” over “color,” but use the American English spellings more generally throughout the text.

I have also attempted to best mirror the language used of the individuals being surveyed. Chapter One will feature numerous references to “the North” from Republicans based in the Republic of Ireland not wishing to use the full name of Northern Ireland. That term is occasionally replicated instead of Northern Ireland for text flow. In Chapter Two, where the focal point is the Northern Ireland security forces, terms like “the United Kingdom” are used more commonly. This is a purposeful intent to ground each chapter in the mindset and worldviews of the people aiming to destroy the Irish border and those people dedicated to defending it.

Place names in Ireland also can be sources of dispute. Like countless historians of the region before me, I paused and gave considerable thought to the name of Derry~Londonderry. Beyond the convention mentioned already from chapter to chapter, I more broadly tried to be sympathetic to majority opinion: County Londonderry still holds a majority population of those most identified with the state’s official designation, while

the metropolis Derry City has a majority population - and since 1984 a distinct council name – favoring a name comparable to its Irish language origin, *Doire*. I hope the inclusion of both, and the deference at times to one or the other, does not offend.

Chapter Three, mainly on the border Republican figure Liam Kelly, features a number of Irish language references. As Kelly and others nearly exclusively used the Irish names *Saor Uladh* and *Fianna Uladh* for his political and militant organizations, they are exclusively used throughout without translation or italics (as above). Kelly himself gaelicized his own name at times throughout his adult life, notably in official capacities in Seanad Éireann where he is recorded as “Liam Ó Ceallaigh.” For consistency, he is always called by the anglicized-version of his name, Liam Kelly, here. For any other widely used Irish words, from political parties to institutional names, attempts have been made to accurately render the names at all times with spellings and accent marks.

INTRODUCTION

This year marks one-hundred years of the Irish border's existence. Arguably, in no other era has it been under more international scrutiny. The contemporary border debate centers on the future dynamics between Ireland, Britain and Europe. The British withdrawal from the European Union has facilitated the re-emergence of the 'Irish Question' in the British political discourse. Slicing across the island of Ireland for just under 500 kilometers, the Irish border is the United Kingdom's only land boundary. The ill-defined partition has even more poorly defended barriers with an EU member state: the Republic of Ireland. While the two governments on the island of Ireland have never worked more closely together than the present-day, it is the relationship with Northern Ireland and the government of Great Britain that has never been more strained. Where one-hundred years ago the preservation of Britain's ties to Ireland satisfied notions of British grandeur, today the arrangement seems out of line with contemporary nationalist sentiments. Conversely, as all-island collaboration has increased in recent decades one wonders why two governments persist on a small island on the periphery of Europe. What political dynamics continue to facilitate the need for a division of two governments in Ireland, and how did the Irish border come to define nationalism for both Irish Unionists and Irish Nationalists?

The answers, like many contemporary political issues, rely on the historical memory of a place. The Irish border was created as a political solution that sufficiently satisfied neither of the government's situation on each side of it, yet it came to be a defining characteristic of 20th century Irish politics. While the issue was settled one-hundred years ago, the aversion of war has not necessarily meant peace for those living along Ireland's line of partition.

While the two modern Irish states trace their origins to the Government of Ireland Act (1920) and the Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921), defining legislation occurred mid-century. The year 1949 was a watershed moment as two pieces of legislation on each side of the Irish border laid the groundwork for security and militancy in the decade to follow. The Republic of Ireland Act, written in 1948 but taking effect in April of 1949, altered the status of Ireland as a nation apart from the British Commonwealth. Subsequently, Westminster passed the Ireland Act (1949) which copper-fastened Northern Ireland to the United Kingdom. The Union was preserved, strengthened and assured for the future.

For Irish Republicans, long looking to end partition, this signaled a crisis. These motions by the two governments on the island of Ireland bolstered their governance and legitimacy while reinforcing partition, something that forced militant Irish republicanism to act. The Irish Republican Army (IRA), despite being institutionally unsound still after the trauma of Second World War-era internment, and its politically stunted affiliate Sinn Féin, would spring into action in an attempt to forcefully end the partitioning of Ireland. While the initial intent was to destroy the border by force, at decade's close the initiative had the inverse effect of strengthening the defense and giving the Northern Ireland security apparatus reason to exist, increase and engage in 'counter-terrorism.'

Northern Ireland was born into conflict, as the Anglo-Irish War and IRA action of the 1920s precipitated a response from the Unionist, mainly Protestant Irish population of Ulster to separate from the Southern-based Nationalist movement. When two-thirds of the province of Ulster created a separate political entity from the remainder of the island, further vigilance was needed to defend against – perceived – disloyal, mainly Catholic Irish subversives within the newly laid down border. The period from 1925, when the Boundary Commission report was abandoned by both governments, through the outbreak of the Troubles around 1968 is seen to be quiet, unspectacular even. This project resoundingly challenges that narrative of the 1950s as a ‘lost decade,’ instead asserting it as a crucial period for state solidification in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The 1950s, far from a tranquil and unremarkable time, was one of intense political discernment and opportunity. While the IRA attempted to seize the opportunity to force the end of partition, it failed militarily to mobilize the Northern Catholic population. It alienated one significant movement in Mid-Ulster among Catholic nationalists, and rejected a series of policies that could have revolutionized the fledgling republican political-military dual thrust. It was during the 1950s that the Irish border was made more defensible by the Northern Ireland security forces. While the border was created in the 1920s and plunged into international headlines by the 1970s, it became an armed, volatile battle ground in the late 1950s because of IRA incursions. The Northern security forces were able to bolster their Unionist “no surrender” ethos while affirming the safety of the United Kingdom’s frontier in a shrinking British empire. As empire receded, the domestic kingdom’s defense hinged on the border between Tyrone and Monaghan, Fermanagh and Cavan. The response by the RUC, supported by the Ulster Special

Constabulary, was definite: Ulster would stand against the existential threat posed by Irish republican extremism and emerge stronger than ever before as defenders of the state against subversion, peaceful or militant.

By 1962, the Irish Republican Army was defeated. As Sinn Féin reeled and smaller Republican political parties collapsed, the cause of anti-partitionist Republicanism was set back immensely. Leading figures immigrated, grassroots support in the North was non-existent and the Irish border was better defended than ever before. Securing the border had rallied Unionist support in the state, and anti-partition rhetoric was dealt a silencing blow. As the 1960 progressed, Fianna Fáil – the Republic of Ireland’s “Republican Party” – sought to improve north-south cooperation as typified by the meetings between Sean Lemass and Terence O’Neill. The border was firmly secure, and endorsed by both governments in policy and practice.

Northern Ireland’s traditional narrative centers on the relative calm from state formation, around 1920 until the outbreak of the Troubles, a neat period of 50 years. However, this overly simplistic rendering of events, particularly along the border, overlooks broad public unrest and simmering resentments by the minority community. Traditionally it is written that the new Unionist political-economic hegemony created stability in the early interwar years and aided in defense of the realm as the 1930s closed. Northern Ireland, ever affirming its place in the Union, would prove its loyalty during the Second World War. Belfast, as a ship-building and ammunitions producing site, gained the attention of the Luftwaffe during the “Bombing of Britain (and Ireland)” beginning in 1941. Northern Ireland had been led since its birth by the steady hand of James Craig, or Lord Craigavon; the successor after his death in 1940 was the ineffectual John Andrews.

Andrews was swiftly replaced in 1943 by the stately Basil Brooke, Lord Brookeborough, who refreshed a stale Unionist administration that was ill-equipped to respond to the Nazi blitzes of April and May 1940.¹ Brookeborough would stay atop the Unionist state in a patrician and paternalistic manner beyond the Second World War and until his resignation in 1963 for health reasons. Northern Ireland remained conservative and insular during his two decades in power. As his tenure ended, Brookeborough cautioned against reforms and North-South collaboration, which his successor Terence O'Neill swiftly ignored. By the late 1960s, reform attempts had raised the concerns of Unionists and failed to placate Nationalists. As the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association and People's Democracy pushed the issue by 1968, volatility spilled over. The Belfast to Derry march in January 1969 resulted in a loyalist mob – featuring some members of the Northern security forces – attacking marchers at Burntollet Bridge. The fuse that would become the Troubles had been lit, and it would be three decades before a cessation of hostilities in the region.

Yet, this narrative is far too simplistic. Falling between the Belfast blitz and Burntollet Bridge is an often over-looked period of Irish history. Northern Ireland's century of existence featured devotion to armed service in two major conflicts on the continent² before the descent into a bloody internal strife. This time of perceived tranquility occurring between the Second World War and the outbreak of the Troubles actually contains significant conflict and broader political developments. The relative

¹ Phillip Ollerenshaw, "Neutrality and Belligerence: Ireland, 1939-1945" from Thomas Bartlett, ed., *Cambridge History of Ireland, Vol. IV, 1880 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 356 and Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 2001), 553.

² While the First World War ended in November of 1918, many of the security personnel who would join the RUC and the Special Constabulary in the 1920s had been connected to that conflict, like Basil Brooke, or even previous military service to Great Britain, like James Craig, veteran of the Boer War.

calm of the 1950s is misleading; beneath the surface, and rising from south of the Irish border, Irish Republicanism was attempting to mobilize political and militant means to destabilize the state of Northern Ireland. Conflict continued as an underling, but near constant, threat along the Irish border from 1954 through the formal IRA ceasefire. This tension was fueled by Republican politics new and old and was directly the result of engagements between armed Irish Republican insurgency and the counter-insurgency efforts by the Northern Irish security forces. By the 1960s, one entity emerged irrevocably damaged while the other was elevated to a place of supremacy.

Ultimately, the revised narrative matters because it illuminates the linkage between past and present that has traditionally been neglected. The 1950s should not be the Second World War's post-script or the Troubles' harbinger; it is an immensely important stand-alone era for the solidification of the Irish border that occurred from the Border Campaign and its contrasting repercussions on the IRA and the RUC. They can stand alone as a period of intense pressure from each side of the border creating new dynamics that are still being reckoned with today.

State of the field

In twentieth-century Irish history, the 1950s persist as a relative blind-spot. In both Irish and British histories of the modern period, it is an era characterized by high immigration, poor economics, and political and social conservatism. Yet, this should not be surprising given the way the decade was viewed *during* the time of "the vanishing Irish." It was in 1953 that John O'Brien published an edited volume under that title advancing the theory that Ireland's population had undergone unbroken decline since the

Famine.³ Dermot Keogh would transfer a dozen essays from an early 2000s academic conference on the 1950s, the “lost decade,” and produce another edited source addressing the legions who emigrated, “enforced departure,” because their young state could not provide jobs, education and economic stability.⁴ The collection of essays covers politics and culture, but is grounded in the widespread despair as the economy sputtered through the decade: amidst stagnation (unparalleled in the developed Western world at the time) the state’s population fell under 3 million, its lowest since the late 18th century.⁵

R.F. Foster’s *Modern Ireland* handles the 1950s as a time that laid crucial political ground-work for 1960s economic advancement and exposure to the wider world.⁶ For a British-centric narrative, Peter Clarke’s *Hope and Glory* chronicles developments in Ireland from Home Rule to partition, but admittedly forgets the Irish question for the next half century until the outbreak of the Troubles.⁷ Accurate for its stated scope, this would parallel the general indifference to Northern Ireland felt amongst the British public when television brought the late 1960s turmoil in Derry and Belfast into London and Manchester homes.⁸ Many Northern Irish observers advance the two community narratives that anchor the sectarian divide in society. Michael Farrell’s *The*

³ Dermot Keogh, “Introduction: The Vanishing Irish,” in *The Lost Decade: Ireland in the 1950s*, eds. Dermot Keogh, Finbarr O’Shea, Carmel Quinlan (Douglas Village, Cork: Mercier, 2004), 17.

⁴ Keogh, “Introduction: The Vanishing Irish,” 13.

⁵ “The 1950s stand out as the highest decade of emigration in absolute and relative terms since the 1880s, as approximately one in eight of the population would leave during the decade. The state’s population had shrunk to an all-time low of 2.8 million people. From Gerry O’Hanlon, “Population Change in the 1950s: A Statistical Review,” in *The Lost Decade: Ireland in the 1950s*, eds. Dermot Keogh, Finbarr O’Shea, Carmel Quinlan (Douglas Village, Cork: Mercier, 2004), 74.

⁶ R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 580-581.

⁷ Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory, Britain 1900-2000*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 340.

⁸ Robert Savage, *The BBC’s ‘Irish Troubles’: Television, Conflict and Northern Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 51-53. Savage writes how television images, particularly filmed by RTE and the BBC, entered thousands of British homes and led to “acute distress” for London, Belfast and Dublin. Additionally, the three main American networks, CBS, NBC, ABC, increased their coverage in 1969 comparing the disturbances to civil rights protests in the American South.

Orange State combatively cites the failings of the Unionist socio-political mechanism at addressing Catholic grievances in the province while traditionalist historians like Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, promotes the state's steady loyalism and higher standard of living compared to its southern neighbor.⁹ The adversarial nature of these two histories fits the broader communal narrative of justifying self-perseverance and resistance.

The existing academic research that examines the period often casts it comparatively among other eras, assessing it as part of broader trends. Often the early Republic (1949-1960s) is characterized as maintaining the insular and failing policies of the Free State and on the cusp of national maturity in economic policy re-orientation. The history of Northern Ireland focuses on the state's creation directly following the First World War and often sees the 1950s as stirrings of the Civil Rights movement that led in to the Troubles. More interestingly, the Second World War casts a long shadow over Northern Ireland, with many historians emphasizing the stability and elevating social standards of the welfare state into the 1950s era. Histories that are backwards looking from the turmoil of the late 1960s then relegate the early part of that decade to missed opportunities for diverging catastrophe.

A significant body of literature assessing the radical physical force Irish Republican element gives substantial insights into a central component of border conflict during the 1950s. The periodization of these studies generally exist in relation to the Irish

⁹ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: War, Peace and Beyond* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 352. Jackson writes that the 1946 decision to extend the welfare state social services to Northern Ireland aided Unionists in bolstering partition and "tranquilizing possibly restless Protestant voters" while also appealing to Catholics by "killing Northern nationalism by kindness."

War of Independence and the Troubles; substantial histories survey the “Old IRA” flying columns of the crucial 1919-1921 era and dozens assess the “Provos” that emerged from the ashes of 1969. Richard English’s history of the Irish Republican Army surveys the movement from the late 19th century until the birth of the modern Provisional movement.¹⁰ His attention to detail is exquisite, yet only a small fraction of his massive work examines the IRA of the 1950s. English’s assessment of the IRA reeling from the failed efforts during the Second World War is that they pale in comparison to the organization that emerged by the outbreak of the Troubles; he mostly speaks of the 1950s Border Campaign in the context of a training ground, militarily and politically, for future Provisional IRA leaders. English reaches the conclusion that despite the failings of the IRA’s border campaign (1956-1962), neither the organization nor its mission should be discounted as trivial.¹¹ Two other surveys of 20th century conflict in Ireland – Henry Patterson’s *Ireland Since 1939, The Persistence of Conflict* and Matt Treacy’s – *The IRA 1956–69: Rethinking the Republic* – more appropriately address the Border Campaign in the wider context of physical force Republicanism.

Barry Flynn’s *Soldiers of Folly* accepts the campaign as farce narrative and paints an elaborate picture of misguided intentions and poor planning in the IRA. Within one year of launching the campaign, the IRA would take substantial losses militarily and publicly and the effort was “floundering due to its poor planning and lack of professionalism.”¹² In a post-mortem to the 1962 IRA ceasefire that blames the

¹⁰ Richard English, *Armed Struggle, The History of the IRA* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1-4.

¹¹ English, *Armed Struggle* 76.

¹² Barry Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly: the IRA Border Campaign, 1956-1962* (Cork: Collins, 2009), 95.

indifference of the Irish public as much as the military failings, Flynn believes that “[f]or the IRA, it was a time to reflect and to face the reality of a changing world.”¹³ Well researched and brutally honest, Flynn’s book analyzes the IRA narrowly with only passing mention to the wider political and security climate in Northern Ireland prior to and after the abortive operation.

Some even-handed histories of 1950s Northern Ireland emphasize the IRA threat among other mundane details of the province. Marc Mulholland’s *Northern Ireland: A Very Short Introduction* points to a “low ebb” in 1960s armed republicanism as the failed 1956 campaign resulted “due to the lethargy of the nationalist people.”¹⁴ Under new[ish] leadership spearheaded by Cathal Goulding, then, they made a leftist turn slowly towards a socialist agenda. Particularly citing the physical force Republicanism of the PIRA, Mulholland traces their mandate to the ‘virtual republic’ created out of the IRB’s 1867 Constitution granting rights over an “absolute national independence, and a permanent Republican Government.”¹⁵ While the IRA of the 1950s aimed to emulate the IRA of the Anglo-Irish War, they miscalculated the tactics that brought Britain to the table.¹⁶ Lastly, it appears the IRA won its first war (the Anglo-Irish War or the War of Independence) then was defeated shortly after by former members of its organization that had moved over to the Free State forces: “the IRA lost the civil war, but maintained itself in

¹³ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 203.

¹⁴ Mulholland, Marc. *Northern Ireland: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, 63.

¹⁵ Mulholland, *Northern Ireland*, 66.

¹⁶ *Soldiers of the Republic* “hoped to validate their shadow state by replicating in miniature norms of soldiering. Indeed, it was large-scale confrontations (the Kilmichael ambush, the assault on Dublin Customs House) that helped create an environment in which the British government persuaded itself that it was valid to negotiate with representatives of gunmen.” From Mulholland, *Northern Ireland*, 68.

existence as representatives of the Republic.”¹⁷ Mulholland’s history defines the 1950s IRA little more than a cheap imitation of prior generations.

British histories regard Ireland as a land plagued by periodic internal strife (“ancient enemies”¹⁸), and Northern Ireland more often is treated as a partially-integrated rather than an integral part of a United Kingdom. Peter Clarke’s magnificently written history *Hope and Glory, Britain 1900-2000* tends to the political and economic with substantial attention to cultural and social developments. Broadly, his history identifies Ireland as an impediment to the politics and drain on economics with minimal cultural or social contribution. Questioning the notion of a national history of Britain, he develops a “clear political rift” between Southern-centric Catholics and Northern-centric Protestants in Ireland around 1900 that led to the border in 1920 “no neat and permanent, still less preordained, solution to the Irish question” and its ripples on the rest of the “British nation,” though doubtfully one exists.¹⁹ Clarke’s mention of Ireland’s place in the broader British sphere of influence in the opening decades of the 20th century gives way to little mention of either the quite separate southern Free State – understandably, “Ireland went its own way in 1918” - and the devolved, equally detached Northern Stormont regime: “This suited the Protestants of Ulster...” whom the Tories, ruling for nearly all of the mid-20th century, left “to rule the roost in their own backyard, with no awkward questions asked.”²⁰ When signs of conflict emerge with O’Neill reforms and

¹⁷ Mulholland, *Northern Ireland*, 69.

¹⁸ Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, 436.

¹⁹ Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, 1-2. Clarke acknowledges the centrality of English history in his British story, yet he states: “this volume does not, I trust, show itself oblivious of their very existence [Scottish, Welsh and Irish nationalisms] and it acknowledges that the term Britons is problematic...”

²⁰ Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, 98-110, 340. Focusing on David Lloyd George, Ireland’s war, armistice and partitioning is dealt with in the context of the brilliant diplomacy of the Welsh Wizard whose strength and prestige after World War I was unrivalled in British political history.

Civil Rights protests, Clarke again casts the Troubles as an internal grievance with Britain as a forced mediator. Clarke's inattention is emblematic of British perspectives towards the island of Ireland during the 1950s. Northern Ireland's population was always well under 5% of the total United Kingdom population, and most British histories reflect the province's relative isolation in mainstream British history. After half a century of laying dormant, "the old quarrel about Ulster" re-emerges amidst debates about British integration into the European economic market, drawing British attention inward as it looked outward.²¹ Clarke frames Northern Ireland in a purely political context, Labour's frustration with the impervious working classes split along sectarian lines and the Conservative's long-standing allies in Unionism. He glosses over much of the causes of Catholic unrest, alluding to the justification of their grievances – calling Stormont's fifty years a "failed experiment" - without many specifics, despite giving great deal to a myriad of other strands within the wider history of the United Kingdom.

If British historians of the 20th century have cast Northern Ireland and the border in the context of foreign politics and a committed military force to quell an ancient 'internal squabble,' Irish historians generally integrate Northern Ireland more seamlessly into an island-wide history. Contrasts are drawn between Southern and Northern states of being and states of mind, often predating the boundary laid down in 1920. Cultural non-congruencies around religion, language, traditions and venerations underpin the historical divergence in armed conflicts. Differences abound between North and South during Ireland's War of Independence (or the Anglo-Irish War) as well as the Emergency (or the Second World War) and continue into the second half of the 20th century where

²¹ Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, 340.

modernity draws each state apart before a convergence around the millennium. This is well-captured in the recent publication (2018) of *The Cambridge History of Ireland, Volume IV* when Eunan O’Halpin’s culminating chapter emphasizes the ‘two Irelands’ of post-1921 with a particular divergent eye on very different post-1945 realities in governance and social fabric.²² Second World War neutrality exacerbated the north-south divide and isolate the southern state from the institutions of post-war Allied economic policy. Brian Girvin’s analysis in “Stability, crisis and change in post-war Ireland 1945-1973,” focuses on the political-economic drive towards European integration and true 20th century modernity. As Henry Patterson points out, the early years of the Republic were disastrous economically and demographically. Yet the Republic would resolve its crisis around the time civil disturbance in Northern Ireland commenced. As the conflict dragged on, “the Republic’s post-1959 economic transformation and its associated membership in the EEC made it increasingly attractive as a partner, junior or otherwise, in Britain’s search for a solution in Northern Ireland.”²³

While British observers paid little heed to Northern Ireland between the 1920s and 1970s, a number of Northern-born historians have attempted to explain the conflict from a communal perspective. Bringing a critical light to the frequent assertion that the Northern Ireland state unjustly neglected its Catholic population, Jonathan Bardon’s *A History of Ulster* surveys the province stuck between Ireland and Britain, and of unique

²² Eunan O’Halpin, “Endword: Ireland Looking Outwards, 1880–2016” in *Cambridge History of Ireland, Vol. IV, 1880 to the Present*, ed. Thomas Barlett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 836. O’Halpin summarizes: “[p]rosperity and a dilution of dependency on the United Kingdom came not through political and economic isolationism, but through trade and international cooperation from the late 1950s onward. Independent Ireland could make choices which radically altered her economic fortunes; Northern Ireland could not.”

²³ Patterson, Henry, *Ireland Since 1939: The Persistence of Conflict* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006), xiii.

character to both. Bardon, although Dublin-born, weaves a historical narrative sympathetic to the Unionist perspective on the mid-20th century and reflects his experience of public history in Belfast. By positioning the province outside of Ireland, he exoticizes it and enhances the notion that the state formed by partition had long existed as a cultural and political separate entity. Of the experience of the Second World War, Bardon writes that the two Ireland's grew farther apart and that 1945 marked the dawn of "the most peaceful, hopeful and progressive period the province was to enjoy in the twentieth century."²⁴ Alvin Jackson calls Northern Ireland's history a compressed version of Ireland from 1700-1900: Stormont was merely a rebirth of the Ascendency parliament pre-Act of Union.²⁵ Jackson casts militant republicanism along the Irish border in the context of failed politics. Anti-partition political disappointment leads to the rise of Liam Kelly's Saor Uladh and border provincialism, albeit however short-lived. While the IRA campaign was easily defeated, Jackson does elevate its importance for mobilizing hundreds of IRA volunteers and thousands of security forces while "heighten[ing] the defensiveness of all aspects of Unionism" reinforcing each side of the community's populist and sectarian leanings.²⁶ Challenging Unionist apologists, Henry Patterson writes that the Stormont regime *did* practice structural discrimination; however, the extent and intensity of discrimination pre-Troubles as well as state's culpability in local and central levels has been at times exaggerated to fit Nationalist narratives and the justification of Republican armed resistance. Still, the Northern-born Patterson, lecturing at the University of Ulster, writes that "what cannot be denied was the incapacity of the

²⁴ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 586.

²⁵ Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998*, 331.

²⁶ Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998*, 354.

Stormont regime to provide an opportunity for Catholics to feel themselves as a respected and valued part of the community.”²⁷ Unionists valued too greatly the material advantages to UK membership in the 1950s and 1960s compared to their southern counterpart as an excuse for maintaining a discriminatory state.

One of the stated aims of Michael Farrell’s *Northern Ireland: The Orange State* is to fill gaps in the literature of the conflict in Northern Ireland.²⁸ This is noteworthy as Farrell first published his well-known account in 1976, still in the first third of what would be a thirty-year conflict. By the mid-1970s, Farrell believed, the growing body of work had overwhelmingly viewed the Northern Irish situation from the events of 1968 onward; this “Troubles onward” lens led to confusion that he wished to clear up. The author was a direct participant in many of the events of the early Troubles, himself a Northern-born Catholic graduating from Queen’s University Belfast before becoming a founding member of People’s Democracy in the late 1960s.²⁹ Farrell neither attempts to hide this bias or justify it; his central place in the turbulence of Northern Ireland adds to his narrative history of the “Orange State,” which he defines as a “rigidly repressive police regime” ruled by a Unionist hegemony.³⁰ With his political-focus, Farrell chronicles conventional politics – the Anti-Partition League – as well as politics taken to the streets – pre-Civil Rights agitation – and armed conflict.

For assessing the security dimension of Northern Ireland, there does exist some literature analyzing policing and security. However, most recent publications focus on the

²⁷ Patterson, *Ireland Since 1939*, xv.

²⁸ Farrell, Michael. *Northern Ireland: The Orange State*. London: Pluto Press, 1992, 12.

²⁹ Colm Keena, “Hunger Striker Turned Lawyer in Long-Time Fight for Social Justice.” *The Irish Times*, January 15, 2016.

³⁰ Farrell, *The Orange State*, 328.

period 1968 until 1998 and give little background to the RUC during the 1950s. These studies fit into the wider study of terrorism and guerrilla warfare, particularly in a post-colonial and Cold War context. Unlike histories of Latin American and Middle Eastern studies, however, Northern Ireland is unique as a Western European conflict zone lasting a significant duration.³¹ In examining the terrorism and counter-terrorism efforts in Northern Ireland, these histories center on the security forces: the British military, MI5, the Royal Ulster Constabulary and even Irish security forces. Gordon Clubb's *Social Movement De-Radicalisation and the Decline of Terrorism*, James Dingley's *Combating Terrorism in Northern Ireland* and William Matchett's *Secret Victory* examine how the security forces countered the IRA. The most comprehensive examination of the RUC is Neil Southern's *Policing and Combating Terrorism in Northern Ireland*, but this is still only a surface level view of the force before the Troubles. Similar to Unionist-sympathetic studies, these accounts focus on the communal tranquility preceding the Troubles and tend to mitigate Catholic grievances while emphasizing the order of Ulster society regulated on seemingly logical, and unavoidable sectarian lines.

In summary, a number of trends emerge from the present state of the field. From an analysis of dozens of histories, Ireland's experience in a post-colonial context is foundational to the political dilemmas of both states: the Free State/Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The militarization of the Irish border would occur during the middle of the twentieth-century in a way that had not been seen before. Furthermore, many histories stress economic limitations and developments without delving in to the ground-level impact on the citizenry, particularly along the border. Post-Second World

³¹ In Europe, the Balkans conflict on the 1990s also drew international attention.

War decolonization across the British Empire and Cold War polarization greater emphasized Northern Ireland's place in a United Kingdom, yet how did disenfranchised Catholics assess this new dynamic? When the Republic of Ireland formally self-declared in 1949, a declaration of departure was made from Britain as Northern Ireland was copper-fastened to Great Britain: how did this rupture create ripples across the next decade? The border became the focal point of both states for an intense, albeit short, period of conflict driven by physical force republicans attempting to destabilize the state of Northern Ireland. They forced a security response that not only reinforced the border but solidified its place of prominence as a line of division. What truths can be gained from this period, and what conclusions have perhaps been overlooked?

Methodology

This project examines the main dynamics along the Irish border between 1949 and 1962. Focus is on the IRA and Republican splinter group Saor Uladh led by Liam Kelly, the RUC and militant-political Unionism and the role of governments in Belfast, Dublin and London. This thesis will examine the Irish border in three components. First, the state of Irish Republican resistance between the Second World War and the IRA ceasefire to its Operation Harvest. A short 20th century background is given to the ideology before a generally chronological history unfolds. The core of the analysis comes from Gardaí police records on Republican commemorations from the early 1940s to the end of the 1950s. Secondly, the focus shifts to the security forces of Northern Ireland who are tasked with defending the state and safeguarding the border. In similar fashion, there is a brief history of Ulster's distinct regional history from the 19th century to the

formation of the state, and then there is a chronological history to the IRA's Border Campaign. Newspaper reporting and government documents from the 1950s and early 1960s are the primary source that grant some insight in to the otherwise private dealings of the Northern security apparatus. Thirdly, the last state observed is an alternate view of Republicanism from within Northern Ireland: Liam Kelly's brand of border Republicanism. This chapter moves between Kelly's life and events on the ground in Ireland. A number of sources on Liam Kelly held at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland in Belfast are utilized here, including a previously classified folder compiled by the Inspector-General of the RUC. The chapter maintains a chronological pace, but also moves between wider events and the experiences of Kelly as a 1950s case study.

CHAPTER ONE, THE SOUTHERN STATE

1.0: Republican threats to the border

One hundred kilometers south from where the Irish border separates Armagh from Monaghan is the resting place for the father of Irish Republicanism. Theobald Wolfe Tone lies in the clay at Bodenstown in County Kildare, just west of Dublin. Tone had dedicated his adult life to the cause of Irish freedom, gathering support and taking on a foreign power on Irish shores in the failed 1798 United Irishmen revolt. The rebellion drew from Catholic and Protestant ranks particularly heavily in greater Belfast's large Presbyterian population in, what is now, Northern Ireland. Tone rallied others, spearheaded a mass moment, launched the insurrection and was apprehended before the upper hand could be won. More Irish revolutionaries would follow a familiar formula, spilling rebel blood and creating Fenian dead.¹

During the 20th century, the annual Wolfe Tone commemoration became a ritualized Republican event meant to revitalize the movement, signal ideological evolutions and allow its leadership to gauge public support. Simultaneously, the security

¹ This reference to Patrick Pearse's well-known line from the 1915 graveside oration over Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa ("but the fools, the fools, the fools! — they have left us our Fenian dead, and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace.") takes into account that many self-identifying Republicans would not fall into the narrower category of "Fenians," particularly the United Irishmen of 1798 and Young Irelanders of 1848. Still, Pearse's role in 1916 and his oration a year prior at the grave of an IRB founder linked 19th century and 20th century "blood sacrifice." From R.F. Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland, 1890-1923* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2015), 215.

forces in Dublin and Belfast² took notice and viewed it as a vehicle for physical force Republicanism's intent and intensity.

As was customary for the third Sunday in June, the crowd of Republicans and Republican-sympathizers had gathered at Sallins field in rural Kildare on the 21st of June, 1959. The traditions of the march, with organizations like Sinn Féin and Cumann na mBan marked out by signs and accompanied by seven bands and a color guard, had changed little over that decade.³ But this year, more than previous ones, marked a vital moment in Irish Republicanism: the IRA's Operation Harvest, its border campaign to defeat the Northern Ireland state, had been going on for two and a half years. It was faltering. Public support peaked in 1957 after an IRA loss of life and gain of temporary electoral strength for Sinn Féin. Commemoration literature (see Figure 1.1) connected the blood sacrifice made by IRA men in the Border Campaign to the historic struggle. The year 1959 was the twilight of that campaign, as the internment policies of both governments North and South of the Irish border had decimated the IRA and destroyed public faith in the movement. In this context, the IRA's Chief of Staff was selected to be the keynote speaker overlooking Tone's grave.⁴ After the standard rituals of wreath-laying, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh's voice rang out the oration to nearly 3,500 spectators. He

² The RUC was aware of Irish Republican public events, especially from the early 1950s through the Border Campaign. It is apparent that intelligence relating to at least Seán MacBride and Liam Kelly was being passed to the RUC Inspector General at Waring Street, Belfast. From typescript of RUC report "LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH," HA/32/1/955A, 2-3, Public Record Office Northern Ireland, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

³ Typescript of "I.R.A. Commemoration Ceremony at Bodinstown on 21st, June, 1959," 1, Garda report on 1959 Wolfe Tone Commemoration, JUS/8/900, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

⁴ The selection process was loosely defined, but usually was a collaboration between the two most prominent Republican organizations, the Sinn Féin Ard Chomhairle and the IRA Army Council. From Robert White, *Ruairí Ó Brádaigh: The Life and Politics of an Irish Revolutionary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 90.

connected the Easter Proclamation to the current IRA campaign saying “[the ideals] had been carried on by the men of 1916 and again 2½ years ago another blow had been struck for Irish Freedom” and despite internment in the South “the fight for Irish freedom must go on and if we made a concentrated effort now we would achieve that freedom, for which Tone lived and died.”⁵



Figure 1.1: Pamphlet of “Seachtain Bhulf Tone – Wolfe Tone Week,” cover (1), 2, Garda report on 1957 Wolfe Tone Commemoration, JUS/8/900, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

⁵ Typescript of “I.R.A. Commemoration Ceremony at Bodenstown on 21st, June, 1959,” 3, JUS/8/900, NAI.

That event's Garda report stated that the speech contained little of a seditious nature and was relatively mild, however spirited it may have been. Tellingly for the Republican movement, the same security force report also gave full names and addresses for nearly all major Republicans involved in the march, from known IRA man O Brádaigh through to identifiable figures forming the color party. So thorough had the Southern security forces infiltrated the organization that they paid little heed to the fact that a letter from Crumlin Road IRA men was read off by Thomas Gill, a former Curragh internee himself, in a most assuredly "seditious" manner.⁶ Yet, what the speech most illuminated was the Republican movement's inability to move beyond romanticizing the past. What's most spectacular was just how unspectacular O Brádaigh's speech was for the crucial timing - it could have been made in 1955 or even 1945, long before the Border Campaign. The fact was the Republican movement's physical force campaign needed an injection of energy and yet all Ó Brádaigh's could muster, pointing to Tone's grave, was that "to this spot succeeding generations have come to do him honour and to derive inspiration to complete his unfinished work."⁷ Precisely what that meant, Ó Brádaigh's organization was at a loss to explain. Much like the unambitious address, the armed struggle in 1959 lacked purpose and momentum amidst IRA internment and widespread disillusionment. With the close of the 1950s came the end of an era in which Republicanism made a grand effort to implode the Northern Irish state by force, and yet unwilling to evolve itself would ultimately falter.

⁶ Typescript of "I.R.A. Commemoration Ceremony at Bodenstown on 21st, June, 1959," 3, JUS/8/900, NAI.

⁷ White, *Ruairí Ó Brádaigh*, 91.

1.1 The border divides Republicans, 1919-1925

The ideological underpinnings of modern Irish Republicanism can be traced back directly to the 1916 Easter Rising and the proclamation read out by Patrick Pearse. The popular and political mandate for Republicanism was given in the 1918 General Election; shortly after the armistice of the First World War, the Irish public went to the polls and overwhelmingly endorsed two divergent policies of governance. The mantle of Republicanism was grasped by the Sinn Féin party, and their electoral success in winning 73 seats led to the sitting of the first Dáil in January 1919.⁸ The other stark reality was the unwavering Unionist support in Ulster, strongest in the constituencies of the far north-east, religiously and economically unique from the rest of the island.⁹ It would be here that Edwards Carson and James Craig would build out their hegemony in government and security with a “near impregnable position” holding six counties and a two-thirds majority identifying as Protestant Unionists.¹⁰ The Irish War of Independence beginning at the start of 1919 and culminating with the Anglo-Irish Treaty at the end of 1921 mostly confirmed the inevitable: a bisected island with two governments reflecting the will of the majority of the (partitioned) population in its midst. It was not surprising that each government would disproportionately cater to the population reflecting their political

⁸ Sinn Féin trailed only Bonar Law’s Conservatives and Lloyd George’s Liberal Coalition in the number of seats won in the United Kingdom. Additionally, Sinn Féin won 70 of the 75 seats in what would become the Irish Free State. From Peter Mair and Weeks, Liam, “The Party System” in John Coakley and Gallagher, Michael, eds., *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 11, 140-141.

⁹ Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State* (London: Pluto Press, 1980), 21. Specifically, Ulster Unionists won 22 of 37 constituencies in nine-county Ulster, 20 out of 30 with a vote share of 2:1 in the area of the future Northern Ireland.

¹⁰ R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989) 503.

mandate, but the level of institutionalized sectarianism was pervasive in Northern Ireland from its inception.

1.1.1 Irish Republicanism: The view from the South

As the Government of Ireland Act (1920) divided Ireland, so did it divide Republicanism. By setting up two governments on the island, both subservient to Westminster, it triggered the inevitable rejection by Southern Irish Republicans who wanted a 32-county all-Ireland nation. Quick to retain links to the United Kingdom, the Unionists accepted the February 1920 proposal and swiftly moved to establish a Belfast-area authoritative body for the administration of the six nearest counties, what would comprise Northern Ireland. Even with major objections to treaty stipulations for a Council of Ireland and Boundary Commission, the Unionists were well positioned particularly with the British government's backing of the new border and military support in 1920 and 1921.¹¹ The border that would come in to existence split the Catholic population, the island's population most sympathetic to the notion of the Irish Republic, and created divisions among the movement politically and physically that would have long-lasting effect on ideological viability.

A few issues plagued Irish Republicanism through the 1920s. Centrally, there is the issue of what precisely forms the "Irish nation," in territorial space and governmental terms. Would anything short of a total-island, 32-county state with full independence from British control be inadequate? While Ireland has natural island boundaries and was

¹¹ Farrell, *The Orange State*, 23. Particularly, the Council of Ireland was designed "with a view to the eventual establishment of a parliament for the whole of Ireland and to bring about harmonious action between the parliaments and governments."

administered as a single political unit from the Act of Union (1801) onward, it had persisted as a deeply fractured entity for much of its pre-modern history.¹² In his thorough survey of the movement, Richard English identifies separatism as a key 20th century hold-over from late 19th century Fenianism, which extolled the near inevitability of physical force means to securing political objectives.¹³ The calculation by Pearse, Tom Clarke and Sean McDermott to use militarism in declaring the Republic made the subsequent military action against Britain, evident in policies shaped by Michael Collins, necessary, but also set in motion the Civil War.

The 1922-1923 Civil War was a direct result of Sinn Féin 's commitment to the 1916 Rising, as Fearghal McGarry has observed. By the time it was realized that the Irish Republican Army – evolving from the earlier Irish Volunteers – could not defeat the British, it was too late as “the Republic had been elevated to more than a mere political objective.”¹⁴ Members of the IRA had sworn to defend the living Republic, and the terms of the Treaty did not satisfy significant individuals within the movement, most notably Éamon de Valera and Liam Lynch. Through draconian measures by the pro-Treaty Free State government and horrific reprisals from the anti-Treaty IRA side, the Civil War caused far more deaths than the War of Independence before arms were dumped by the ‘Legion of the Rearguard,’ the Republican rump in May 1923.¹⁵ As the Civil War hostilities faded, it was clear a new norm would settle over Ireland; Catholics in the

¹² Niall Ó Dochartaigh, “State, Nation, Island: The Politics of Territory in Ireland” in Niall Ó Dochartaigh, Hayward, Katy and Elizaeth Meehan, eds., *Dynamics of Political Change in Ireland: Making and Breaking a Divided Island* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 15-16.

¹³ Richard English, *Armed Struggle: the History of the IRA* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 8-9.

¹⁴ Fearghal McGarry, *The Rising, Ireland: Easter 1916* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016), 287.

¹⁵ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 512-513.

Northern Ireland state had to come to terms with the new reality of Partition as the Free State government seemed unwilling to challenge it. For the remainder of the early 1920s, Dublin would consolidate control and administer over the territory it had, spending little time concerned with territory ceded to the Belfast administration.

1.1.2 Irish Republicanism: The view from the North

One lesson lost on Irish Republicans of the 1950s looking back on the War of Independence (1919-1921) was the fact that it was not solely an Irish struggle against a foreign force. A significant number of IRA victims were Irish people – deemed “collaborators” – made legitimate targets as members of the Royal Irish Constabulary or individuals working for the British governmental apparatus. As “objectively the representatives of alien oppression,” these mostly Catholic and Irish individuals were ostracized from their local communities, particularly in rural areas of Munster and Connaught, and many were killed during the years of conflict.¹⁶ Yet, the Northern Ireland state mobilized a far more passionate native born security force as the RIC would evolve into the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and a paramilitary apparatus, the Special Constabulary (their formation and composition is explored in greater detail in the next chapter). While the IRA of that era could portray the Black and Tans as a faceless, foreign-born, extraneous force brought out of the trenches after the First World War suppress the Irish Nationalist uprising, the IRA of the 1950s could not claim the RUC to be as such. The Northern security forces were almost entirely native-born, albeit self-

¹⁶ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 494.

describing as “Ulstermen” more so than “Irish.” Their core beliefs aligned with the defense of the realm, not for any imperialistic cause but because their demise as a force was an existential threat to their families and their communal way of life. Yet, in this respect the RUC was also completely foreign to Catholic, Nationalist-leaning areas of Ulster, for example the future borderland of south Armagh and east Tyrone where almost no members of the force mirrored the community. It is in this exceptional way that the security situation in Northern Ireland evolved rapidly in the early 1920s to differentiate it from the other three provinces of the island.

As events in the South pointed to a stalemate and negotiations between the IRA and the British government, the IRA campaign in the North faced significant setbacks. The British military moved to quickly subdue unrest in Derry City at the outbreak of the War of Independence; when June 1920 fighting between IRA and UVF units erupted, the military sealed off the Catholic Bogside and imposed a rigid curfew; the city of just over 40,000 people was cordoned off with a massive security presence of 1,500.¹⁷ While historian Pearse Lawlor’s research lists a number of subsequent disturbances in Derry City between 1920 and 1922, Northern Ireland’s second largest city would remain mostly at peace for the remainder of the period known colloquially as “the Outrages.” In Belfast, it was the population and Protestant vigilance groups who inflicted a fairly coordinated intimidation campaign against the minority Catholic population; while some sectarian violence did occur in the South, no area rivalled the sectarian bitterness of Ireland’s second city. Belfast was unique in settling the policy agenda for Sinn Féin and the IRA in

¹⁷ Farrell, *The Orange State*, 26. Additionally, while the IRA was targeted the UVF was not asked to disarm, leaving them “unmolested” in Farrell’s words.

the newly created Northern Ireland. Once the border was erected, the minority population in each state suffered, though the Northern Catholics who were one-third of the state suffered disproportionately more than the less than 10% of Southern Protestants (which would rapidly decline to only 3% of the Free State population).¹⁸ The Free State's attention would be drawn towards internal matters of operating the new government and combatting the anti-Treaty IRA in 1922-1923. Michael Collins and others were left with little more than economic measures (namely the Belfast boycott) and attempted pacts with the Northern Ireland government to remedy partition as they awaited the Boundary Commission.

Years later, when the hollow Boundary Commission was finally exposed as satisfying neither camp, the three governments involved moved to bury it for good.¹⁹ It's narrow sights and substantial roadblocks had always set the prize as too small while potentially resulting in massive disruption to political and daily life.²⁰ By December 1925 it was clear: the border would persist, regardless of its unpopularity among the Catholic Nationalists people most affected by its presence. The newly created borderland would be at the crossroads of Irish politics and militancy, as rival nationalist groups contested the space most aggressively in evenly divided parts of Ulster. Fergal McCluskey's survey of Tyrone from the Home Rule crisis to the end of the Civil War reveals the persistence of

¹⁸ James Dingley, "Northern Ireland and the 'Troubles'," in James Dingley, ed., *Combatting Terrorism in Northern Ireland* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 25.

¹⁹ Farrell, *The Orange State*, 77-78. The Boundary Commission report was leaked in November 1925, with sensational details including the Free State transferring of East Donegal and possibly part of Inishowen peninsula (North Donegal) to Northern Ireland and only gaining strips of South Fermanagh and South Armagh in return. Panicking, the Free State government traveled to London and signed off on the existing border also striking the Council of Ireland provision.

²⁰ Peter Leary, *Unapproved Routes, Histories of the Irish border, 1922-1972* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 56.

centuries old persecution and discrimination along religious lines but under a revised imperial policy promoted by the Conservative government and Unionist sympathizers.²¹ Tyrone's colonial past led to garrison towns aligned with the Protestant Unionist element and a Catholic Nationalist countryside with a slight majority: 55% in the 1911 census, maintained at that level in 1920.²² Securing the border and subduing a population on the periphery of the state would be paramount for the survival of the young state. Subsequent chapters will consider how the Northern Ireland state did so and how its security forces were mobilized in cultural and territorial battles.

1.2 Republicans during transition years, 1926-1945

The leading political manifestation of Irish Republicanism continued to be the Sinn Féin party. Sinn Féin, in its many reincarnations from 1919 to the 1940s, had attempted to stay true to its republican roots and the 'national question' while responding to the realities of state and society.²³ Yet, defections by key members throughout that period, often times to political parties more willing to explore constitutional means, stunted the party's development and robbed it of dynamic leaders that could promote its aims and agenda.

²¹ Fergal McCluskey, *Tyrone, The Irish Revolution, 1912-23* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014), 134-135.

²² McCluskey, *Tyrone*, 1.

²³ Eithne MacDermott, *Clann na Poblachta* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998), 3-5. MacDermott convincingly traces the divergence and convergence between democracy and nationalism in modern western-nation states. In an Irish context, she shows that Sinn Féin has fragmented and regrouped numerous times around class and citizen rights corresponding with the right-left political spectrum.

1.2.1 Republicanism: Defections and defeats, 1926-1939

How did Irish Republicanism maneuver the 1920s political landscape? In the early Free State era, the group's impact diminished sharply as militancy lost its place in the fabric of Irish life. Politically, Sinn Féin remained excluded from both the Belfast Parliament (first at Belfast City Hall then Stormont) and the Dáil, refusing to acknowledge the legitimacy of either state. The IRA in the South declined sharply in the late 1920s as inactivity and intelligence service penetration wreaked havoc. In the North, the Civil War and fall out was even more devastating, as it split the organization, halted the source of arms and lead to leadership losses: "The commanders of two of the four Northern divisions were to be executed by Free State troops – Joe McKelvey from Belfast in December 1922, Charlie Daly from Tyrone in March 1923, while Sean Larkin, the local IRA commander in South Derry, was executed with Daly in Drumboe Castle in Co. Donegal."²⁴ Depleted of men and arms, the IRA's Northern Command was demoralized by the 1923 IRA ceasefire and weapons dump; less concerned with the Free State force, they had to contend with a massive Northern Irish security apparatus: "sixteen battalions of British troops and nearly 50,000 police and Specials [...the most extreme estimates placed] the IRA's pre-civil war strength in the six counties [at] 8,500."²⁵ It is no wonder that most IRA supporters placidly acknowledged the realities they would be living in, putting aside issues with the Nationalist Party and re-subscribing to a force of Northern Nationalism tied to the Belfast firebrand, Joseph Devlin. Catholics attempting to navigate their role in the state while maintaining some of their historical

²⁴ Farrell, *The Orange State*, 61.

²⁵ Farrell, *The Orange State*, 61.

allegiances (like the Ancient Order of Hibernians) would proscribe to “Devlinite”

Nationalism as a political opposition to the strongly organized Unionist Party.²⁶ Michael

Farrell aptly writes of this era:

[T]he Unionists set about constructing an Orange and Protestant state with almost all political power and patronage in their own hands – right down to the humblest rural council – and operated an elaborate and comprehensive system of discrimination in housing and jobs which kept the minority in a position of permanent and hopeless inferiority.²⁷

To counter Farrell, there were some councils (for example Newry and Mourne), controlled by Catholics, but even in areas with substantial Catholic populations this was not a certainty. Another Northern historian of the era labels the character of the new Northern Ireland administration as reflecting the socio-economic and political Unionist relationships that had long pre-dated the failed Irish revolution, from a Northern Nationalist position.²⁸ Northern Ireland was a state born in bloodshed, reinforcing a “no surrender” mentality that had existed in Loyalism for centuries.

Political developments in the South from the mid-1920s through the 1930s also redefined how people self-identified with the notion of Republican politics. The rules most dramatically shifted with the most outspoken anti-Treaty politician, the former Sinn Féin stalwart de Valera. When he left Sinn Féin to create Fianna Fáil this signified another rupture moment for Irish Republicanism since the Treaty fallout. Sinn Féin’s electoral support had been declining through the mid-1920s, as its abstention policy did

²⁶ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 440. Devlin remained active throughout the early 20th century, famously defeating de Valera in the West Belfast 1918 Westminster contest; he gained concessions for Northern Catholics in the 1930 Education Act while a sitting MP for the borderland constituency Fermanagh and Tyrone (1929-1934).

²⁷ Farrell, *The Orange State*, 81.

²⁸ McCluskey, *Tyrone*, 129.

little to harm the state's growing legitimacy.²⁹ The movement's largest defender, in Ireland and abroad, had decided to enter the Dáil in opposition in 1927, finding a way around the difficult matter of an oath.³⁰ De Valera had founded Fianna Fáil a year earlier after leaving Sinn Féin, and the IRA's miscalculation in assassinating the government minister Kevin O'Higgins forced de Valera to adjust tactics. The newly formed party would enter the government and eroded the Sinn Féin vote share in the next general election. In June 1927, Fianna Fáil would gain 44 seats in that inaugural contest to Sinn Féin's 5 seats; their vote share fell by almost a quarter to 3.6%.³¹ By 1932, Fianna Fáil had caught W.T. Cosgrave's Cumann na nGaedheal, besting them by 15 seats to gain its first lead in government, with support from the Labour Party. In doing so, the self-proclaimed "Republican Party" won over public support and continued to create Sinn Féin defections and obscure their message for the remainder of the decade. Similarly, IRA was in a dark window for the decade from 1926 to 1936, attempting to evolve and find a new footing in a well-changed domestic landscape. The organization did benefit from having steady leadership, led by the enigmatic Chief of Staff Moss Twomey, and experienced military leaders like Sean Russell and Frank Ryan with clear political motivations.³² However, as a secret army known well to the state forces, the IRA rarely posed a sizeable threat to stability of either the Free State or Northern Ireland in the late 1920s and through the start of the Second World War in 1939.

²⁹ Coakley, John "The Foundations of Statehood" from Coakley, *Politics in the Republic*, 21-22.

³⁰ De Valera still engaged in "verbal Republicanism" if not practicing any cohesive policy of Anti-Partition measures while attempting to alter the state from within. From Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 531.

³¹ Dáil Éireann - 17th Dáil 1961, "General Election of 9 June 1927," *Elections Ireland*, accessed March 1, 2020, <https://electionsireland.org/results/general/05dail.cfm>.

³² Brian Hanley, *The IRA: 1926-1936* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), 18-20.

1.2.2 Republicanism: deficits and self-destruction, 1939-1945

What was the status of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), fully outlawed by both governments on the island of Ireland, between 1939 and 1945? Simply, the IRA would be run down by the Irish Free State government during the length of the Second World War. Attempting to replicate the opportunism of the 1916 rebels who struck during the First World War, the IRA attempted to strike out at Britain during the slide into the Second World War. With a bombing campaign in Britain and attacks on the island of Ireland, the IRA showed its relative strength and brought about its significant weakening. The domestic IRA attacks on customs huts in late 1938 succeeded in gaining the attention of each Irish government. The IRA Army Council statement in December 1938 and the IRA proclamation in January 1939 served each government in strengthening the emergency powers act allowing arrest and internment of IRA members.³³ The Northern Irish authorities wasted no time in arresting leading Republicans in an attempt to stabilize the province amidst Nazi air-raids, but more shocking was the Southern response. Only a little over a decade from formally breaking with his more radical Republican past, Éamon de Valera pursued the IRA with a stunning gusto that bordered on the personal, “show[ing] no mercy to those who still believed in physical force.”³⁴ De Valera’s government used internment and special courts to devastating effect: six IRA men were executed and the government “stood its ground” when two hunger strikers - Tony D’Arcy and Sean McNeela - died in prison during the Emergency.³⁵ In an effort to maintain

³³ Ollerenshaw, “Neutrality and Belligerence: Ireland, 1939-1945,” 359.

³⁴ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 13-14.

³⁵ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 13.

neutrality, the Free State government was unwilling to give the IRA any opportunity to draw Britain into an open conflict south of the Irish border.

Any progress in the Republican movement through the late 1930s was disrupted by the war, and a recession struck north and south. Writing on Ireland's persistence of conflict, Henry Patterson observes that little good happenings are known of Republicanism in Derry and Belfast during the war, and little is known (in general) in rural Northern Ireland – "indicat[ing] a sense of disorientation and a lack of energy or direction."³⁶ A 1950s IRA historian is equally blunt: "The IRA was almost militarily bankrupt as the clouds of conflict cleared over Europe in 1945."³⁷ Aiming to increase its profile, the inverse occurred when a de Valera-led government vigorously pursued the organization, rendering its operational capacity deeply limited by the conclusion of the conflict. There does occur a cogent ideological shift crucial to the Republic's place at the table at the end of the Troubles: did the 1950s begin the "Republic's shift from a thirty-two-county anti-partition nationalism to a twenty-six-county state patriotism"?³⁸ If the 'Emergency' was particularly quiet for Ireland, the IRA took the brunt of the action from the Irish security forces, and were at an organizational low ebb by 1945.

The IRA public relations wing did attempt to press on, as indicated by a series of publications: *War News* was in Ireland during the Emergency and *The Irish Republic* and *Irish Republican Bulletin* were sold in the US before and after the war. In June 1940 *War News*, published by the Irish Republican Publicity Bureau, would self-describe as a Lamp

³⁶ Henry Patterson, *Ireland Since 1939, The Persistence of Conflict* (Dublin: Penguin, 2006), 35.

³⁷ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 14.

³⁸ Patterson, *Ireland Since 1939*, xiv.

of Truth to keep alive Ireland's sacred flame of freedom as Europe fell dark.³⁹ The message could be scattered, even within the same issue, however. There would sometimes be encouragement for the Irish people, like the February 1941 edition asking vigilant citizen-soldiers to not submit to the "current of events around you" and the cons by "the selfish and unscrupulous men" in both governments. Yet, that same edition had stern words of discouragement towards American President Franklin D. Roosevelt who was pursuing the US-UK Lend-Lease Act, a move that aided Britain.⁴⁰ By wars end, its circulation seems to have declined sharply. Similarly, the Irish-American publications promised imminent mobilization with scant details of precisely *how* this was to occur.⁴¹ Publications by Republican groups in the early 1940s aimed to remain relevant, provide a current events slant while continuing to provide education on political matters since partition.

Yet for all that was promoted publicly, behind the scenes there was substantial organizational breakdown that was never alluded to in the literature of the time. There are few words dirtier among clandestine armed organizations than "informer," but the IRA of this period was heavily infiltrated by them. The IRA did not too often move undetected by the security forces. The security forces on each side of the border seemed to remain one step ahead of the IRA volunteers, often having advanced knowledge of the moves

³⁹ "We Rise Again," *War News*, June 8, 1940, front page (1), DFA/10/1/16, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

⁴⁰ "A Message from the Army" and "To President Roosevelt," *War News*, February 1941, front page (1), 2, DFA/10/1/16, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

⁴¹ Beneath the banner of "History" in *The Irish Republic*, July 1940 edition is mention of a 1939 IRA plan of attack that would be "Ireland's deliverance from England." From *The Irish Republic*, July 1940, front page (1), DFA/10/1/16, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. In the December 1947 *Irish Republican Bulletin*, "Will Ireland Speak?" tells of a "determined effort to win back the unity of Ireland," DFA/10/1/16, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

and maneuvers. An IRA man, Michael Ryan relayed an eye-opening conversation from the early stages of the Border Campaign. In January 1957 he was being transported from Tyrone in to Donegal by former IRA man Frank Morris, who was disillusioned and had no faith in the IRA headquarters:

It didn't do much for our morale to hear Frank, a veteran of the 1940s campaign, recount how he'd been tortured by the RUC and sentenced to a flogging with the cat o'nine tails, every stroke of which was meted out. He then spent eight years in Crumlin Road Jail, Belfast, because of a betrayal by an informer in HQ. I had never heard, or read, anything about floggings, torture, or an HQ informer.⁴²

Morris was also instrumental in the 1950s training of a Republican group from the borderland, Saor Uladh, which will be examined in greater focus in Chapter Three. As for this reference, it appeared to Morris that informers had long been active in IRA circles undermining the organization. While the IRA was sound at controlling the narrative it put out during the early 1940s, Frank Morris' experience speaks to its ability to also conceal some of its darker elements.

1.3 Wolfe Tone commemorations

As Republicans struggled to maintain relevance in the Southern Irish political discourse, they also sought ways to keep an anti-partition message in the public consciousness. They would increasingly look to their Republican forbearers - martyrs from Tone to Robert Emmett and Thomas Davis - as a cultural heritage worth preserving. Perhaps no single figure, including the famed martyrs of 1916, held more resonance with Republicans north and south than Wolfe Tone.

⁴² Michael Ryan, *My Life in the IRA: The Border Campaign* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2018), 98.

Tone's death and burial in the rural townland of his birth created a veneration point for future generations of Irish Republicans. Annually, Irish Republicans travel from across Ireland and even from overseas to participate in ceremonies of Tone's remembrance. Particularly in the 1940s and early 1950s, representatives of the diaspora in Australia and America tied their public support – and financial support⁴³ - to the persistence of radical Republicanism. In measuring the impact of the nationalist movement in the 20th century, one can examine the annual June commemoration as a sign of the political climate at the time. For example, in the turbulent stretches of the 1920s and 1930s the site was weaponized by the opposing sides of the established state forces and those still working towards the idealized "Irish Republic."

The commemoration, with its symbolism and the retelling of the history of Tone and subsequent figures like him allowed for a passing of traditions from old to young. Security analyst Gordon Clubb, in studying a century of the IRA's persistence in Irish life, elevates the value of inter-generational continuity:

Family networks provided the network linkages for a traditionalist Republican movement to exist independently on any substantial support. Through the occupation of space in Republican commemorations, parades and clubs, the IRA could tap into latent community support by utilizing the credibility that appeals to Republican culture bestowed. It also provided an alternative route to continue mobilisation at a grassroots level, placing them in a good position when opportunities arose.⁴⁴

Indeed, even though the IRA was defeated in the early 1920s and forced underground through the 1930s it retained a monopoly on cultural symbolism, namely Easter Rising

⁴³ Typescript of RUC report "LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH," HA/32/1/955A, PRONI, 4. Liam Kelly, a Northern-based Republican had long-established connections with Republican clubs in the United States, particularly along the east coast, that served as fund-raising sources.

⁴⁴ Gordon Clubb, *Social Movement De-Radicalisation and the Decline of Terrorism: The Morphogenesis of the Irish Republican Movement* (New York : Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 56.

commemorations, as well as other subsequent freedom fighters like Tone.⁴⁵ By the end of the 1930s, and the normalizing of relations between the opposing Treaty sides, the commemoration settled in to a familiar pattern of rituals. From an analysis of Garda records, patterns of behavior and divergences in rhetoric and norms indicate wider continuity and change within in the Republican movement from 1945 to 1959.

1.3.1 Republicans regroup: 1944-1951

By the early 1940s, the annual event had evolved alongside the dual states on the island of Ireland; security personnel north and south would gain a pulse check for Republican sentiment. It allowed the Gardaí a window into the secretive organizations of Sinn Féin and the Irish Republican Army, long a legally prohibited organization. The yearly records persist as a comparative of the IRA's size, its scope and substance over a decade and a half. The reports are extensive, naming members and including excerpts of stirring speeches made. These records paint a picture of a movement continuing to wrestle with its aims and motives, its loyalties to its past and the realities of the present. As a proscribed organization, the 1944 and 1945 reports only identify members of the 'Old I.R.A.' and make no reference to active members. This changes in 1946, a year of renewed organizational vigor around the death of Sean McCaughey on hunger strike in Portlaoise Prison.

⁴⁵ Clubb, *Social Movement De-Radicalisation*, 47. He mentions the persistence of the monopoly and the central role of Easter Rising commemorations: "First the IRA had a monopoly on Republican cultural symbols and parades, such as the Easter Rising commemorations, specifically the 50th anniversary in 1966 which had a substantial impact on improving the IRA's strength, even if it was still officially disengaged."

The growing level of detail by the late 1940s indicates the heightened awareness of the IRA by Garda Síochána as well as, perhaps, a public indication of the resuscitation of the movement. The IRA was known to have undergone a reorganization in 1947 with an infusion of new members, a fresh direction politically, and the commitment to planning a new offensive against the Northern Ireland state set for commencement in the early 1950s.⁴⁶

There is a standard composition to the annual commemorations in the 1940s that shifts by the end of the decade. The infusion of Clann na nGael support in 1947 and 1948 is noteworthy for its denouncement of the Southern government policy towards partition under Fianna Fáil. A letter was read out from Clann na nGael which contained “a reference to the ideals for which Tone died and that the only way to break the connection with England was by force of arms in spite of the persecution inflicted by Leinster House and the hirelings from Dublin Castle,” according to the Garda report from June 1948.⁴⁷ There was an effort to integrate Irish organizations from the diaspora sympathetic to the Republican cause. The American lobby had become louder in the shadow of Sean McCaughey’s protest but failed to make a massive impression on IRA policy into the 1950s. The year 1949 served as a watershed moment north and south; for Éire, new legitimacy sprung from a self-declaration while the Government of Ireland Act re-envelops Northern Ireland in the embrace of the United Kingdom. Between the two states would remain the border and the organizations aiming to dismantle it.

⁴⁶ Padraig Ó Baoighill, “Liam Ó Ceallaigh agus Fianna Uladh na gCaogaidí,” *Comhar*, Iml. 70, Uimh 8 (Lúnasa 2010), 23.

⁴⁷ “Typescript of “Wolfe Tone Commemoration Ceremonies at Bodinstown on Sunday 20th June, 1948,” Garda report on 1948 Wolfe Tone Commemoration, JUS/8/900, 1, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

By the resumption of physical force Republican activity in the early 1950s – specifically the arms heist at Gough Barracks in Armagh, June 1954⁴⁸ - the pattern of commemoration was well set. Rain or shine, the Sunday nearest Tone’s 20th June birthday was set out as a special day. The choreographed rituals to follow, venerable events to those that participated, were yearly hallmarks of the Republican calendar. Special trains from Dublin and often Cork and Belfast would arrive midday in Sallins, the town of Tone’s birth. Cars were rare but bikes were often used, and the buses and trains were the most popular form of transit. This sleepy Kildare countryside would spring to life throughout the early afternoon and between 2:30 and 3:30 the assembled mass would begin the procession roughly two miles to Bodinstown cemetery.

Typically, the parade featured a number of steady participants: the National Graves Association were well represented each year along with – what one Garda report called – marchers “under the auspices of the I.R.A. and kindred organizations.”⁴⁹ There were separate columns of men marching with the Old IRA and then those representing the active IRA of the 1940s and 1950s; these numbers fluctuated however. In the 1940s the expansion of the official ranks of the National Association of the Old IRA further drew a distinction between men of the former struggle and those maintaining a presence in IRA decisions and the GHQ of the organization.⁵⁰ Similarly, women were organized by affiliations with *Cuman na mBan* and *Cuman na Cailini*, with organizational support

⁴⁸ Patterson, *Ireland Since 1939*, 133. The spectacular and brazen attack on the lightly secured British military installation in Armagh, targeted by the IRA in mid-1954 as they gathered arms for a campaign.

⁴⁹ Typescript of “Wolfe Tone Commemoration, Bodinstown, Sunday 22/6/47,” Garda report on 1947 Wolfe Tone Commemoration, JUS/8/900, 1, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

⁵⁰ MacDermott, *Clann na Poblachta*, 10. Men who later were founding members of *Clann na Poblachta*, Sean Fitzpatrick, Simon Donnelly and Sean Dowling, are all mentioned in many of the 1940s Wolfe Tone reports.

ranging from two dozen some years to two hundred at its peak.⁵¹ Republicans also made significant efforts to integrate younger males through annual incorporation of the Fianna Eireann Scouts, peaking with participation in the 1959 commemoration with 139 members marching.⁵² Occasionally sporting organizations would take part, as evidenced by participation in 1947 by Thomas Williams GAC, a Gaelic athletic club believed to be from South Armagh.⁵³ Numerous speakers through the late 1940s and 1950s spoke of the need for engagement with the youth who had to maintain a level of fitness, as they would be the next generation to participate directly in the armed military conflict.

More than sport, music was a commonplace at the annual meeting. Over the years surveyed a number of bands traveled in from various corners of the country: the Newry Pipe Band (in 1953), a Cork pipe band (in 1957) and multiple years of Dublin-based bands and the local Newbridge Brass and Reed Band. The 1959 parade consisted of a Colour Party, six Pipers Bands, one Fife and Drum Band.⁵⁴ Why such an emphasis on music? Beyond the cultural significance provided by music since the Gaelic Revival of the late 19th century, music magnified the event to the greater community. It also provided an air of order and continuity among the various elements turning up at Sallins field. It is clear the Republican movement aimed to engage a strong cross-section of Irish

⁵¹ Each Garda report numerically identifies both Cuman na mBan and Cuman na Cailini with significant year-to-year variation. The 1950s are striking, as the 1952 report lists 25 women and 30 girls present, while by 1957 their numbers have spiked to 104 women and 28 girls respectively. From 1952 Typescript of "I.R.A. Commemoration Ceremony for Wolfe Tone at Bodinstown, 22/6/52," Garda report on 1952 Wolfe Tone Commemoration, JUS/8/900, 2, and 1957 Typescript of "I.R.A./Sinn Féin Commemoration Ceremony at Bodinstown, 23/6/57," Garda report on 1957 Wolfe Tone Commemoration, JUS/8/900, 3, both at National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

⁵² Typescript of "I.R.A. Commemoration Ceremony at Bodinstown on 21st, June, 1959," 2, JUS/8/900, NAI.

⁵³ Listed as "48 members of Thos. Williams' Camogie," from Typescript of "Wolfe Tone Commemoration, Bodinstown, Sunday 22/6/47," 2, JUS/8/900, NAI.

⁵⁴ Typescript of "I.R.A. Commemoration Ceremony at Bodinstown on 21st, June, 1959," 1, JUS/8/900, NAI.

society, from both genders and mixing in the young with veterans from the decades of conflict. By fostering this sense of continuity across age groups, Republicans could continue to sync struggles present to past. Additionally, the community feel of the commemoration allowed for casual observers an annual remembrance of Republican concerns, namely the maintenance of partition by both governments in Dublin and Belfast.

It is also evident that music, marching and the general order of the Republican commemoration fostered a militaristic tone which pervaded the march from Sallins to Bodinstown as well as the oration and rituals around the gravesite. Tone wrote that in his youth he favored military marching, so in a way this element truly honored the man and his interests.⁵⁵ The keynote oration was delivered beside the grave of Wolfe Tone during a wreath-laying ceremony. Often there is a chief marshal of the proceedings and an introductory speaker ahead of the main speaker. The main speaker, often a rising star or known name in the Republican movement, was given the platform each year to publicly state Republican policies. As indicated in the table below, a few important realities of the Republican movement emerge.

Foremost, when examining the various speakers across a decade and a half, there is a high turnover in the keynote speaker. This is also reflective of the lack of continuity across the years, but also – by the resumption of the armed conflict – the toll that internment would take on the movement. While some, like Frank Driver of Kildare, are mainstays from the early 1940s through the 1950s, every few years there are new names

⁵⁵ RTE Archives, "In Bodinstown Churchyard There Is A Green Grave, 1972," *RTE*, accessed November 1, 2019, <https://www.rte.ie/archives/2017/0619/883844-wolfe-tone-commemoration>.

added and participants from the year prior missing. Some of the speakers, however, would not be considered highly prominent Republicans; for example, in 1946, less than a year after the ending of the Second World War and in the wake of Sean McCaughey's death on hunger strike, the speaker was Edward Quinn, a man unknown to the Gardaí until only two months prior. He is identified as not being prominent in the Republican movement, only delivering one notable speech in April of that year in Dublin, and making little impact on the movement after his June 1946 graveside oration.

Secondly, and perhaps more crucial than the revolving door of leading figures in the Republican movement, was their places of origin. A frustration to some Northern Republicans – notably Liam Kelly a long-time IRA volunteer from Tyrone – was the muted involvement of individuals from Northern Ireland. Kelly, frustrated with Southern inaction, would form his own breakaway political and paramilitary organizations in 1953 and 1954. Years later he would summarize his logic as Northern Republicans galvanizing their Southern counterparts, in a way that could lead to a war of liberation akin to 1919-1921: “[W]hen young men and women in the Six Counties die in the fight, perhaps the people who drove out the Black and Tans might awake again out of their slumber.” Jimmy Steele, one of Belfast's most prominent Republicans alongside Joe Cahill, is recorded by the Garda as present in the parade and ceremony, but does not one time speak in an official capacity. Had there been a concerted effort to select Southern speakers either to increase their influence or to limit any Northern-based IRA men from gaining too much influence? The evidence would suggest so.

The commemoration, despite yearly busloads and trains from Belfast, is heavily southern Irish in origin. If a keynote speaker is chosen from an area other than Dublin, in

the instance of the 1953 event and speaker Tomás MacCurtain, it is a hat-tip to Cork or another south location. In the decade and a half surveyed, only two Northern Ireland-born speaker were featured, the 1952 oration given by Joe McGuirke and the crucial 1957 Commemoration by Sean Duggan of Antrim (see Figure 1.2).⁵⁶

Considering even introductory speakers - sometime brought in from the Irish diaspora in Britain, Australia and the US – Belfast’s Joseph McGuirke and Antrim’s John Duggan appear to be the only Northern Ireland speakers out of nearly thirty individuals over these crucial fifteen years surveyed. Neither man would have carried significant clout in their respective home areas, certainly more figures of the past than figures of the present. Joe McGurk appears to have been active during the 1920s and 1930s, interned in Northern Ireland for his IRA membership.⁵⁷ Comparatively, the Irish American advocacy group Clann na Gael had a massive presence at the turn of the mid-century mark; Michael McGinn, of Philadelphia, reads off letters from the American support network at a handful of commemorations. It is a curious indication of Sinn Féin priorities to give Irish-America a more direct voice in the most sacred Republican day of the calendar than members from the northern six counties under the foreign domination the IRA so vehemently hoped to destroy. It seems that publicity in the US – and the associated fund-raising – was given priority over cultivating speakers and leadership in Northern Ireland.

⁵⁶ The Garda report actually lists two names for the man, Séan Dougan but also alternately John Duggan. More interestingly, Duggan hails from Dunloy, Antrim, an area where the Border Campaign would make no impact and near a disastrous theatre of operation, the Glens of Antrim. It appears one abortive mission would later land Duggan in Crumlin Road Goal. Typescript of “I.R.A./Sinn Féin Commemoration Ceremony at Bodenstown, 23/6/57,” 1-2, JUS/8/900, NAI.

⁵⁷ John O’Neill, *Belfast Battalion: A history of the Belfast I.R.A., 1922-1969* (Wexford: Litter Press, 2018), 24. There is at least one known arrest of “Joe McGurk” [sic] in 1925 and a sentence of three months’ remand.

Wolfe Tone Commemorations – Bodenstown, Kildare		
Year	Keynote Orator	County Affiliation
1944	Sean MacBride	Dublin
1945	Brian O’Higgins	Clare
1946	Edward Quinn	Dublin
1947	Sean McCool	Donegal
1948	Tomás MacCurtain	Cork
1949	Christopher O’Neill	Dublin
1950	Speaker unclear	
1951	Anthony McGann	Dublin
1952	Joseph McGuirke	Belfast
1953	Tomás MacCurtain	Cork
1954	Gearoid O’Broin	Dublin
1955	No access to reports	
1956	No access to reports	
1957	John Duggan	Antrim
1958	John Joe McGirl	Leitrim
1959	Ruairí Ó Brádaigh	Longford

Figure 1.2: Chart compiled by James Rynne from information contained in typescripts of Garda reports on 1944-1959 Wolfe Tone Commemorations, all from JUS/8/900, 1, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

From a politically-focused lens, it is difficult to describe Sinn Féin as anything but passive in the decade leading to 1954. While the president of Sinn Féin, Margaret Buckley, is mentioned through the late 1940s reports, she makes minimal impact beyond the laying of wreaths. Sinn Féin political awareness is lacking particularly amidst the strong IRA rhetoric espoused by the keynote speakers; for example, in 1947 Sean McCool, the former IRA Chief of Staff turned Clann na Poblachta TD for Donegal, labeled “one part of Ireland [...] a Crown Colony and the other part a British

Dominion.”⁵⁸ A year forward Tomás MacCurtain, later to be a leading IRA figure in the Border Campaign, spoke of the persecution from Leinster House and “deplored the lack of National spirit in the youth.”⁵⁹ Multiple speakers in this period talk of broad frustrations with arrest and internment, political intransigence and even economic morose, but Sinn Féin remains silent as to alternative aims.

One of the early speakers to have lasting political resonance is Sean MacBride, who apparently delivered a speech guarded in tone, according to the reports. MacBride’s speech came in June of 1944, only a few weeks after the Allied landing in France and, politically, a highly-sensitive time in neutral Ireland. Given MacBride’s former role as IRA Chief of Staff, this is unsurprising. Yet, it can be seen as a similar move towards more legitimate political means ala what Éamon de Valera did two decades prior; similarly, by the late 1940s, MacBride had formally broken with his IRA and Sinn Féin past and chosen to adopt a constitutional approach with a new political party.

Clann na Poblachta, which formed in July 1946 but first emerged publicly with strong campaigning in 1947 and 1948, presented a challenge to Fianna Fáil as the rightful owners of the Republican tradition, publicly and politically.⁶⁰ More than just a new alternative to Fianna Fail for disillusioned teachers and farmers, the party aimed to be broadly based with an economic focus and pressing domestic issues.⁶¹ Ultimately, the party’s philosophy was a combination of Irish Republican orthodoxy - with IRA-linked

⁵⁸ Typescript of “Wolfe Tone Commemoration, Bodenstown, Sunday 22/6/47,” 1, JUS/8/900, NAI and MacDermott, *Clann na Poblachta*, 11.

⁵⁹ Typescript of “Wolfe Tone Commemoration Ceremonies at Bodenstown on Sunday 20th June, 1948,” 1, JUS/8/900, NAI.

⁶⁰ MacDermott, *Clann na Poblachta*, vii and Keane, *Seán MacBride*, 73.

⁶¹ Keane, *Seán MacBride*, 73, 75, 78-79.

individuals in its leadership – with social radicalism, in line with Christian Democratic parties on the continent.⁶² When the 1948 election returns came, Clann na Poblachta won 10 Dail seats with 13% of the national vote share.⁶³

The inter-party Coalition government of 1948-1951 generally approached Northern Ireland through anti-partitionist propaganda and rhetoric (John A. Costello stated in a 1948 broadcast to the United States that the government would “bend our energies to the restoration of the territorial integrity of our native land”⁶⁴) and attempts to engender co-operation with the government of Northern Ireland. When the Inter-Party Coalition returned to power in 1954-1957, the task would be made even harder by the events of 1949 that hardened the border.

Yet, while in government, particularly the first inter-party Coalition many supporters of Clann na Poblachta became dissatisfied with a perceived lack of movement on the partition issue. The 1949 party Ard Fheis, as illustration, featured four branches proposed motions endorsing force to retake Northern Ireland, to which MacBride had to swiftly suppress such intentions.⁶⁵ One defection from the party, Peadar Cowan, would attempt to harness this support by early 1950 when he began organizing his own private army, although this only forced a security response by Northern Ireland Prime Minister Lord Brookeborough who mobilized the B-Specials to face-down the threat in November

⁶² F.S.L. Lyons, “The Years of Readjustment 1945-1951,” in *Ireland and the War Years and After, 1939-1951* eds. K.B. Nowlan and T.D. Williams (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1969), 69.

⁶³ Brian Girvin, “Stability, Crisis and Change in Post-War Ireland, 1945-1973” in *The Cambridge History of Ireland, Vol. IV, 1880 to the Present*, ed. Thomas Barlett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 386.

⁶⁴ David McCullagh, *A Makeshift Majority, the First Inter-Party Government, 1948-51* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1998) 109.

⁶⁵ McCullough, *A Makeshift Majority*, 126.

1950.⁶⁶ Of course, stating that the border was under duress only further strengthened the Northern Unionist's hand, and gave the security forces more of a reason to deal heavily-handedly with Nationalist areas.

1.3.2 Commemoration amidst the conflict: 1951-1959

The Garda report on the Wolfe Tone commemoration of 24 June, 1951 indicates a major departure from previous public displays in numerous ways. Members of the IRA are counted and identified (if names were known to the authorities), but the procession was divided into provincial units. This calculation indicated the organization wanted to identify its regional strength, and it could also seemingly have been used as a recruiting tactic. As a formal military would take stock of its gaps in specific ranks, this may have been the reorganizing IRA's attempt to publicly take stock. Yet, for such a public event with a Gardaí presence, perhaps it was also window-dressing in the inverse: the purposeful playing down of regional strength to assuage Gardaí concerns. As indicated by the report, security forces begin paying particular attention to identify the provincial leaders: a leadership contingent features the emerging Charles Murphy, Leinster's and Dublin's dual units include Sean O'Neill and Frank Rogers, Munster's volunteers are identified as the "Cork contingent" led by Tomás MacCurtain and another man Fox Collins.⁶⁷ Of the dozen groups marching, including for the first time a Communist

⁶⁶ McCullough, *A Makeshift Majority*, 126-128. Cowan's public militant remarks were so startling they brought on the first instance of a raised question in the Dail by Eamonn de Valera since the 1948 election. Cowan also gained the attention of security forces in Northern Ireland, as Brookeborough addressed Stormont saying that a man in the South had threatened to come and cut the throats of all loyalists.

⁶⁷ 1951 Typescript of "Wolfe Tone Commemoration Ceremony on 24.6.51," Garda report on 1951 Wolfe Tone Commemoration, JUS/8/900, 2, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Murphy,

contingent⁶⁸ led by Sean Mulready, only two feature unknown leaders: the Ulster and Connaught IRA branches, respectively. For Ulster there are “84 men in military formation led by [an] unknown man,” which is reflective of the low level of intelligence on IRA activity in Northern Ireland as well as the lack of integration of Ulstermen into the IRA fold, or at least the annual commemorations. Unlike most of the previous decade, no differentiation is made between “Old I.R.A.” persons and members of the I.R.A. Does this indicate a shift in security perspective? If at one point men could have been commemorating a struggle long past, it could be inferred that anyone participating by 1951 was viewed suspiciously by the state as still “active” in IRA planning.

By 1952, it is apparent that Garda had increased their level of detail in observations of IRA activity more than previous commemorations. The Irish security forces likely were continuing to receive information pertaining to an impending Republican offensive. Where prior reports were a couple of pages, the report filed 30 June, 1952 to Oifig na Choimisineara contains 9 pages of names and activities, the greatest detail in a decade. One year later, two major players in the movement emerged from the pages of the 1953 report. Conspicuous as their activities were in the pages of the report, the two men barely known to authorities at the time were Ruairí Ó Brádaigh and Seán Mac Stíofáin. On page 2 of the report, O Bradaigh is identified amongst a three man flag-bearing guard of the procession as well as “...and a man named McStephen on behalf

MacCurtain would later be IRA Army Council members with Rogers and O'Neill also emerging as prominent members of the movement.

⁶⁸ The inclusion of a Communist group appears to have been a phenomenon for a couple of years in the early 1950s, then vanishes as the IRA campaign ramps up in 1954-1955. Still, it is a curious inclusion that indicates the far left political components of the movement.

of London Irish Associations.”⁶⁹ One month later Mac Stíofáin was part of a daring operation to procure arms from a British officer training school in Essex. If the Irish security forces and government had any lingering doubts about the seriousness of the IRA threat mounting through the early 1950s, the actions of 1954 and 1955 signaled a resuscitation of the movement and a need for counter-terrorism measures on each side of the Irish border.

An awakening would occur within radical Irish Republicanism in the mid-1950s. Militancy would first lurch forward in two incidents aimed at procuring arms: the 1954 arms raids in Armagh and Tyrone. The first, a highly successful arms raid on Gough Barracks in Armagh happened eight days prior to that year’s Bodenstown commemoration, would be a publicity bump to the re-romanticized cause.⁷⁰ Recruitment became easier⁷¹ and a second raid would occur in October targeting the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers barracks in Omagh, Tyrone. After a fire-fight, no arms were procured and the IRA men fled, all eventually to be captured. In a sign of things to come with the Border Campaign, all of the ‘raiders’ were Southern-born, Eamonn Boyce commanding a group comprised of Dublin and Cork volunteers.⁷² Speaking in West Cork

⁶⁹ Typescript of “I.R.A. Commemoration Ceremony at Bodenstown on the 21st June, 1953,” Garda report on 1953 Wolfe Tone Commemoration, JUS/8/900, 2, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

⁷⁰ The Armagh raid was masterminded by Sean Garlard, an IRA man serving in the British Army. No one was harmed and the IRA procured lorry-load of arms: 340 weapons, pistols, rifles, Sten and Bren guns. From Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 26-27.

⁷¹ Both Barry Flynn and Michael Ryan write of the buzz created from the June 1954 raid, specifically: “Recruitment became a lot easier in the aftermath as young men became enamored by the romanticism of the republican cause.” Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 27.

⁷² Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 27-29. Interestingly, Eamonn Boyce’s prison diary from Crumlin Road gaol would become one of the more compelling sources on the IRA in this period. Northern Ireland would resurrect an antiquated charge against the IRA men “Treason Felony” first used in the 1848 Rebellion; it allowed prosecution against those attempting to stir foreign powers against the United Kingdom.

later that year, Tomás MacCurtain called on all those who “were physically fit” to join the IRA while those who were not were to join Sinn Féin.⁷³ MacCurtain’s seniority in the IRA leadership indicated that the division of the political and militant was a widely held belief. There remained a prevailing effort to split Republicans between the physical force and the political poles of the movement, even at a time that others were fusing the two. At precisely the same time a movement in Mid-Ulster spearheaded by Liam Kelly was attempting to do precisely the opposite (explored more in Chapter Three).

It is also known, through Irish government records, that from 1953 onward Sinn Féin was increasingly under IRA-control. Closely linked through their common aims, but differing methods, the organizations came under practically common control by the onset of the physical force campaign. Garda noted that “change from two separate and independently-controlled organisations commenced at the annual Sinn Féin Ard-Fheis in 1953, when the following resolution was adopted: ‘Sinn Féin assumes equal responsibility with the Army Council, I.R.A., for any military action taken in future.’⁷⁴ From there, the IRA moved to increase its supplies and continue training exercises in anticipation of the military campaign, with the political aspect minimally nurtured. The excitement of arms procurement and a plan to retake Northern Ireland spilled out in orations from the next few years. Speaking in the immediate aftermath of the Gough Barracks raid, Gearoid O’Broin stated “...it was said that the cinemas and dance halls of Ireland were sapping the strength of the young men, but anyone that thought that need

⁷³ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 29.

⁷⁴ Typescript “Review of the I.R.A. Organisation” in “Copies of various confidential memoranda, letters and a report concerning external affairs, finance, the IRA and Agriculture,” P190/708 (7), 8, John A. Costello Papers, University College Dublin Archives, Dublin Ireland.

only enquire at Gough Barracks, Armagh.”⁷⁵ O’Broin indicated that the tide had turned, and presumably this palpable energy remained in the 1955 and 1956 commemorations, the final two events to be held before the formal commencement of Operation Harvest in December, 1956.⁷⁶

If 1957 can be seen as a watershed year for the Republican movement, then the Wolfe Tone commemoration (as the security forces observed “the biggest for many years”⁷⁷) was extremely telling for numerous reasons. The oration given by Duggan, bilingual and “one of the Freedom Fighters from the Glen of Antrim,” explained that force was the only language British tyranny understood. Yet, his speech salutes the many Irishmen already interned, citing Wormwood Scrubbs, Crumlin Road and Mountjoy Prison before also mentioning the men killed in the Brookeborough RUC barracks attack, Sean South and Fergal O’Hanlon: “their names are now part of Irish history.”⁷⁸ There is also some deception in Duggan’s description of the Border Campaign as he thanks the IRA men from Southern counties saying, “the men of the North were carrying out the fight themselves but were glad of the assistance of the men from the Twenty-Six Counties. The fight for freedom would continue until the last vestige of British rule, both visible and invisible would be cleared out of Ireland.”⁷⁹ It is known from internal Gardaí and RUC communications as well as public arrest records that an overwhelming number of IRA men originated from the Republic of Ireland and were not native to Northern

⁷⁵ Typescript of “I.R.A. Commemoration at Bodinstown – June 20, 1954,” Garda report on 1954 Wolfe Tone Commemoration, JUS/8/900, 4, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

⁷⁶ Regretfully, the folder JUS/8/900 containing Garda reports from 1942-1959 does not have any records from either 1955 or 1956. No explanation is provided for why they are missing from the National Archives of Ireland.

⁷⁷ “I.R.A./Sinn Féin Commemoration Ceremony at Bodinstown, 23/6/57,” 2, JUS/8/900, NAI.

⁷⁸ “I.R.A./Sinn Féin Commemoration Ceremony at Bodinstown, 23/6/57,” 4-5, JUS/8/900, NAI.

⁷⁹ “I.R.A./Sinn Féin Commemoration Ceremony at Bodinstown, 23/6/57,” 4, JUS/8/900, NAI.

Ireland. In a March 1957 government report issued to the newly installed Minister of External Affairs, Liam Cosgrave, there is evidence of strong IRA infiltration by the Southern security forces. Marked “secret” at the time, the thorough 10-page document lists numerous organizational elements known to the Garda, from numerical strength to training and armament details.⁸⁰ Sources of funding were well known to have been drawn from America and some long-standing Republican sympathizers on each side of the border.

Ominously for the IRA’s subsequent attempts to remain a clandestine operation, the 1957 report notes that Army Council and Sinn Féin executive meetings held in Dublin “were invariably observed by members of special branch and particulars of those who attended noted,” showing any hope of organizational anonymity had vanished.⁸¹ While 1957 was a high point in the Border Campaign with public support pouring in after the Brookeborough attack in January, the electoral gains in March 1957 would be the last significant political achievement for the movement. Militarily, the IRA’s campaign would be on a nearly uninterrupted decline from 1957 to 1959, when functionally the group was defeated. By then, mass internment and a loss of moral ravaged the organization. As the Garda knew full names and addresses of all members of the IRA Army Council by 1957, it was only a matter of time before the movement was suppressed. As the March 1957 Garda report to the government also indicated, the Sinn Féin executive was “completely dominated by the I.R.A.” – specifically as “several

⁸⁰ Typescript “Review of the I.R.A. Organisation” in P190/708 (7), 1-5, Costello Papers, UCD.

⁸¹ Typescript “Review of the I.R.A. Organisation” in P190/708 (7), 2, Costello Papers, UCD.

persons appear both in the I.R.A. and Sinn Fein at top level where policy is decided and which leaves no doubt but that both are being directed toward a common policy.”⁸²

If the commemorative energy of 1957 indicates a high tide for the Border Campaign, the lack of vigor in 1958 and 1959 indicates the decline of momentum. One of the major contributing factors to the inefficiency of the Border Campaign was the inability to sustain public support, and the bland, unimaginative orations from 1958 and 1959 give a glimpse of tired rhetoric. The removal of identifying signage from the parade – gone were the triumphant “Ulster Contingent” of the IRA – or any other markers, indicate an organizational desire for privacy. Yet, by this point, the movement was deeply infiltrated, North and South, and internment had decapitated the IRA leadership. The crippling effects of the arrest and internment policy of the Irish Republic and the government of Northern Ireland will be explored more in Chapter Two.

1.3.3 Republican commemorations in comparison

In analyzing broader trends across the Wolfe Tone Commemorations, there is a strong divergence between the commemorations occurring 1944 to 1951 and then those from 1951 to 1959. Foremost, there is an allowance early on in politically deviating interests that is not seen from 1955 onward. For example, in the 1940s groups like the fascist-leaning Ailtirí na hAiséirghe were present, emulating some of the Catholic Fascist movements on the continent.⁸³ The Communist Party of Ireland was also represented at

⁸² Typescript “Review of the I.R.A. Organisation” in P190/708 (7), 2, Costello Papers, UCD.

⁸³ Spain under Francisco Franco and Portugal during its “Estado Novo” under António de Oliveira Salazar.

least twice, the 1951 and 1954 commemorations. Without the ability to analyze Garda records from 1955 and 1956, there is a discernible shift in the tone, focus and language for 1954 and 1957-1959. The 1953 Gardaí observances are standard: logging names, identifying car registrations and maintaining the observance of peace. The noticeable shift in 1954 can be epitomized by military language in identifying and classifying IRA men: “About 524 men were in columns of four as I.R.A. Units but it was noticed that personnel from the several contingents were mixed up with other Units and some from the southern Counties were marching with members from Northern Units and vice versa.”⁸⁴ There is a telling awareness of the IRA’s promotion of its regional strength, and there is also a Gardaí awareness of “active members” and leaders, for instance the identification of Jimmy Steele of Belfast leading the Ulster IRA men.⁸⁵ Yet, within a few short years the IRA changed policy amidst the Southern state’s aggressive arrest policy: the 1958 report claims “[n]o member of the IRA participated in the parade.” By that time, as the Border Campaign moved into its twentieth month, the IRA had ditched the signs and removed its key leaders from the Wolfe Tone commemoration. This attempt to avoid Gardaí surveillance proved futile, as consistent arrests and internment continued. The

⁸⁴ “I.R.A. Commemoration at Bodinstown – June 20, 1954,” 1, JUS/8/900, NAI.

⁸⁵ “I.R.A. Commemoration at Bodinstown – June 20, 1954,” 2, JUS/8/900, NAI.

final report surveyed, taken at 21 June 1959, shows the security force's deep level of IRA membership figures (see Figure 3.1).

30/142/59.

from D. M. D.

a) Names of listed members of the I.R.A./who travelled to the Wolfe Tone Commemoration Ceremony at Bodenstown on Sunday, 21st June, 1959.

1. Anthony MAGAN	-	45 Dodder Rd., Rathfarnham.
2. Richard BURKE	-	23 Cliftonville Rd. Glasnevin.
3. Robert RUSSELL	-	67 North Strand Road.
4. Eamon THOMAS	-	30 Goldenbridge Ave., Inchicore.
5. Gerald McGARTHY	-	43 Drimmagh Road.
6. Andrew NATHAN.	-	398 Nutgrove Ave. Rathfarnham.
7. Thomas DOYLE.	-	36 Comeragh Rd., Drimmagh.
8. Seamus GRAHAM	-	18 Bangor Drive, Crumlin.
9. Charles MURPHY.	-	116 Emmet Road, Inchicore.
10. Thomas GILL.	-	12 Iveragh Road, Whitehall.
11. Denis MERRINS.	-	41 Suir Road, Kilmainham.
12. Cathal GOULDING	-	27 St. Enda's Drive, Rathfarnham.
13. Jackie GILLESPIE	-	124 Dunluce Road, Clontarf.
14. Sean O'MAHONEY.	-	49 Larchfield Road, Dundrum.
15. Anthony RUANE.	-	37 Blessington Street.
16. Vincent KANE.	-	2 North Road, Finglas.
17. John KANE.	-	30 Upper Dorset Street.
18. William ROSS.	-	25 Our Lady's Rd., Maryland.
19. Frank ROSS.	-	14 The Rise, Glasnevin.
20. Patrick McLOUGHLIN	-	183 Larkhill Road, Whitehall.
21. Terry MURNANE.	-	197 North Cir. Road.
22. Brian MURPHY.	-	1 Leinster Avenue, North Strand.
23. Bartholomew MURPHY.	-	-do-
24. James GREENE.	-	18 Grove Park, Rathmines.
25. Gearoid O'BROIN.	-	27 Church Ave., Rialto.
26. Patrick CLARKE.	-	41 McAuley Ave., Artane.
27. Sean WARD.	6	5 West Temple Street.
28. John HUTTON.	-	33 Glenbeigh Road, N.C. Road.
29. Patrick BROWNE.	-	158 Larkhill Rd., Whitehall.
30. Niall MOORE.	-	111 Vernon Ave., Clontarf.
31. Owen GOFF.	-	206 Clonliffe Road.
32. Frank McGLADE.	-	60 Mourne Road, Drimmagh.
33. Charles McGLADE.	-	-do-
34. Michael GIBBONS.	-	42 Grange Road, Rathfarnham.
35. Eamon LADRIGAN.	-	19 Merchants Road, East Wall.
36. James FAY.	-	55 Merchants Road, East Wall.
37. Michael DONOVAN.	-	16 Parnell Square.
38. John PARNELL.	-	21 Ardbeg Avenue, Artane.
39. Peter PRINGLE.	-	2 Almeida Tee., Old Kilmainham.
40. James A. KELLY.	-	1210 Ballybough Flats.
41. Patrick T. COSGROVE	-	21 Dufferin Avenue, S.C. Road.
42. Joseph McGRANE.	-	95 John McCormack Ave., W'town.
43. Hugh HUTCHINSON.	-	22 Walkinstown Green.
44. Edward WHELAN.	-	325 Landen Road, Ballyfermot.
45. Patrick HILL.	-	58 Keeper Road, Crumlin.
46. Seamus NOLAN.	-	Rathcoole.
47. Joseph NOLAN.	-	Alcadore Lodge, Glenageary.
48. Desmond WEBSTER.	-	50 Curlew Road, Drimmagh.
49. Paul GLEESON.	-	46 Galtymore Road, Drimmagh.
50. Frank NOLAN.	-	34 Hardbeck Ave., Walkinstown.
51. Denis CASEY.	-	106 Philipsburgh Avenue.
52. Charles CASEY.	-	44 Parnell Street.
53. Sylvester FITZSIMONS	-	"Ardnagreena", Farmhill Rd. Dun- drum.
54. Christopher KEOGH.	-	60 Iverah Gardens, Crumlin.
55. Walter LYNCH.	-	4 Cooleen Avenue, Whitehall.
56. Dominick O'SHEA.	-	21 Whitehall Rd., Terenure.
57. James F. DOYLE.	-	38 Comeragh Road, Drimmagh.
58. Sean SMITH.	-	5 Benburb Street.
59. Peter O'BRIEN.	-	34 Parkgate Street.

Figure 1.3: Typescript of "I.R.A. Commemoration Ceremony at Bodenstown on 21st, June, 1959," Garda report on 1959 Wolfe Tone Commemoration, JUS/8/900, 4, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

The reports, always compiled by the Garda Soichana of Carlow-Kildare based in Naas and sent to the Commissioner's Office in Dublin, contain a discernible tonal shift as they progress. The earlier reports (1945-1952) are shorter, more dismissive and portray the participants as ultimately unthreatening. Multiple reports reference the "mild tone," the "orderly and peaceful" nature of the gathering which features "no untoward incident" nor "breach of the peace;" reports through the last commemoration of the 1950s indicate that things were "conducted and controlled; there was no cause for complaint."⁸⁶ While the Gardaí were looking for provocative moments, the Republican establishment carefully toed the line between remaining principled and proclaiming inflammatory words that could spur further police actions.

The Wolfe Tone commemorations also provide an annual snapshot of mass support for the Republican movement. The most significant illustration of Irish public support for Republicanism occurred in 1957 in the wake of IRA men being killed in the Brookeborough RUC Barracks raid. This is reflected in confidential reports made by the Garda Detective Branch to the Department of Justice in June of 1957 following the annual Wolfe Tone commemorations. The beginning of the report states that "total parade of approximately 2,000 persons was the biggest for many years."⁸⁷ A statistical analysis of the previous decade confirms that this is well above the Gardaí-stated figures (see Figure 1.4).

⁸⁶ All quotes from Garda report on 1944, 1945, 1947, 1957, and 1959 Wolfe Tone Commemoration, JUS/8/900, NAI.

⁸⁷ Typescript of "I.R.A./Sinn Féin Commemoration Ceremony at Bodenstown, 23/6/57," 2, JUS/8/900, NAI.

Wolfe Tone Commemorations – Bodenstown, Kildare			
Year	Participants	Public	Total
1944	208	200	408
1945	76	150	226
1946	c. 350	c. 300	650
1947	449	300	749
1948	800	c. 100	900
1949	600	c. 180	780
1950	750	est. 100	850
1951	840	est. 100	940
1952	758	300	1,058
1953	607	c. 100	707
1954	650	c. 200	850
1955	No access to reports		
1956	No access to reports		
1957	1744	256	2,000
1958	2000	est. 200	2,200
1959	1860	c. 200	2,000

Figure 1.4: Chart compiled by James Rynne from information contained in typescripts of Garda reports on 1944-1959 Wolfe Tone Commemorations, all from JUS/8/900, 1, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

Specifically, the IRA strength is cited as 648 persons, with 168 from Leinster, 240 from Munster and another 240 from Ulster.⁸⁸ There is strong evidence, however, that a number of the men marching under the banner of Ulster were native to Leinster or Munster. These figures are also refuted by the secret government memorandum “Review of the I.R.A. Organisation” dated to 19 March, 1957. The IRA’s early 1957 strength is listed at 943 members, the largest figure since September 1945.⁸⁹ Tellingly, the

⁸⁸ Typescript of “I.R.A./Sinn Féin Commemoration Ceremony at Bodenstown, 23/6/57,” 2, JUS/8/900, NAI.

⁸⁹ Typescript “Review of the I.R.A. Organisation” in P190/708 (7), 1, Costello Papers, UCD.

Republic's security apparatus knows that nearly all of the IRA volunteers are located in the South with an extensive being Dublin-based, almost 40%, with another 10% from Cork. With such a significant Southern-based membership, there were logistical issues with a sustained campaign in which cross-border attacks meant lengthy periods in foreign terrain; furthermore, movements could be more easily tracked over time as border 'hot spots' emerged from 1956 to 1958. The local population of the borderland was also less likely to embrace volunteers from Cork and Wexford, arriving for sporadic attacks and then leaving across the border. The creation of "liberation zones" across the Irish borderland could hardly be helped by a transient and non-Northern-based fighting force of IRA men.

The government report also claims roughly 350 active IRA personnel in May 1954, with incremental increases over the next year and a half: 500 members by the end of 1954, over 650 by the end of 1955 and 800 by the end of 1956. The Garda believed the increase in numbers would continue "as the militant activities in the Six Counties will attract youths and the emergence of Sinn Féin as an active political party will help to secure members for the I.R.A." For example, the United Irishman had rebranded appeals from "Join the IRA" to "Join the Republican Movement," an attempt to evade prosecution under the state's Offences Against the State Act, 1939 which had been reinstated post-Border Campaign.

All of the late 1950s Garda reports were also quick to conclude that even with the attendance bump, "the whole proceedings were well conducted and controlled."⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Typescript of "I.R.A./Sinn Féin Commemoration Ceremony at Bodenstown, 23/6/57," 2, JUS/8/900, NAI.

Nothing “untoward happening” was a staple of previous reports. Surely this was partly meant to assuage worry among higher ups and was also indicative of the customary nature of the commemoration. Where Wolfe Tone was fiery, the wick on the candle of commemoration has grown short, the flame dim. Still there is traceable developments in the Republican movement from these events, rebirth in the 1950s and then a sudden decline.

1.4 Conclusion: Republicanism revived and rebuked

From the organizational low-point of 1945-1946, the IRA would rebuild, reorganize and make new plans for a 1950s offensive. The IRA and Sinn Féin maintained a strong organizational presence at the annual Wolfe Tone commemorations. Yet, the Irish security apparatus kept intelligence on the organization and collected information that would lead to its undoing once the Border Campaign commenced. The seeds of the eventual IRA arrests and mass interment were sown through public events like the annual June ceremonies at Bodenstown, Kildare. In an attempt to venerate the past, the present IRA made miscalculations that alerted the authorities to key figures, institutional strength and political motives.

After years of surveillance on the Wolfe Tone commemorations, charting IRA and Sinn Féin developments, the Gardai again needed to assess and address the threat of an active Republican physical force movement. Chief Superintendent Patrick Carroll would write the March 1957 report to Liam Cosgrave that addressed the IRA threat and gave an indication of the Southern state’s planned response. Carroll was a long-standing member of the security forces and had a long and honest police record of attempting to

maintain order in the Irish state protecting all its citizens regardless of background or political beliefs.⁹¹ In the final description of the IRA, its military campaign and the Southern response to curtail its attacks on the Northern Irish state, Carroll lent fascinating insight:

The current policy of the I.R.A. [in early 1957] is to continue their militant attacks in the Six Counties and recent instructions have been issued to all units to be ready to move at the shortest notice from I.R.A. Headquarters. Practically all arms are located in the Six Counties. The organization has also given consideration to the question of extending its activities to England. Repeated statements have been made by I.R.A. and Sinn Fein leaders that they will not interfere or take any retaliatory action against the State forces or institutions here, and written instructions on these lines have been issued to all their units.⁹²

With weapons dumps in the North, it was then the RUC's matter to confine and eliminate the movement; the manner in which they did will be expanded upon in Chapter Two. Additionally, the desire by the IRA to not engage the Southern forces showed an unwillingness to provoke the Southern authorities into more severe actions. Carroll acknowledges the crippling effect of internment on the movement, but adds that soon enough "these leaders will again be in circulation," and advises more strict policy against them.⁹³ This would ultimately come when Fianna Fáil re-took the government and successive internment measures by de Valera and Sean Lemass tightened control in 1960 and 1961, culminating with the reinstatement of military tribunals. Lastly, the intelligence indicating an extension of activities to England shows a true desperation setting in to the

⁹¹ Carroll had even, in 1948, warned the former IRA Chief of Staff, Minister Seán MacBride, that the special branch had received information of a plot to assassinate him. From Pauric J. Dempsey, "Carroll, Patrick Joseph," *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, James McGuire, James Quinn, eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), Cambridge Core.

⁹² Typescript "Review of the I.R.A. Organisation" in P190/708 (7), 9, Costello Papers, UCD.

⁹³ Typescript "Review of the I.R.A. Organisation" in P190/708 (7), 10, Costello Papers, UCD.

IRA only one year into its campaign, as Operation Harvest was only intended to impact Northern Ireland.

The Border Campaign featured over 1,000 coordinated attacks by members of Irish Republican paramilitary groups intent on facilitating the implosion of the Northern Ireland state and bring about its demise. Launched with lofty hopes in 1956, after almost a decade of fresh planning, it failed in less than two years. It claimed the lives of dozens, its own members and those it declared war on, and it disrupted the lives of communities along the border in ways that lasted into the Civil Rights era of the late 1960s. By 1962, the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland was more secure than ever before. Republicanism had been soundly rebuked, and the IRA ceasefire in February of that year indicated nearly as much.

Ultimately, the Border Campaign was less a loss war by the IRA and more a victory in defense for the security forces of Northern Ireland. How had the police and support personnel so roundly rebuked the efforts of physical force republicans? In exploring the force, their style and substance, one gets a greater understanding of the state of Unionism in the 1950s as well as the Northern Ireland state identity. The Northern Irish political stance and security response to the Irish Republican Army and other Republican groups will be the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO, THE NORTHERN STATE

2.0: The security forces defend the border

It would take the security forces of Northern Ireland less than one hundred hours to assess the threat posed to the state in December 1956. The launch of Operation Harvest by the IRA in what would become commonly known as its Border Campaign, was never more effective than in its earliest days. The IRA sent 150 raiders across the Irish border with multiple attacks beginning in the late evening of Wednesday, 12 December. The IRA leadership was stationed across the border in Monaghan as mobile units were deployed against targets in Fermanagh, Londonderry, Tyrone and Armagh with significant success.¹ The element of surprise was on the side of the IRA, who had not been truly active in Northern Ireland since isolated instances fifteen years previously, at the time of the Second World War.² This would be a far different level of commitment from the IRA which had the strategic aim of forcing an end to Ireland's partition.

The outcomes of the campaign were clear: the IRA was intent on destabilizing Northern Ireland by targeting state and military objectives. However, the IRA leadership was adamant that the security forces were absolutely not to be attacked, unless it was an act of self-defense, and instead the IRA were to engage the British military. A chief architect of the campaign, Charlie Murphy, would later state that targets were ruled out

¹ Michael Ryan, *My Life in The IRA, The Border Campaign* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2018), 83.

² Notably, an IRA attack on the RUC in Belfast resulted in the last Republican to be hanged in a Northern Irish jail, the Tom Williams execution of 1942. Henry Patterson, *Ireland Since 1939, The Persistence of Conflict* (Dublin: Penguin, 2006), 33-34.

just as carefully as they were selected, as the IRA was hyper-sensitive to touching off a Unionist backlash:

In no way did we want Operation Harvest to be perceived as a campaign against the Unionist community in the Six Counties, that is why we were forbidden to attack police officers. We wanted to draw the British Army from their bases, but they, typically, were shrewd and in a typical ploy refused to present themselves which posed a problem, initially, for the campaign.³

While not originally intended for targeting, the security forces of Northern Ireland were rapid in their response. Damage was minimal – a far cry from the destabilizing of essential services that the IRA had aimed for – and amounted more to a shock set of attacks than any clearly coordinated initial aim of an armed conflict. The strategic aim was to gain London’s attention and demonstrate the futility in maintaining a colonial paradigm with Ireland, namely by “increase[ing] the perceived price of ‘occupation,’ so that the government” would eventually abandon Northern Ireland’s link to Great Britain.⁴ Foremost, the RUC responded to the border area where attacks were conducted, where sympathizers could hide and billet IRA men, and where the Southern-based raiders would perhaps try to cross back in to the Republic of Ireland for immunity. The B-Specials were also quickly mobilized (see Figure 2.1) by the end of the year; they had been an “at ready” force for years as occasional communal disturbances along the borderland – especially when Republican events displayed the Irish tricolor – provided an opportunity to reinforce the RUC with the supplemental Special Constabulary.

³ Barry Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly: The IRA Border Campaign 1956-1962* (Cork: The Collins Press, 2009), 67. The fact that Brookeborough RUC barracks were targeted by January 1957, three weeks in to the campaign, shows how swiftly operational tactics shifted.

⁴ Peter Neumann, “The Rise of the Paramilitaries,” in *Combatting Terrorism in Northern Ireland*, ed. James Dingley (New York: Routledge, 2009), 37.



Figure 2.1: Photograph “His Grace the Duke of Abercorn inspecting the Parade” from “North Tyrone Specials Parade” in *The Tyrone Constitution*, July 30, 1954, 3, The Newspaper Library of the Belfast Central Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

The geographic isolation of the IRA along the border, even in the earliest days, was not by accident. Accounts from IRA members active in the Border Campaign show the raids into Northern Ireland were minimally penetrating. Michael Ryan, active from 1956 through the ceasefire in 1962, relayed how he was one of the few in an Antrim-based unit operating 50 miles from the nearest border crossing. This mobile unit was intended to target a British Army barracks in Ballymena and an RAF installation in Torr Head, yet both targets would be abandoned reflecting the campaign’s border-centric aims from the start.⁵ In Belfast, there was not only an absence of attacks but even a lack of

⁵ Ryan, *My Life in the IRA*, 73.

general awareness. Joe Cahill, a leading Belfast Republican at the time, was made aware of the attacks when he was taken in by the RUC the morning after.⁶ This reality, that the borderland would be a focal point for Republicans, had been central to the militarization of the border from its inception. The RUC, supported by the Special Constabulary, was designed to withstand defending against Southern incursion, and had stayed suspiciously vigilant for over three decades.

The public reaction was mild on each side of the border, caught more off-guard by the news than incensed by any of the incidents. The “mildly stunned populace” would awake to the reports of what had been “the largest concerted attack on the fabric of the state” in its 30 years of existing.⁷ Naturally the Unionist press delivered condemnation, yet the Nationalist press was not immediately prepared for a cohesive reaction. When three further attacks were launched two nights later, the element of surprise had been lost. Two Fermanagh raids on RUC barracks at Lisnaskea and Roslea, twelve miles apart, were unspectacular and met with resistance; a third attack on Derrlin RUC barracks, a mere five miles over the border from Cavan was anticipated by the RUC and repelled violently.⁸ The Northern Ireland Prime Minister, Basil Brooke, paid a visit to the stations within a few days pledging support for any desired defensive improvements in an apparent boost to morale.⁹ Easily within four days, less than one hundred hours, the security apparatus had sprung forward ready to meet the IRA challenge. Once the initial

⁶ Ryan, *My Life in the IRA*, 75.

⁷ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 75.

⁸ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 82-83. It seems that RUC barracks that had initially been attacked had communicated with Derrylin that evening, pre-empting the third attack. In the ensuing firefight, Noel Kavanagh of the IRA would be injured, the first casualty for the Republican side in the campaign.

⁹ Sam Logan, *The Life of Sir Basil Brooke, Bart., the first Viscount Brookeborough* (Kibworth, Leicestershire: The Book Guild Ltd., 2018), 147.

shock of the IRA attacks on security installations and strategic targets subsided, the campaign lacked that initial edge and was forever dulled.

While the Irish government, led by John Costello, deliberated in the immediate aftermath of hostilities, raids by the Irish army in Monaghan on 16 December did net over a dozen IRA men in a safe-house.¹⁰ The Southern government's response would draw criticism in the early years of the campaign as Costello's government was viewed as too lax. Still, in a scathing response to his government's perceived lack of action, Costello wrote a letter to a prominent critic the weekend the IRA first struck condemning, in part, the IRA's disregard for constitutional power and the mandates of state and church limiting unauthorized force.¹¹ The response from the Northern Ireland government was swift in condemnation and action; as the South debated reinstating Second World War-era anti-IRA legislation, Stormont quickly passed additional Special Powers legislation allowing for "arrest without warrant, detention and internment without trial."¹² This Unionist hegemony was a well-established norm in the province and members of the political establishment quickly used the Unionist press to decry the IRA and to call for its

¹⁰ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 85. It appears the 'safe house' was owned by a known IRA sympathizer making it an easy target for the security forces of the Irish Republic.

¹¹ Correspondence from John A. Costello "—to Deputy J. McQuillan, Ballyforan, Ballinasloe, county Galway concerning a telegram received from McQuillan urging the government to stop using the Irish Army and Gardaí as 'instruments of British Policy in helping to maintain partition,'" P190/837(311), 1, John A. Costello Papers, University College Dublin Archives, Dublin Ireland. In response to criticism by Deputy Jack McQuillan (later to form the National Progressive Democrats with Noël Browne), Costello wrote on December 18, 1956 that "[t]he organization which is responsible for the unlawful use of armed force has arrogated to itself the determination of policy as to the means that should be adopted to bring Partition to an end and has defied the authority of the Dail to withhold its assent to engagement in war." He elaborated that the IRA's actions "contravene the constitutional provision which vests in the Oireachtas alone the right to raise and maintain armed forces and are contrary not only to the principles of democracy, but to the moral law, as enunciated by the Catholic Hierarchy in their statement of the 18th January, 1956."

¹² Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 84. The Costello-led government considered whether to reinstate the Offense Against the State Act of 1939 for much of the early Border Campaign, even though it technically had still officially been on the book the previous decade and a half. From Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 83-84.

suppression by the Southern government. Simultaneously, the security apparatus came alive in ways that had long been anticipated.

By the time the Border Campaign formally sputtered to a conclusion in 1962, the RUC and the Northern Irish security forces had soundly defeated the IRA. While efforts by the government and security apparatus in the Republic of Ireland was also crippling, it was the unwavering defense of the Irish border that made the task of ending partition by physical force unobtainable. Always a lofty objective, even the threat of border violence propelling forward the politics of anti-partition never materialized in the 1950s campaign. The Northern Ireland security forces viewed the fight in existential terms and, in numerous ways, had been preparing for its inevitability since the foundation of the state. Standing formidably against the Republican threat, Northern Ireland by the end of the 1950s had a more secure political Unionist hegemony than at any point previously in the twentieth-century.

2.1 Ulster's Exceptionalism, 1800-1919

Contemporary commemoration in Northern Ireland celebrates events from the 17th and 18th centuries as part of the historical evolution of the modern state. Ian McBride has identified that the core of Ulster Protestant culture “lies a cycle of myths concerning the seventeenth-century struggle between Protestant and Catholic, settler and native, for supremacy in Ireland”¹³ From Northern Ireland's establishment after World War I, there was a conscious effort to promote an established, separate ‘northern’ history and culture,

¹³ Ian McBride, *The Siege of Derry in Ulster Protestant Mythology* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 9.

centered on a reconstituted Ulster exception from the rest of the island. However, the Act of Union between Great Britain and Ireland, in 1801, serves as the most appropriate starting point for assessing the unique case of Ulster. The 19th century is a period in which the hardening of communal norms and expectations occurred over time, and when many of the institutional divisions within the state today began to form. In Northern Ireland, divisions between Presbyterians – Dissenters from the established church – and Anglicans began to be mended as they created a political solidarity through the 19th century. Catholic Emancipation, spearheaded by Daniel O’Connell, in the 1820s redefined the political and social landscape in Ireland, albeit gradually, and created a greater sense of communal solidarity among different Protestant Irish groups in Ulster.¹⁴ Divisions persisted through the famine and turbulence of the late 19th century with land agitation and the emergence of the Irish Parliamentary Party and the brilliance of Parnell.¹⁵ In his rich history of the Irish border, Peter Leary traces the rise of Irish nationalism as initially gaining a democratic base among the Protestants of Ulster, particularly after the time of the famine.¹⁶ However, as rumblings for Irish self-rule, eventually Home Rule, grew amidst the Catholic population, the Protestant population moved generally to the Unionist cause. The Conservative Party continued to look out for Irish Unionist interests – at least those of the Ascendancy – as they saw a shrinking share of the population and a

¹⁴ Patrick M. Geoghegan, *King Dan, The Rise of Daniel O’Connell 1775-1829* (Dublin: Gill Books, 2010), 266-270, 323. O’Connell’s efforts through the 1813, 1821 and 1825 bills that culminated with the Catholic Relief Act in March 1829, even amidst challenges from within the Catholic Association.

¹⁵ Frank Callanan “Parnell, Charles Stewart,” *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, James McGuire, James Quinn, eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), Cambridge Core. Callanan writes extensively about the multiple layers of Parnell, particularly that after “Parnell’s death, his posthumous myth embarked on its strange odyssey.” Still, his immense statue in Irish Nationalist politics cannot be overstated.

¹⁶ Peter Leary, *Unapproved Routes, Histories of the Irish border, 1922-1972* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 4.

weakening hold on the institutions of power. The 20th century dawned amidst intercommunal tensions manifested in mirror organizations: the Orange Order and the “Peep O’Day Boys” were rivalled by the Ancient Order of Hibernians and localized agrarian Catholic groups.¹⁷ As communal allegiances to churches, orders and political ideologies ran along a clearly defined line, political mobilization around significant causes – like the proposal of Home Rule legislation - occurred rapidly. When the Third Home Rule bill was set to pass, Unionism in Ireland organized politically and militarily around the north-east corner of the island. The Ulster Unionist Council (founded in 1905) and the Ulster Volunteers (founded in 1912) ensured that Unionism would have a loud voice heard at Westminster.¹⁸

Politically, Unionists were advocating for Ulster’s exclusion 1912-1914 from a self-governing Ireland centered on a Dublin parliament. When Home Rule was delayed by the First World War, and a rebellion in Dublin in 1916 pushed political developments rapidly ahead, the debate re-emerged post-war with Ulster Unionists believing their society and culture was under threat. While certainly exaggerated, Ulster Unionism succeeded in galvanizing support and was fervently sincere managing to unite a diverse people behind a shared ideology. By the First World War, it was undeniable that Unionism had cut across class and regionalism to create a mass movement “founded in a passionate sincerity, a genuine belief that a culture and future was in deadly peril.”¹⁹ This

¹⁷ Leary, *Unapproved Routes*, 4.

¹⁸ Kimberly Cowell-Meyers, Paul Arthur, “Ulster Unionist Party,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*. (Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc, 2019). The modern day Ulster Unionist Party, the leading political party in Northern Ireland for nearly its entire history, traces its origins to the Ulster Unionist Council and the militant Ulster Volunteers.

¹⁹ Michael Foy, “Ulster Unionist Propaganda against Home Rule 1912-14,” *History Ireland* 4, no. 1 (1996), accessed March 1, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/27724315,

belief in a unified Unionist fate would guide a shared vision of Ulster's past and Northern Ireland's future.

2.2 Northern Ireland state formation

In what manner was the state of Northern Ireland created and secured during a time of conflict on the island of Ireland? Armed militants using guerrilla warfare tactics targeted the security forces of the state at the time that Northern Ireland was created. This seems to have had a profound effect on the ethos of the Northern Ireland police and reserves through the century of Northern Ireland's existence.

As the state was formed on a Unionist-Protestant ethos, the security force was inherently at odds with a segment of its own community – the Irish Catholic population. The RUC was born out of the division of the island, and the creation of two states in the course of political upheaval. The Government of Ireland Act of 1920 designated the authority for a devolved Northern political and security presence in Belfast and the surrounding area. In protecting against threats of the IRA in the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921), extending in to 1922-1923 with the Irish Civil War, contained mostly to the Southern state, the RUC made no attempt to hide a suspicion of the Northern Catholic community. This mutual distrust would linger through the first five decades of the state until the disaster of the Troubles (1968-1998) and a plunge into 30 more years of internal strife.

2.2.1 A state of conflict: 1919-1925

The modern state of Northern Ireland was born into conflict, or perhaps it was born from conflict: unrest before and after the First World War and dissatisfaction from Home Rule left a void for a new political reality to fill. The immediate effect was a solution that angered Irish people of a separatist nationalist persuasion, and it was a compromise that only partially satisfied Irish people of a unionist mindset. Irish Unionists would find a welcoming home in the new state: whether native, like James Craig and his inaugural ministerial cabinet (three of the five in fact hailed from within 10 miles of Belfast City Hall), or non-Ulstermen like the Dublin-born Edward Carson.²⁰ It was in Ulster they would make their stand. Faced with Home Rule, they decried Rome Rule; they signed their protest in blood and then spilled blood on continental battlefields,²¹ notably the Somme in 1916. Ultimately - and ironically given the Home Rule objections - Loyalism allowed for the establishment of a domestic parliament first in Belfast from 1921 so as to avoid inclusion in an all-island government.²² Their interests would be respected by their allies in London, ensured by themselves in Belfast City Hall, and safeguarded by their frontier-protectors along the newly devised Irish border.

²⁰ Craig's 1921 Cabinet featured the following ministers, native to Belfast, Bangor, Comber, Fermanagh and England: Prime Minister James Craig, East Belfast; Minister of Finance Hugh Pollock, Bangor; Minister of Home Affairs Richard Dawson-Bates, East Belfast; Minister of Education Charles Vane-Tempest-Stewart (Lord Londonderry), England; Minister of Agriculture Edward Archdale, Rossfad, Fermanagh; Minister of Labour John Millar Andrews, Comber. "Biographies of Members of the Northern Ireland House of Commons" Northern Ireland House of Commons Election Results, accessed November 10, 2019, <http://www.election.demon.co.uk/stormont/biographies.html>.

²¹ It must also be noted that thousands of Irish of the Nationalist political persuasion also fought in the First World War, especially after John Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party encouraged enlistment, which eventually reached over 200,000 Irish. From Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (New York: Penguin, 1989), 471

²² The seat of governmental authority would shift in 1932 to the regal Stormont parliamentary building which would open in the heart of Unionist East Belfast.

The partition of Ireland to protect the will of Ulster was all but decided by 1919: The Paris Peace Conference affirmed the rights of independent nations like Luxemburg as the first sitting of the Southern state's parliament, Dáil Éireann, met in Dublin. There was no Unionist representation, and the future state of Northern Ireland concerned itself with the task of post-war rebuilding. Initial efforts were centered on the economic behemoth of Belfast, with its linen industry, ship-building and docks, during the early economic development of the state.²³ When it was time to reward citizens' loyalty, security was maintained at the expense of the feared 'disloyal,' Northern Irish Nationalists, many of whom were Roman Catholic, who identified significantly more with the government on the other side of the newly mandated border.

The Irish border was created as an artificial barrier between two competing political ideologies. It was designed to be a check on an encroaching, dangerous ideology: Irish separatist nationalism - in the form of the major Irish Republican party Sinn Féin - had already won a significant electoral mandate from the majority of the island in December of 1919. Yet Unionists could claim a majority of the 6 north-eastern counties of Ulster. The 1911 Census, just on the eve of the passing of the third Home Rule bill, showed Ulster to have a 44% Catholic provincial population, problematic for Unionism to claim a clear mandate.²⁴ Post-war, as the ruling coalition gradually moved from Liberal to Unionist, the Conservative interest would be in line with the cause of leading Ulster Unionists. They would mobilize support for the Northern Ireland

²³ Bardon brilliantly points out that sovereign Luxemburg was smaller than County Antrim; that post-war boom in Ulster was fueled by "the need to replace what had been destroyed, by pent-up consumer demand, and by desperate food shortages in central and eastern Europe. Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 462-464.

²⁴ Peter Leary, *Unapproved Routes. Histories of the Irish border, 1922-1972* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7.

government based in Belfast, but extending out to the Irish borderland, much of which was a patchwork of Catholic Nationalist areas and Protestant Unionist enclaves, with significant Catholic populations in Derry City, and counties Fermanagh and Tyrone. The Southern-based IRA forces made clear that any effort to withhold any portion of Ireland from independence would not be tolerated; the stage was set in 1919 for conflict.

Republicans moved first, requiring the Unionist build-up to respond once the gun was placed back in Irish politics. The IRA commenced its armed campaign in 1919 behind general public support throughout Catholic Ireland. Henry Patterson has been critical of the overly simplistic design of the IRA campaign in Ulster, where the assumption was that British rule was the only obstacle to Irish self-determination; yet, when sectarian attacks flared “beginning with the mass expulsion of Catholics from the shipyards and engineering plants in Belfast in July 1920” there would be over 450 deaths, 5,000 evictions and 7,500 workplace expulsions in the following two years.²⁵ The unrest disproportionately affected Catholics as the dominant heavy industries had long been Protestant-controlled and centered in greater Belfast, which also had the island’s smallest Catholic population.

From the Belfast garrison outward, the Unionists quickly worked to create, defend and legitimize Unionist territorial claim. The frontier was marked by new outposts in South Armagh, Tyrone, Fermanagh, and west county Londonderry. Included for economic sustainability, the Catholic majority counties of Fermanagh and Tyrone would be contentious points but deemed necessary for maintenance of the state. In his survey of

²⁵ Henry Patterson, *Ireland Since 1939, The Persistence of Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3.

Tyrone from the Home Rule crisis through the Irish Civil War, Fergal McCluskey synthesizes that Tyrone Unionists followed the lead from Belfast and elite British circles not only because of shared philosophical assumptions but also out of a basic self-interest. They collectively built and endorsed a “paramilitary police force, a gerrymandered electoral system, preferential economic treatment in government and private employment [which] explained the devotion of Tyrone unionists to the Belfast regime.”²⁶ Aware of their position on the frontier of the state and of Northern Unionism, the borderland Protestant population offered its service in the defense of the state in return for patronage and favor. Forged in the early 1920s, this Unionist understanding would persist for decades.

2.2.2 The borderland and security: 1920-1925

Policy on the borderland would emanate from Belfast and London in the early 1920s with the intent to safeguard the security of Northern Ireland. Speaking at Westminster in February 1922 as the United Kingdom Secretary of State for the Colonies, Winston Churchill famously conjured up “the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone emerging once again” after war had subsided.²⁷ This language was stirring and pointed, as the two rural counties had a stark congregational divide, as later illustrated in the sharpening of support for either Orangeism or Hibernianism in the 1920s and 1930s; as traditional outlets for each community, indeed this era showed everything

²⁶ Fergal McCluskey, *Tyrone, The Irish Revolution, 1912-23* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014), 129.

²⁷ Liam de Paor, *Divided Ulster* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), 101.

changes although nothing changes.²⁸ Yet, another line from Churchill's speech to the House of Commons would more aptly signal the impending cultural clash along the borderland of the two newly born states. While Churchill called the Ulster Unionist position "morally and materially" strong, if it had a weak point it was along its newly created borderland:

Certain of these districts in Fermanagh and Tyrone, even in the county boundary, may be districts in which—I am not pre-judging—the majority of the inhabitants will prefer to join the Irish Free State. If that be true, and to the extent to which that is true, one feels that the tremendous arguments which protect the freedom of Protestant Ulster have, in those districts, lost their application and have, possibly, an opposite application."²⁹

Churchill further anticipated the virtue of political compromise between the two governments and, ultimately, the Boundary Commission. Churchill, however, had already failed to see a central reality of the new Northern Ireland state: the border would not budge and the security forces sworn to uphold it would remain in place long after the state's establishment to ensure the 'opposite application' would be stifled before the steeple bell was ever rung.

If the borderland would become the 'frontier,' what did this signal for the entire security apparatus and how did it affect their function? Churchill would be determined to back the Northern Irish security forces, even during efforts to promote conversations between James Craig and the IRA man turned Free Stater, Michael Collins, in 1922. The Northern security concerns were well founded, as one month after Churchill's speech the

²⁸ McCluskey, *Tyrone*, 129-130.

²⁹ Winston Churchill, "Irish Free State (Agreement) Bill," House of Commons Debate, February 16, 1922, Vol 150 cc1261-372, Parliament. UK, accessed January 20, 2020, January 20, 2020. UK Parliament.

IRA would make incursions into the heart of Mid-Ulster on 19 March there was an arms raid on Pomeroy RUC barracks in east Tyrone, and on 20 March Maghera RUC barracks in south Derry were similarly raided.³⁰ The RUC would be different than the RIC as targeted in the Irish War of Independence in that they would be empowered through “the policy of police primacy”³¹ in countering attacks, and a far more aggressive reactionary element persisted in the force in the early years. Shortly after, Collins would approve an attack on security personnel that would end up in the death of six RUC men and Specials; IRA aggression would propel the British government to even more firmly endorse the Northern security apparatus publicly and financially.

The British Army withdrawal from the Irish Free State in early 1922 allowed a further security presence across the borderland in to Northern Ireland. Still, the fight had been highly inter-communal in much of Northern Ireland, unlike many areas of the South. As the fighting along the border between the IRA and the B-Specials featured essentially the military-age men of those communities, massive bitterness would persist even after the Civil War shifted focus south and allowed the Northern Ireland state to consolidate its position.³² In that crucial year and a half, the Civil War would deal a deathblow to the Northern IRA effort.

When the anti-Treaty IRA seized the Four Courts in Dublin in April of 1922, the Southern-focused Irish Civil War gave Craig’s expanding police force time to neutralize

³⁰ Paul Bew, *Churchill and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 119.

³¹ Neil Southern, *Policing and Combating Terrorism in Northern Ireland, The Royal Ulster Constabulary GC* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 12.

³² Peter Leary references intense fighting across areas of Donegal, Tyrone, Fermanagh and Monaghan, citing the ‘Clones Affray’ in February 1922 as a particularly violent exchange, Leary *Unapproved Routes*, 8-11.

the borderland while Belfast continued to be a sectarian hotbed.³³ As the new Free State government needed British support to suppress the anti-Treaty IRA threat, the realities of their limitation to effect United Kingdom policy towards Northern Ireland were further realized. The Northern security forces seized the moment and launched a massive counter-measure against the Catholic population of the state: “500 A Specials launched a massive comb-out of the remote valleys of the Sperrin mountains between Draperstown and Greencastle,” rounding up hundreds of Catholic males on suspicion of IRA affiliation.³⁴ Shortly after the Craig-Collins pact would be scrapped and the Northern IRA was left largely to stand alone.

At the end of May, the IRA would officially be outlawed by the government of Northern Ireland with internment following. Over 200 men were arrested almost overnight and soon that would swell to 500 suspected Republicans, decimating the IRA.³⁵ At stake was the survival of the young state, as Craig massively expanded the B-Specials to take the brunt of the border defense: Protestant farmers would go on duty in their spare time, armed with a rifle (that they could keep at home) and bayonet, one hundred rounds of ammunition and a British Army uniform dyed dark green.³⁶ However unconventional, these tactics proved the difference and huge stretches of the three-hundred mile borderland could be defended by Protestant B-Specials living near otherwise heavily Catholic rural tracts.

³³ Bew, *Churchill and Ireland*, 124-125.

³⁴ Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland, The Orange State* (London: Pluto Press, 1983), 55.

³⁵ Farrell, *The Orange State*, 58.

³⁶ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 488.

All the while the political mechanism was turning out security policy, James Craig made frequent border visits from 1920 through the 1925 Boundary Commission which validated his borderline. Beyond establishing the frontier of his political domain, it bolstered Unionist moral while simultaneously reminding the Nationalist population of their place in the state's social order. One of Craig's most trusted border Unionists would prove to be Basil Brooke, later the Prime Minister. Brooke was newly returned from the continental battlefields and kept his arms for the defense of his native Fermanagh. Born in Colebrook, less than ten miles from the border with Monaghan, Brooke was educated at Winchester and Sandhurst before winning the Military Cross and the Croix de Guerre for gallantry in the First World War. Upon his return, he organized a locally raised Unionist vigilante group to guard the religiously and politically mixed borderland.³⁷ He would then be appointed the commandant of the Special Constabulary in 1922, instrumental in shaping border security policy before beginning, in 1929, a long and illustrious political career in the government. By the time Brooke would make his way from security to governance, Northern Ireland had moved from conflict to a period of relative calm, albeit with communal tension, that would characterize the next three decades.

2.3 The RUC in a state of vigilance and preparedness

The security measures outlined during the mid-1920s would generally be maintained for the next three decades. Despite the formal cessation of the conflict, the

³⁷ Kate Newmann, *Dictionary of Ulster Biography* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University of Belfast, 1993), 23.

security forces maintained the posture of an at-risk force for the remaining 1920s and in to the 1930s. When considering the broader ethos of the security forces, it is clear legacy played a major role: Northern Ireland was born out of conflict and policing was vital to sustaining the state. The conflict at the start of the state would linger in the minds of the Protestant Unionist population, and as they made up the bulk of the RUC, it is clear that was ingrained in the police force.

The development in character for the RUC was vital to shaping its perceptions as a biased force. The Ulster Volunteers, created to defend the province against the threat of Home Rule, was reconstituted as the near exclusively Protestant “Special Constabulary” to defend against any threat to the new state. The Specials were conceived in four-tiered groupings³⁸ was almost entirely Protestant in composition for the length of its existence.³⁹ Despite no connection between Catholicism and disloyalty, the force carried over the previous decade’s suspicion of the Catholic community. The borderland would evolve through the early 1920s as an area apart from either of the newly formed states, with the Catholic community there equally suspicious of the Northern Ireland institutions that did not seem to function the same for them as it did for their Protestant neighbors. The borderland maintained a communal solidarity through the pull of kinship and local church affiliations which preserved “largely parallel, if overlapping, social spheres” that went rarely intruded upon for decades.⁴⁰ While the police force settled into a responsive

³⁸ The A, B, C, and CI Specials were the different classifications, although the only group to survive by the end of 1922 were the B Specials, the others being disbanded.

³⁹ Patterson, *Ireland Since 1939*, 3.

⁴⁰ Leary, *Unapproved Routes*, 5.

and preventative role later in the decade, it would be drafted in the early 1920s to stabilize the borderland amidst uneasiness and open conflict.

Touring the borderland in 1922, Prime Minister James Craig choose to agree with the recommendation of Henry Wilson, an important British security advisor, that substantial increases be made in Crown forces stationed along the border with the newly formed Free State. The British government agreed and by the middle of that summer, “the British garrison had been increased to sixteen battalions backed by 5,500 A Specials, 19,000 B-Specials ” and an unknown number of C Specials were out to support the RUC.⁴¹ Northern Ireland’s border was demarcated with armed men in uniform stretching from south Armagh up to Derry City, prepared to defend the state. So extensive was the armament of the Unionist population in 1922, that the data reveals that for every five Protestant adult males in Northern Ireland, one was a member of the Specials.⁴² This left a legacy of division in the borderland and set delineations between those who would be defenders of the state and those who would be looked on with suspicion.

During the intense period from 1922 to 1923, 14,200 Specials were mobilized to oppose the IRA and subdue the Catholic borderland, with another 1,200 RUC members. Yet the Northern Ireland government did facilitate the disengagement of militant Loyalism from the era of Home Rule crisis and First World War.⁴³ While Unionist

⁴¹ Farrell, *The Orange State*, 49-50. Also, the new group - the CI Specials - were authorized at the beginning of 1922 and styled as “a territorial-army-style force who were given full military training and used as a military reserve with their own command structure,” but were later discontinued.

⁴² Farrell, *The Orange State*, 50.

⁴³ Gordon Clubb, *Social Movement De-Radicalisation and the Decline of Terrorism: The Morphogenesis of the Irish Republican Movement* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 45. The author reiterates the point on channeling militarism to the security forces: “The new regime facilitated the total disengagement of the UVF, which was incorporated into its auxiliary police force, the B-Specials, to accompany the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC).”

militancy was channeled and normalized in the state security forces of the new Northern Ireland, the Republican movements efforts were curtailed to the south and the Civil War; there was little room for maneuver. The majority of the Ulster IRA would stay loyal to Collins' Free State government, and the salaried men were explicitly told not to engage the security forces in Northern Ireland.⁴⁴ Once it was clear order was restored, the British government was content with what it saw as its answer to the Irish Question, finally, and it remained minimally concerned with interfering in the affairs of Northern Ireland. As Bardon points out, the relative calm from 1923 onward, including perhaps the lowest ordinary crime rate in Europe in the 1920s, "intercommunal tensions had not been significantly reduced, and, while neither Craig nor his colleagues had created these divisions, they did little to assuage them."⁴⁵ Yet, some fascinating recent scholarship has shown discrepancies in how Belfast and the borderland would have viewed "criminality." In a state of questioning their own belonging, the Catholic Nationalist borderland also seemed to harbor a general sympathy for smuggling, especially of small goods like butter and produce. Particularly in the years after the Second World War, women took a prominent role in smuggling and led to its domestication and a wider normalization.⁴⁶ If a subversive spirit persisted in the political-social fabric of the borderland, it also continued to be a fertile breeding ground for more overt displays of public defiance.

Force statistics also tell some of the story of the early years of border security in Northern Ireland. By the summer of 1922, Northern Ireland's ratio of security personnel

⁴⁴ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 493.

⁴⁵ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 467.

⁴⁶ Leary, *Unapproved Routes*, 162-163. Leary summarizes smuggling as an "opportunistic crime" but also lists a myriad of motivations from greed and desire, to local allegiances, generational identity and even gender subversion and inversion.

to civilians was such that for every six families, there was one member of the security forces; given the religious dynamic, that meant there was one security official for every two Catholic families.⁴⁷ Viewing this statistic from the level of family units more accurately conveys the ability to conduct surveillance on Catholic rural townlands; a RUC patrol of two or three officers could well keep tabs on four or six Catholic families, especially the military age males. The evidence suggests that Catholic males, even if they had military training, were unlikely to enlist in the RUC after partition. Bardon surmises that “Catholics were reluctant to seek employment in the service of a government they did not want,” although some Catholic RUC officers were hold-overs from the pre-1919 RIC force, about one in six officers in 1922.⁴⁸ With little honest effort to reach out to the Catholic community during the ensuing decade, the RUC Catholic recruitment decreased sharply. By 1936, Catholics comprised 17% of the force despite being over one third of the population, and only 9 of 55 RUC district officers were Catholics.⁴⁹ By the late 1930s, the RUC was a normalized police force with about 3,000 officers for a population of 1.5 million people.

⁴⁷ Committee on International Relations, US Congress, “The Need for New and Acceptable Policy in Northern Ireland” Hearing Before the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, One Hundred Sixth Congress, First Session, April 22, 1999, Volume 4 (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1999), 85.

⁴⁸ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 499.

⁴⁹ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 499. Bardon discloses that the force in 1936 were 2,849 RUC officers and only 488 were Catholic. The original intent was for the RUC to be comprised of at least 33% Catholics, yet this was never realized.

2.3.1 Stabilizing state: security force culture

While the size of the full-time force was dialed back, a vigilant attitude was generally maintained among the RUC. As the 1920s ended, the security forces would still claim 12,000 part-time B-Specials to support the force of 3,000 RUC officers.⁵⁰ In his two-hundred year survey of Ireland, Alvin Jackson cites militarism as playing an important role in 20th century Northern Ireland. There was a persistence of a strong military spirit in Northern Ireland, particularly among people in political and social leadership. Whether the descendants of soldiers sent to garrison towns in the 18th century or the sons of Boer War veterans, many politically-Unionist males envisioned their citizenship actively with weaponry near at hand. Their recent experience bore out the truth that, as Northern Ireland was created out of direct military conflict: “the new state was founded on the defeat of the IRA in the North, and not on the firmer clay of political consensus.”⁵¹ To the contrary, as the state’s political foundation promoted a communal tension for electoral support, this would have to be institutionally maintained in the earliest decades of the state.

Broadly, the RUC underwent more continuity than change during those first thirty years of Northern Ireland’s existence, unlike the multiple iterations of the Irish Republican Army at the same time. Peter Clarke’s historical view from the British mainland that the RUC was “deeply suspect as an agency of law enforcement; its paramilitary B-Specials were simply seen as Protestants in uniform,” an interesting turn-of-phrase linking the state’s political and ethno-religious majority to its wider minority

⁵⁰ Patterson, *Ireland Since 1939*, 3.

⁵¹ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: War, Peace and Beyond* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 331.

status on the island as a whole.⁵² While many British observers knew Northern Ireland to be a sectarian state with a suppressive security regime, little concern seemed to be paid to it by the government or the public.

As relative calm would come to the borderland through the 1930s and into the 1940s, many Unionists continued to live uneasily with partition. It did not ensure security and stability, As one terrorism and security expert has established: “first, support of the British could not be relied upon; the Irish state to the south posed a threat to the north’s existence; and the minority Catholic population were viewed as a disloyal and potentially destabilising force.”⁵³ It was this lurking threat of IRA action through the first 50 years of Northern Ireland which shaped the development of the RUC differently than its United Kingdom counterparts. Another law enforcement commenter, Neil Southern, has analyzed that the formidable and militarized force developed “to protect both themselves and law-abiding citizens from terrorist violence.”⁵⁴ Yet, it is an odd notion to call the RUC’s tactics a proportional response to a perceived threat of violence, orchestrated by Irish Republican paramilitaries, over decades. It is logical that the RUC would raise their alertness to correspond with intelligence identifying a threat, but that is not evident in their force; instead, a hyper-vigilance seems to have always been maintained as if it was 1922, yet the 1930s and 1940s saw almost no Republican attacks on the borderland.

Southern rejects any conception of the RUC as a colonial-style police force and instead identifies the key motivation of the RUC:

⁵² Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, Britain 1900-2000 (New York: Penguin, 2004.), 341.

⁵³ Clubb, *Social Movement De-Radicalisation*, 44.

⁵⁴ Neil Southern, “The Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Terrorist Threat” in *Combatting Terrorism in Northern Ireland*, ed. James Dingley (New York: Routledge, 2009), 177.

The IRA always posed a threat to the Northern Irish state and the fact that its members came exclusively from the Nationalist community meant that that community – within which the IRA functioned as a potentially subversive force – always was under the watchful eye of the state.⁵⁵

Even if one disregards the unethical designs of policing in such a way, the psychological toll this would take on the Northern Catholic community is incalculable. In total, emigration from Catholics – though only one third of the population – was 90,000 out of the 159,000 who left Northern Ireland between 1937 and 1961.⁵⁶ While there was not necessarily an IRA threat, there was certainly currents of opposition to the security apparatus. The IRA would persist as a force because Republican grievances continued to hold sway in Irish politics, north and south. Unionist hegemonic control in Northern Ireland perpetuated social and political grievances while minimizing Catholic identity. The institutional ethos of the RUC was certainly alien to Catholics⁵⁷ in a number of ways, particularly the establishment of a number of Orange Lodges attached to RUC units.

2.3.2 Stabilizing state: 1930s and 1940s political developments

For much of the 1920s and 1930s, the rhetoric from Republican politicians north and south continued to decry partition and publicly call for a new political solution. But, it was with the adoption of the Irish Free State's 1937 Constitution that an escalation of

⁵⁵ Southern, "The RUC and the Terrorist Threat," 178.

⁵⁶ Farrell, *The Orange State*, 92.

⁵⁷ Southern, *Policing and Combating Terrorism in Northern Ireland*, 36-37. The author mentions the "alien" institutional ethos as a deterrent in Roman Catholic recruitment, but equally offers that "the threat of being especially targeted by the IRA for a traitorous ethnic act is thought to explain the lack of recruitment amongst Roman Catholics" saying that the topic merged issues of cultural identity with a desire to avoid being marked out as traitorous within the Catholic community.

the partition issue would occur. Most alarming to the Unionist hegemony were Articles 2 and 3 of the Bunreacht, or constitution, Article 2 defined “the national territory” as “the whole island of Ireland, its islands and the territorial seas,” and Article 3 went further in claiming that laws apply to the whole island but remained suspended “pending the re-integration of the national territory.”⁵⁸ While the language of the Constitution would not shift Free State foreign policy and the physical Irish border, the symbolism of claiming control of the entire island remained a sticking point for Northern Unionists into the 1990s. Taking a legal view of the 1937 Constitution, the language of Articles 2 and 3 rejects the 1925 boundary agreement settled by the governments in Dublin, Belfast and London on the grounds of an imagined national territory.⁵⁹ The Irish government, led by Eamonn de Valera’s Fianna Fáil party had indeed been distancing itself from Britain culturally, economically and politically since 1932; to Northern Ireland the constitutional claims were a further outrage and triggered an even greater British and Protestant ethos from the state.⁶⁰ If each community was warily watching the other, driven more to their cultural distinctiveness in the 1930s, the late 1940s heightened the tension even more.

The next prominent moment of political angst that can be seen to have shaped the security response occurred in 1949 in an era immediately after the Second World War. The South’s neutrality was starkly contrast by the North’s involvement, particularly when German planes blitzed Belfast in the spring of 1940.⁶¹ In the aftermath of the war, the

⁵⁸ Michael Gallagher, “The Constitution and the Judiciary,” in *Politics in the Republic of Ireland, 4th edition*, eds. John Coakley and Michael Gallagher, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 76.

⁵⁹ Austen Morgan, “Northern Ireland Terrorism, the Legal Response,” in *Combatting Terrorism in Northern Ireland*, ed. James Dingley (New York: Routledge, 2009), 159.

⁶⁰ Dingley, “Northern Ireland and the “Troubles,”” 25.

⁶¹ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 553. Bardon writes how German reconnaissance was stunned to find that the entire city of Belfast was protected by seven anti-aircraft batteries.

expanding social welfare state of Britain extended its arms to citizens in Northern Ireland. This would lead to a further widening of the standard of living gap between the people in the two jurisdictions. Stormont used the economic advantages of United Kingdom membership in the 1950s and 1960s to provide access to welfare supports “as if these in themselves excused a state that remained encrusted with ethnic particularism.”⁶² It was clear that post-1945 the two governments were drifting farther apart in aims, policies and their dealings with Great Britain. By 1945, the contrast between the two states on the island of Ireland was stark: the southern state continuing to draw itself further away from Northern Ireland until the end of the 1950s. Bardon points to the divergence by specifically citing the foreign policy of The Second World War neutrality, the cultural arrested development of a “‘thirties’ time warp” with censorship and Catholic Church influence (although many conservative Protestant churches in Northern Ireland were equally assertive), and economic policies like a high tariff wall.⁶³

In Northern Ireland, 1945 also marked the formation of the Anti-Partition League which met in Dungannon, Tyrone for the first time with the hope of garnering more international attention concerning the Irish border.⁶⁴ The political success of Labour in the General Election of 1945 was to the dismay of Unionists who sided with their Conservative brethren, but also to some Irish Nationalists aware of Labour’s creeping popularity, especially in working-class Belfast.⁶⁵ Once ousted from government, de Valera would embark on an international anti-partition tour in 1948 and 1949. Despite

⁶² Patterson, *Ireland Since 1939*, xv.

⁶³ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 588.

⁶⁴ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 598-599.

⁶⁵ Brendan Lynn, "The Irish Anti-Partition League and the Political Realities of Partition, 1945-9." *Irish Historical Studies* 34, no. 135 (May 2005), 326.

efforts to raise the issue in the United States, the government of Harry S. Truman made it clear they had no plans to intervene in Irish partition.⁶⁶ Broadly, the position of the United States towards partition exists between neutrality and deference towards Britain; as Britain maintained it would not act unless a majority of the Northern Ireland legislature consented. America remained on the outside of what it concerned an Anglo-Irish issue.⁶⁷ It would be news made north of the border in Canada that would send shockwaves back to Ireland. In September 1948, while on an official visit the Taoiseach, John A. Costello, announced Ireland's intent to become a formal Republic.

Without informing or consulting Britain, the Irish government would re-define itself, its relationship with Britain and the central ideal of Irish Republicanism. The Northern Irish government, understandably, sought reassurance from the Labour government now in power. Conditions in Britain at the time, especially given the Cold War context of controlling the north Atlantic, also drew Belfast closer to London. In the context of contested space in 1948-1949, Northern Ireland held strategic sway given its ports and natural inland harbors on the north Atlantic; Britain valued naval supremacy amidst tensions like the Berlin blockage. Meeting with Clement Attlee in January 1949, Lord Brookeborough was given full reassurance of British commitment to Northern Ireland. The Northern Prime Minister would promptly, and confidently, call an election “to demonstrate once more that Northern Ireland was British,” and rallied Unionists by

⁶⁶ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 598.

⁶⁷ Britain had been clear on partition as it only affirmed Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom during the 1940s. Seán Cronin argues that the US was unduly influenced by Britain, taking a side against a united Ireland; yet, the 'special relationship' between the US and the UK also would suggest the US would honor any agreement made between Britain and Ireland on the issue of partition, particularly if NATO membership was ensured. From Elizabeth Keane, *Seán MacBride: A Life* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2007), 145.

warning “Our country is in danger [...] No Surrender, We are King’s men.”⁶⁸ The Anti-Partition campaign reached into the Republic for help, yet Unionist would gallop to a resounding victory.

The 1949 “Chapel Gate” election was one of the most bitterly-fought in Northern Ireland’s history. The contest resulted in an increase in the Unionist share of the vote as they won 40 of 52 seats in Stormont.⁶⁹ Efforts by Southern Republicans, notably the Minister for External Affairs Seán MacBride, to assist Northern candidates only backfired and split opinion in the Republic over perceived meddling in a foreign election.⁷⁰ Further assurance by London was granted in June when Westminster passed the Ireland Act which copper-fastened Northern Ireland to the United Kingdom and reinforced the Unionist veto.⁷¹ Alvin Jackson identifies a blossoming of political confidence across mainstream Unionism from this moment onward: “The generation of Unionists elected in the late 1940s, and particularly in the election of 1949, received their political education at a time of relative loyalist confidence as well as southern braggadocio; and though sometimes bright (as with Brian Faulkner), they were not at this time open to even tentatively consensual gestures.”⁷² The 1940s drew to a close with a new normalcy was descending on the Irish borderland as each government endorsed the separation of Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland in legislation, security and society.

⁶⁸ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 600.

⁶⁹ Alan Parkinson, *Election Fever: Groundbreaking Electoral Contests in Northern Ireland* (Newtownards: Blackstaff Press. 2017), 112-113.

⁷⁰ Keane, *Seán MacBride*, 126-127. The efforts were counterproductive as the Unionist vote share rose from 50% in 1945 to 63% in 1949 (126).

⁷¹ Michael Kennedy, *Division and Consensus: The Politics of Cross-Border Relations in Ireland, 1925-1969* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2000), 113.

⁷² Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: War, Peace and Beyond*, 353.

2.4 Northern Ireland: state solidification in the 1950s

After the legislative changes in 1949, security again became essential in the defense of the state. The RUC and B-Specials were always intended to operate as a hostile fighting force, so vigilance and suspicion was maintained even in times of peace. Unlike the other policed areas of Great Britain, the benefits of modernization were unevenly distributed in Northern Ireland and had profound effects on community policing and views of authority. Even though the Prime Minister, Basil Brooke, often spoke of the superior educational opportunities, health and welfare systems north of the Irish border, the government remained fixed in its political attitudes and rigid structures. The lack of pressure from Westminster and Whitehall in the 1950s was a policy continuation from the 1920s; the “ancient divisions in the region had survived the war intact and were older and more profound than the political frontier weaving its way through the province of Ulster.”⁷³ Even if they were excluded from the higher rungs of the socio-economic ladder in the state, Catholics would see their standard of living increase compared to the Southern population.

The Northern Ireland political apparatus applied the “no surrender” Unionist ethos of prior generations to its new twentieth century establishment. There was a need to prove self-worth and necessity within the British Empire after the First World War, that was revisited in the changing landscape after the Second World War. The Empire had been shrinking for five decades, and Northern Ireland’s border with the Republic had shifted from the nearest reach of a large British possession to, now, something of a Commonwealth outpost. The decade of the 1950s would open with Northern Ireland a

⁷³ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 588.

secure part of the United Kingdom and its state solidified behind legal justification, an electoral mandate and a firm security apparatus. Simultaneously, the realization of the Irish Republic would be as much a crisis moment for Irish Republicans as Northern Unionists. Bardon fittingly identifies the opening of the 1950s as a low-point in modern Irish Republicanism: “The prospect of Irish reunification never seemed so distant as it did in 1951”⁷⁴ Drastic measures seemed prudent, the question was who would emerge as the flag-bearers of Republicanism? R.F. Foster concurs, writing that the actualization of the Irish Republic, even a 26-county one, ended a significant chapter in the island’s history. Still, Northern Nationalists continued to use the term “Free State” implying that the Republic was a title only; the Irish Republic remained sacred “platonically preserved for the visionary thirty-two-county separatist state,” yet this was further away than at any point that century.⁷⁵ Those Northern Nationalists had coalesced around the 1940s Anti-Partition push, employing constitutional means and attempting to rally public support on both sides of the border. The Anti-Partition League’s collapse in 1951 meant another door closed for the minority population. Michael Farrell has written the Catholic community “had failed to reform the Northern state from within, they had been unable to end its existence by constitutional means.”⁷⁶ The two outcomes that flowed from this was a return to the physical force resistance as well as something new: the culture clash of open confrontation with the security forces of Northern Ireland.

⁷⁴ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 603. That same year the Anti-Partition League dissolved.

⁷⁵ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 566.

⁷⁶ Farrell, *The Orange State*, 202.

2.4.1 The culture clash: 1950-1954

The 1950s opened with Irish Republicans in Northern Ireland engaging in more public defiance of the state through events that engaged with symbols, actions and pronouncements affirming the Irish Republic and rejecting the state of Northern Ireland. For decades, dissent had been discouraged and forced off the street, but as a later 1960s Civil Rights agitator put it, Irish politics would return to the street. If the ruling establishment of Northern Ireland perceived a growing threat, the security response shows the tactics desired to repel it. The RUC was, one of contemporary Catholic activist called, a “para-military force” due to their training and access to high powered rifles and machine guns as well as armoured cars; from the 1950s onward the force included “a special Commando or reserve force whose functions were almost entirely para-military.”⁷⁷ The makings of a culture clash between the police force and Catholic border population were well underway by the start of 1951.

There would be public order legislation devised in the 1950s that had not existed prior and would show state refusal to allow communal expression of Republican sympathies in Catholic areas. The Public Order Act in 1951 heightened the probability of public-police confrontation and, even in the opinion of one legal analyst unsympathetic to the Northern Catholic community, “appeared biased towards loyalism and against Republicanism.”⁷⁸ The proof would be in the contentious points between the RUC and civilians, nearly all in Catholic areas and commemorations. At the same time, Stormont showed an unwillingness, or perhaps just an inability, to ban the often more provocative

⁷⁷ Farrell, *The Orange State*, 96.

⁷⁸ Morgan, “Northern Ireland Terrorism, the Legal Response,” 160.

Orange parades, during the July marching season. Some, like the Orange parade through Longstone in county Down, had long been a source of local protest – still the RUC failed to curtail instances of Unionist provocation.⁷⁹ The contrast between what the state sanctioned and forbid was clear: a perceived rising from the predominantly Catholic, Nationalist (if not Republican) areas would be suppressed, often violently, by the security forces. One of the last major events before the Anti-Partition League went into full



Figure 2.2: Pamphlet of “Beannacht na Féile Pádraig,” cover (1), Anti-Partition League, D2991/B/81/2, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

⁷⁹ Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998*, 353.

decline was a St. Patrick's Day march in Derry City in March of 1952 (see Figure 2.2). While parading through the walled city with tricolors and people adorned in green and gold, the RUC baton-charged and disrupted the group with force, even battering Eddie McAteer.⁸⁰ The RUC, with its Protestant majority, battering Catholic marchers led by a high-profile MP like McAteer in a Catholic majority city along the border with Donegal was brazen. It also showed that the Northern security forces saw any challenge to their authority as a threat, and any symbols of the Republic as an encroachment on the status quo that required responsive force.

A year later a different type of street celebration was fully embraced by the government of Northern Ireland. Great Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, freshly crowned as monarch after the death of her father George VI, embarked on a tour of her realm. She traveled to Northern Ireland in early July of 1953. Her visit – just ahead of Orange marching season - contained all the jubilation and pageantry that corresponded with royal affairs, particularly in Belfast. If asked, many of Ulster's Unionists would likely have agreed with the *Times of London's* assertion that the Coronation was "the nation's feast of mystical renewal."⁸¹ Perhaps the sight of streets blanketed with Union Jacks and the national colors inspired the next piece of legislation from Stormont. Still, some Unionists were incensed that predominantly Catholic areas did not join in the jubilation. In a

⁸⁰ Niall Ó Dochartaigh, "The Politics of Housing; Social Change and Collective Action in Derry in the 1960s," in *Derry and Londonderry: History and Society*, ed. Gerard O'Brien (Dublin: Geography Publications, 1999), 23.

⁸¹ Elizabeth II's tours spanned 1953-1954, the first to the immediate realm and the larger world tour was through much of the Commonwealth. Many gushed at the "New Elizabethan" or the "Young Elizabethan," and Ruth Feingold has summarized that "[p]ublic pronouncements about the significance of Elizabeth's reign were dizzying in their optimism: a second renaissance, a flowering of creativity and endeavor in science and the arts, was prophesied." From Ruth P. Feingold, "Marketing the Modern Empire: Elizabeth II and the 1953-1954 World Tour," in *Antipodes* 23, no. 2 (2009), 148

shocking disregard for the royal visit, locals in in Dungiven, County Londonderry had not permitted a special Coronation Day Orange band to march through the predominantly Catholic town.⁸² Another instance of civil disobedience occurred in Cookstown, Tyrone where locals had pulled down bunting erected for the queen, only to have it re-hung and then guarded by a member of the RUC until the celebrations ended.⁸³ When legislation protecting the flag of the United Kingdom was proposed a few months later, it was shaped to allow the RUC powers to remove “foreign” symbols of state and arrest those possessing them.

Norther Ireland’s political apparatus had enacted legislation to cover the RUC’s policing policies. To catch up with events on the ground, where the RUC were already accosting tricolor-carrying protesters, Stormont passed the Flags and Emblems (Display) Act in April of 1954. The bill became law just two weeks ahead of Easter and the 1916 commemorations that had long been moments of popular nationalist expressions in Catholic areas. Two years before, a group of Republicans in east Tyrone had taken control of Pomeroy town for an Easter 1916 commemoration in a paramilitary style show of force: the town was sealed off by armed men and the Proclamation of the Irish Republic was read out.⁸⁴ Stormont moved to ensure that type of dissent would not spread, and the RUC were directly supported legislatively to pre-emptively remove cultural symbols that could be used in such a Republican ceremony. The Act provided protection to the flying of the Union Jack, allowed for the RUC to remove a flag or emblem

⁸² Patterson, *Ireland Since 1939*, 125. Some Unionists were also incensed that predominantly Catholic areas, such as the Falls Road in West Belfast, were not required to fly Union Jacks – and the RUC was forced to step in and quiet the disturbance before a riot ensued.

⁸³ Farrell, *The Orange State*, 204.

⁸⁴ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 34. The event was orchestrated by Liam Kelly and Saor Uladh supporters.

displayed including if it required their entry into a secure location: “a police officer may without warrant enter any such lands or premises, using such force as may be necessary, and may remove and seize and detain such emblem.”⁸⁵ The flying of a foreign flag, such as the Irish tricolor, was deemed an offense against the state. The government was pushing against the existential threat posed by Irish Republicanism on display in public demonstrations. Defying the state was deemed extremism; the state intended to suppress subversion, whether it employ peaceful or militant tactics. The legislation’s intent to suppress Republican disorder along the border was targeted at one movement in particular, the Fianna Uladh Republicanism of Liam Kelly from Tyrone.

Kelly had increased his local clout among the Catholic townland of Mid-Ulster in the early 1950s, culminating in an electoral victory in 1953. He would over-step in a victory speech, and was given a prison sentence for seditious activity. He was allowed out early in August 1954 after serving eight months of his twelve-month remand. As news reached back to rural Tyrone, a spokesperson from Kelly’s political party, Fianna Uladh, shared that there would be a massive reception with a torch-lit procession and welcome band through town with bonfires ablaze in the surrounding townland.⁸⁶ The crowd swelled in to the thousands as evening came and Kelly made his way in from Dungannon. Simultaneously, the RUC had massed in order to maintain the peace; they

⁸⁵ CAIN Government Reports and Acts, “Flags and Emblems (Display) Act (Northern Ireland), 1954,” CAIN, ed. Martin Melaugh, accessed on November 5, 2019, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/hmso/fea1954.htm>. The exact language allowed any police officer to apprehend a displayed emblem that “may occasion a breach of the peace”

⁸⁶ “Senator Kelly Released” *Evening Herald*, August 19, 1954, Front page (1), accessed August 8, 2019, Irish Newspaper Archives.

also intended to enforce the Flags and Emblems Act, especially any flying of the flag of the Republic of Ireland.

Years earlier, Kelly's supporters held an Easter commemoration with Irish tricolors and other symbols of Irish nationhood, explicitly made illegal by this new legislation. The RUC, led by County-Inspector Hamilton, made it clear fighting would ensue if a tricolor was produced; once Kelly's car arrived the crowd erupted and, as the pipe band processed to the parish hall for the Church of the Assumption, a tricolor was produced.⁸⁷ The town of 450 people had swelled to 10,000 to welcome Kelly home, so the RUC was ready in full force. Violence between the baton-wielding RUC and the stick, stone and bottle tossing crowd quickly escalated.⁸⁸

The melee on 19 August, 1954 was classified by the Unionist *Tyrone Constitution* as a "clash" between police and republicans assembled to welcome Kelly home. The newspaper reported that as the evening and festivities wore on, 100 members of the RUC confronted an estimated 1,000 Republicans. According to the reporting the crowd had "showed determination to resist the order that had been made earlier, that the tricolor would not be permitted."⁸⁹ Members of the RUC would make multiple attempts to seize one tricolor in particular, encircled by an estimated 500 protesters, in what descended into hand to hand fighting. Bottles were thrown and the police wielded their batons. Forty people were injured as even Liam Kelly received a head injury before, after a few tense hours, the town returned to normal order. Fianna Uladh's vice-chairman Laurence

⁸⁷ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 36.

⁸⁸ "No Interference in Sunday's Parade,' D.I.'s Call on Senator Kelly at Pomeroy," *Irish Press*, August 24, 1954, Front page (1), accessed August 8, 2019, Irish Newspaper Archives.

⁸⁹ "Wild Scenes at Pomeroy," *The Tyrone Constitution*, August 27, 1954, 3, The Newspaper Library of the Belfast Central Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland. The details in this paragraph come from this article.

Loughran and some committee members were among the arrests afterwards, charged with rioting.⁹⁰ The political and policing constraints on Kelly and his movement would have major implications from 1955 onward (dealt with more depth in Chapter Three).

After the August clash in Pomeroy, there was an RUC policy response to avoid certain confrontation over the tricolor, particularly by not engaging the crowd the following weekend; a large Nationalist event was planned for nearby Carrickmore, Tyrone with members of the Dáil present and a speaker from the American League for an Undivided Ireland.⁹¹ With national attention on the RUC, and some notice from Irish America, the security forces wisely curtailed the vigor by which they apprehended illegal flags, at least for the short-term. The 28 August follow-up event featured 5,000 marchers in the town where tricolors dotted almost every house on the lavishly decorated main street; there was minimal police presence in the town but the RUC maintained a strong “at the ready” stand-by force at the Pomeroy barracks.⁹² In another Nationalist rally, one week later in Newry, 10,000 gathered to protest the RUC response to Kelly’s homecoming event.⁹³ The RUC created a line of demarcation near a Unionist area of the city, and two priests interceded to de-escalate the situation.⁹⁴ Over the coming months the

⁹⁰ “Back to normal in Pomeroy but – Four men appear on riot charges” *The Irish News*, August 21, 1954, front page (1) from Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

⁹¹ “Carrickmore Meeting, ‘No objection’ to carrying of tricolor,” *The Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, August 27, 1954, 2, Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland. The reporting indicated that “It is understood that the R.U.C. have intimated that there will be no objection to the carrying of the tricolor at a public meeting which is to be held at Carrickmore on Sunday.”

⁹² “Five Thousand March in Carrickmore Demonstration,” *The Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, August 30, 1954, front page (1), Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

⁹³ “Priests Save Tense Situation in Newry,” *The Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, September 6, 1954, front page (1), Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

⁹⁴ After the public event, a few hundred remained facing the police cordon along the Unionist enclave near Margaret Square, where counter-protesters had previously tried to shout down the event. Rev. E. Campbell and Rev. J.P. Burke, both of Newry, stepped in to calm the situation.

situation simmered down and Kelly re-oriented himself to conventional politics: he was set to speak in the Irish Senate in November.

But by the end of 1954, after years of sporadic conflict in the streets and electoral frustrations, many Nationalists had seen their constitutional efforts dashed. It wouldn't be long before Kelly himself showed signs of frustration with the existing political structures, gaining little traction in the Seanad. The Northern Ireland security response to street demonstrations and peaceful protest was to respond heavy-handedly with force. Republican frustrations would soon boil over, and it was clear as 1955 opened that the physical force option increasingly appealed to a growing segment of the Northern Catholic population.

2.4.2 The IRA's Border Campaign: 1956-1962

In his provincial history of Ulster surveying from the Vikings to modern devolution, Jonathan Bardon has labeled the period from 1945-1963 as the *quiet years*, characterizing it as a “long period of internal peace” despite persistent concerns over political and economic stagnation.⁹⁵ Quite to the contrary, these years were far from a transition period from the Second World War to the era of Civil Rights agitation. Instead, they featured the strongest threat posed by Irish Republicans to Northern Ireland since its creation.

The 1956-1962 IRA Border Campaign was officially named in IRA circles as “Operation Harvest,” meant to conjure up the metaphoric reaping of support seeds sown

⁹⁵ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 587-588.

for re-unification, as well as signifying its planned launch of spring 1956. The campaign actually began in the winter, a bad omen for any reaper hoping for dividends, and in the end the IRA reaped few. The winter frost came in the form of a prepared, aggressive security response from the RUC and Special Constabulary. What began with 12 December, 1956 night raids had crash-landed with an IRA ceasefire in February 1962, long after the operational capacity for the IRA in Northern Ireland was extinguished. The campaign began with hope and promise of Nationalist “liberation zones” along the borderland which would spread towards the whole of Northern Ireland consuming it, exhausting the British occupier into submission due to “its ability to pose a persistent threat.”⁹⁶ Quite the opposite, the campaign would bolster the existing power structures in Northern Ireland and leave the IRA in ruins.

The general historical opinion questions the IRA’s military motivations, training and funding, and casts its members as misguided and naïve. This criticism has also come from volunteers themselves, as Michael Ryan’s revealing and raw memoir *My Life in the IRA* describes a ground-level view of “the hardship, frustration and near-constant disappointment” of the Border Campaign.⁹⁷ Ryan recalls numerous instances where an attack was planned, a target chosen, volunteers following orders just up to the point of attack before an operation was cancelled. Where targets chosen the beginning of the campaign (1956-1957) seemed purposeful and part of a wider scheme to destabilize the state and batter the security forces, the years 1958 to 1960 were characterized by more dissatisfaction than triumph. Jonathan Bardon summarizes the Border Campaign as

⁹⁶ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 49.

⁹⁷ Ryan, *My Life in the IRA*, back cover.

making little dent in the armour of the state, as “the IRA campaign continued fitfully without ever seriously disrupting the life of the people of Northern Ireland.”⁹⁸ With nearly universal condemnation, it can be surmised that perhaps the campaign destined from the start to end in failure. What drove it to such a disastrous end?

While the Border Campaign failed for a number of reasons, three causes can be highlighted as most deeply detrimental. Foremost, the Republican movement lacked political capital across Northern Ireland and no significant grassroots movement materialized to coincide with the armed struggle. When, in October 1959, Sinn Féin got a clear run from Nationalists at the Westminster election they lost all 12 seats they contested and had half the vote share that was won in 1955; their small window of public support had slammed shut.⁹⁹ Once the IRA was completely operationally stranded, the security forces could crater roads to secure the border and actively patrol the borderland for pedestrian attacks.

Secondly, the IRA devised a strategically-flawed and ideologically-misguided plan for reunification based on “liberation zones” that never formed. Logistically, it was ill-fated from conception and did not take in to account the reality of the RUC as a native police force, not some foreign army of occupation. As the support from the public was limited to the borderland, the RUC and B-Specials had a quick grasp of the problematic areas. Patrols were increased and the border was militarized again within a month of the

⁹⁸ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 606.

⁹⁹ Farrell, *The Orange State*, 220. In the 1959 UK General Election, Sinn Féin contested and lost 12 seats and gained 73,415 votes, less than 50% of their 1955 vote share. Farrell writes: “The emotional support they [Sinn Féin and the IRA] had won then [1955] was evaporating, faced with the attrition of arrests, internment and constant security operations. The people had no stomach for continuing a campaign which had failed.”

beginning of the IRA campaign. The government of Basil Brooke, Lord Brookeborough, responded by eventually ordering that all but seventeen manned border roads be cratered or spiked, and then “calling up for duty the full complement of the B-Specials ” this was complete by mid-January 1957.¹⁰⁰ And, as the Border Campaign dragged on, Northern politicians weaponized roads and applied political pressure on the Republic; Minister Walter Topping even saying in June 1959, “it would be of great assistance... if people on the other side of the Border brought their best endeavors to bear on the public authorities in those areas” in combatting illegal activities.¹⁰¹ The assistance Topping was requesting would soon materialize and help deliver a final blow to the fledgling IRA.

In its security response, the Northern Ireland security apparatus made the Irish border more defensible and more real than at any point since 1925. This had been the opposite intent of the IRA, which had hoped to swiftly brush aside the state and border in its hope of Irish reunification. With limited activists, especially in Northern Ireland, the RUC could use internment to cripple the organization in the period 1957 to 1959. In 1957 alone, over 250 IRA supporters were arrested in raids, heavily concentrated on the borderland.¹⁰² Supporters quickly became known to the RUC and ‘safe houses’ that billeted IRA men were just as easily identified. A familiar cat-and-mouse game developed as an attack, often at night, would occur and the security forces would track the IRA unit either to a safe house or to an attempted border crossing. With internment measures introduced in the South, the IRA would have no safe haven on either side of the border, and the campaign was stifled.

¹⁰⁰ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 79, 141.

¹⁰¹ Leary, *Unapproved Routes*, 179.

¹⁰² Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 607.

A final security force advantage came in the form of at least one informer within the Republican movement. The RUC had a highly placed informant who they codenamed “Horsecopper” who provided crucial information for a number of years.¹⁰³ While details of this figure’s position within the organization and place of operation has remained concealed, he was able to provide membership details to the RUC: as of March 1958, nearly half of the active IRA was based in Dublin, with total numbers just under 1,000 volunteers.¹⁰⁴ Knowing this, the RUC could assume any attackers operating in Northern Ireland would attempt to flee back to the Republic for cover; the routes were well known by the end of the conflict and the RUC was apt at swooping up fleeing IRA men. The informant was also able to identify policy positions and intent within the movement; for example, recognizing that the IRA lull in attacks in the summer 1959 was intended to create a public outcry for the release of Northern interned IRA volunteers (this would not occur). The RUC had hoped that publicizing the IRA interest in a British bombing campaign could force London officials to pressure Dublin to bring greater legislative measures against the IRA. With the return of Fianna Fáil to government, this would indeed transpire.

Lastly, with little money and resources the cause of Irish Republicanism along the border would be given up in the south, long after citizens in the north realized the cost outweighed the benefit. With few supplies and little support, the security forces of Northern Ireland – and the Republic of Ireland - could finally end the IRA’s efforts. The

¹⁰³ Matt Treacy *The IRA 1956-69, Rethinking the Republic* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2011), 10.

¹⁰⁴ Treacy, *The IRA 1956-69*, 10-11. The informer indicated there were 455 Dublin IRA volunteers and about 500 elsewhere in the Republic. No information was included about the Northern Ireland based IRA members.

end of the campaign was unspectacular: there would be twenty-seven incidents in 1959 and only twenty-six in 1960.¹⁰⁵ Isolated shootings would persist among massive IRA arrests north and south, and when an RUC constable was killed in Armagh, the Fianna Fail government led by Taoiseach Sean Lemass reintroduced military tribunals in November 1961. By this point the campaign was finished as internal fighting and resentment between the IRA and Sinn Fein rendered the effort futile.¹⁰⁶

The IRA ceasefire was officially called in January of 1962. A published declaration on 26 February claimed that issues of “arms, men and finance” ended the fight. The statement set the IRA against “5,000 regular troops, 12,500 B-Specials , 3,000 RUC, 1,500 specially trained commandos and sundry other security forces totaling nearly 30,000 men” and identified the IRA’s valiant effort despite inefficient public support.¹⁰⁷ The fight would be renewed at a later date, and the statement lauded the campaign’s 600 operations that had been carried out at “enormous cost to the enemy.”¹⁰⁸ In the May 1962 Northern Irish election, Unionism maintained 65% of Stormont seats and it was clear that partition was here to stay as “the IRA campaign could kill policemen but it could do little else.”¹⁰⁹ The *New York Times* proclaimed not merely the end of the campaign but also the end of the IRA, which belonged to better men than those of 1956-1962. “So dies Sinn Fein,” the newspaper stated, “Let us put a wreath of red roses on their grave and move

¹⁰⁵ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 607.

¹⁰⁶ Ryan, *My Life in the IRA*, 298. Michael Ryan states that from 1960 through February 1962 monthly meetings between the 3-member Army Council (IRA) and Sinn Fein’s 3-member Ard Chomhairle to plan, coordinate and amend policy. Ryan saw clear differences in strategy and aims as well as divisions as “they [Sinn Fein] could hardly conceal their resentment of us, the younger element” of the IRA. From Ryan, *My Life in the IRA*, 297.

¹⁰⁷ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 197-198.

¹⁰⁸ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 198.

¹⁰⁹ Logan, *The Life of Sir Basil Brooke*, 160-161.

on.”¹¹⁰ The extent to which the RUC and B-Specials were directly responsible for laying the 1950s IRA to rest cannot be understated. They had met the thrust by physical force Republicanism and given back just as good as they got. In the end, they emerged as a stronger force more confident in their defense of the state and the defense of Unionism.

2.5 Conclusion: state survived, state strengthened

One of the more astounding things about the Irish border, surveyed at almost any point in its history, is how difficult it is to find. With few natural barriers, like rivers or loughs, it is often delineated by the color of post boxes and sign posts. The Irish border was actually made real by the individuals who defended it: the security forces of Northern Ireland. The Royal Ulster Constabulary with support from the Special Constabulary desired to remain vigilant against the internal threat posed by disloyal Catholics, particularly in the highly concentrated areas along the borderland. Across that mostly invisible line, hundreds of miles from Lough Foyle in the northwest around to Carlingford Lough in the southeast, was that foreign nationalism seemingly always poised to encroach and to reclaim land long lost but not forgotten. It was in this intense moment of response that the 1950s security forces stepped in and smashed the Republican threat. The threat foremost came from cross-border raiders, but they also moved to suppress the fifth column, the Nationalist Catholic borderland, within their state. The decade had opened with attempts to minimize the public projection of Irish

¹¹⁰ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 201.

Republican culture, and it closed with the refutation of an armed incursion meant to destabilize the state.

Looking back from the 1960s, the 1950s can be viewed as a time where the border was tested, and the security forces rose to the challenge. However, this view obscures the underlying dysfunction of the borderland in which the IRA Border Campaign, if only for a moment in time, seemed to grab the general public's attention. If Jonathan Bardon's acknowledgement is true – that “[n]o advantage was taken of the long period of internal peace and the isolation of the IRA to remedy obvious wrongs and soothe intercommunal resentment still stubbornly alive, especially where pockets of disadvantage were dangerously concentrated”¹¹¹ – then one can infer the 1950s was not an era of persisting peace but an illustration of the dangers of letting wrongs fester, particularly among a disillusioned minority. It would only take a fresh generation, born around 1940 and reaching its political awareness by the late 1960s, to demand more from a state unwilling to bend to their demands.

By the start of the 1960s, the Northern security forces could self-congratulate over bravery, but also not rest: they had a spirit of vigilance and preparedness, knowing that a future Republican challenge may not be so under-resourced and ineffective. By hoping to destroy the Irish border, the IRA actually more deeply established it as a defensible barrier for the Northern Irish state, which had long worried about the Catholic population in its midst. The setback for the Northern Catholic population was sizeable as grassroots Republicanism was returned to square one.

¹¹¹ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 588.

CHAPTER THREE, AN ALTERNATE STATE

3.0: To free Ulster?

Just beyond the reach of the Donegal Gaeltacht lies Tory Island, an enchanting, timeless place one hundred miles northwest from Dungannon in Tyrone. Separated by the Irish border, and under the jurisdiction of two different governments on the island of Ireland, each of those places is central to the story of one man: Liam Kelly. Kelly was reared in nearby Pomeroy but educated in Dungannon. It was there that the pupil Kelly first interacted with the Irish language, beginning a lifelong interest in Irish culture. Kelly would spend time in the Donegal Gaeltacht, mainly in Ranafast where he became immersed in the local customs and way of life. Years later and once retired, Kelly would return to Donegal to fulfill a dream of building a home in Magheraroarty, with a view of Tory Island off in the open Atlantic.

Liam Kelly is best known for a rare distinction: he would hold political office in both legislatures on the island of Ireland in the 1950s. An elected member of Stormont for Mid-Tyrone in 1953, Kelly would also be appointed to Seanad Éireann in 1954. He was a physical force Republican, expelled from the IRA only to form a splinter organization maintaining the armed struggle; he would partake in the Border Campaign with a foot in both worlds – political and militant – before leaving Ireland in 1961. By the

time that Kelly and his family emigrated, the IRA campaign was doomed to failure¹ and Kelly's legacy was swept up with the misguided efforts of radical republicanism of the 1950s. But Liam Kelly was much more than the few lines cast to him in the IRA histories between the end of the Second World War and the outbreak of the Troubles.

Generally, Kelly's legacy is one of a number of "border raiders" who blew up customs huts and fired on RUC barracks along the Irish border in the 1950s. With his knowledge of the Irish language and Celtic mythology, Kelly would have been well aware of the connotation behind "raiders," the term the Unionist government and press applied to the men participating in the Border Campaign. Celtic mythology often involves raids between rival groups in an effort to acquire wealth and prestige. The concept of "ruathaire" conducting a raid or "ruathar" was most famous in the national epic, *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. Raiders from the south launching an attack on the warriors of Ulster, the narrative would fit with the defense of the realm promoted by the RUC of the mid-20th century, a romanticized struggle between 'warriors' on both sides of the divide.

Kelly presumably came across the Ulster Cycle when he was first learning the Irish language as a student at St Patrick's Academy, yet many years later he would be in the role of Irish language teacher: while interned in Crumlin Road in the 1940s, Kelly taught classes.² Kelly would mirror the experiences of later IRA internees in HMP Maze

¹ "The IRA was beaten but wouldn't accept it [by 1960]" from Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State* (London: Pluto Press, 1980), 220. Widely derided as a foolish endeavor, the Border Campaign was acknowledged to be an abject failure by its main architect, Sean Cronin, in his 1980 book *Irish Nationalism: A History of Its Roots and Ideology* where he wrote that "physical-force tradition did not reflect the interests of nationalists" in Northern Ireland, and that the IRA faltered from miscalculation and poor execution. From Barry Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly: The IRA Border Campaign, 1956-1962* (Cork: Collins Press, 2009), 201-202.

² Padraig Ó Baoighill, "Liam Ó Ceallaigh agus Fianna Uladh na gCaogaidí, *Comhar*, Iml. 70, Uimh 8 (Lunasa 2010), 23.

during the 1970s and 1980s³ who enhanced their language skills from prison. Post-retirement, Kelly would return to Ireland – Donegal’s Gaeltacht - to build a home in 1981 and spend a portion of his year there ever since: returning around Easter and staying through the end of the summer.⁴ Kelly never lived again in Northern Ireland after emigrating, but he would keep a watchful eye on it from just over the border.

Liam Kelly would find peace there in the language and the people who kept it alive: “It was my wish from the first day that I set foot on the Donegal Gaeltacht land, to have a small house and live there.”⁵ Corresponding with a distinguished Irish language advocate, Pádraig Ó Baoighill, in the 2000s, Kelly conveyed an awareness of his age and circumstances with a hint at the fire still within the proud Tyrone man. Kelly would share details about his upbringing, his experiences in prison and in politics, his views on government and on armed resistance. There is a detectable militancy, as well. Kelly reminisces in a detached way about the 1955 Roslea RUC barracks attack (“I was reasonably happy with the job that was done”) despite it resulting in the death of Connie Green, “...a distinguished man. He was a soldier.”⁶ Green’s death and that of another Saor Uladh volunteer (see Figure 3.1) Aloysius Hand in July 1958 would forever linger with Kelly, who prayed each day for the repose of their souls.⁷ Between time in Tyrone and Donegal, Kelly had lived two decades in New York. There, Kelly named his local

³ Famously IRA men like Gerry Adams and Bobby Sands learned the Irish language during the 1970s, using it to converse undetected by the guards. There is even evidence of some Loyalist prisoners, notably Gusty Spence, who learned the language while in Northern Ireland prison during the Troubles.

⁴ Ó Baoighill, “Liam Ó Ceallaigh,” 25.

⁵ Ó Baoighill, “Liam Ó Ceallaigh,” 25.

⁶ Ó Baoighill, “Liam Ó Ceallaigh,” 24.

⁷ Ó Baoighill, “Liam Ó Ceallaigh,” 24.

Official IRA association as “the Connie Green Club” and it remained active into the late 1970s.⁸ His later interview would also shed light on why he left Ireland for New York



Figure 3.1: Photograph “Funeral of Aloysius HAND of Saor Uladh at Clones, Co. Monaghan on 4/7/58.” From RUC file HA/32/1/955A, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast, Northern Ireland. Liam Kelly is at the head of the coffin, carrying from the left side.

and why he has since returned. All the while, the border was inescapable; as it was a force throughout Kelly’s life, it separates his Donegal home from his native Tyrone. The

⁸ Brian Hanley, Scott Millar, *The Lost Revolution: The Story of the Official IRA and the Workers’ Party* (New York: Penguin Group, 2009), 388-389. The Connie Green Club in Queen’s, New York was one of the final Republican associations in America to remain connected to the OIRA during a time of internal feuding and punishment killings that repelled most supporters. In an acknowledgement to OIRA prisoners in HMP Maze, the NY Transport Workers’ Union president was given a gift made by men in “the Long Kesh concentration camp,” June 1978.

border divided the two jurisdictions to which Kelly was a representative in government – separate jurisdictions which he had hoped to see made one.

In his lifetime, Kelly attempted to forge a new path for radical republicanism in Northern Ireland that was, in many ways, revolutionary for the era. Central was his attempt to legitimize the Southern state, acknowledging the mandate of the Irish Constitution and the Dáil. In maintaining a physical force threat, Kelly wished to apply pressure on the Northern Ireland state to cooperate with the Republic of Ireland in ways that could bring about the end of partition. In this context, the Border Campaign was meant to supplement the political program Kelly spent years building. When his electoral base declined and the fight appeared doomed, Kelly would choose to emigrate from Northern Ireland like many of his generation. In this way, his legacy is a mixed one: while opportunities were there, he mostly represents a path not taken and an outlook not embraced by radical Republicans until the 1980s. However, Liam Kelly is owed a modification to his general identification as a 1950s “republican” – he was an ideologically forward, cultural Irish nationalist.

3.1: Political developments, north and south

Life normalized in both Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State as the 1920s progressed. After the tumultuous start to the decade, each government was able to implement security controls that stopped internal strife and restore a relative piece. Along the Irish border, a new realization was being processed. An evolution in the philosophical underpinnings of Irish Republicanism occurred with a series of political developments in the Irish Free State through the 1930s into the 1940s.

3.1.1: Republicanism in Mid-Ulster, 1920-1940

Liam Kelly was born 22 September 1922 in Dungannon, County Tyrone, Northern Ireland. The state had existed and persisted for a little over a year at that point, and James Craig was in the autumn of 1922 fortifying his border defense around Armagh, Tyrone and Fermanagh: Craig would answer the question of the frontier with “not an inch,” referring to Unionism’s desire to maintain the borderland with a readily-armed force: “what we have we hold.”⁹ The government south of the border was stabilizing as only a week before W. T. Cosgrave had introduced the Constitution of Saorstát Éireann Bill to the Dáil, implementing the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty.¹⁰ The foundation of an independent Irish self-government, albeit not an all-island state as imagined in Easter 1916’s Irish Republic, had been laid.

At that time, the Irish Civil War in the South was entering a more serious stage: in August, Michael Collins had been killed and in November the Free State government would begin a series of IRA executions, many by firing squad.¹¹ The public was split as was the IRA, some supporting and some resisting the terms of the Treaty. The events of the Civil War convulsed the Northern IRA, which had a set of leaders also executed amidst further splintering and arrests. The RUC in Northern Ireland was stabilizing and becoming more formidable along the borderland, as communal dynamics would settle into the loyal suspicious of the disloyal, maintaining a watchful eye. In the Free State, the

⁹ Hugh Shearman, *Not an Inch, A Study of Northern Ireland and Lord Craigavon* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1942), 169.

¹⁰ R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989) 14.

¹¹ T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin, Francis Byrne, *A New History of Ireland: Ireland, 1921-84* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 47. Kevin O’Higgins delivered emotional remarks at Dáil ahead of November, 1922 executions of four men in Kilmainham Gaol, with over 70 more in the following months.

security forces were also becoming formidable and would force the anti-Treaty IRA to relinquish its arms in the middle of 1923.

For Kelly, like so many prominent 20th century Irish nationalists, Republicanism was in the blood: his father William and grandfather Billy were both involved in local activism in east Tyrone.¹² The area had long been demographically split between Catholics and Protestants, the last census before Kelly's birth showing Tyrone to have a 55% Catholic majority of almost 80,000 Tyrone Catholics to 64,000 Tyrone Protestants.¹³ The communal divide would hold steady and the Catholic percentage of the population would actually decline almost a percentage point by 1961, showing the effects of emigration on the county (both communities had declined, the Catholic population to 73,400 and the Protestant population to 60,500 in 1961.)¹⁴ Kelly was a product of a mixed marriage, as his mother was a Tyrone Protestant converting to Catholicism in 1919 upon marrying his father.¹⁵

Communal tension in Ulster has long featured local leaders drawing on a reservoir of popular memory stretching back, in some cases to the 17th century; yet by 1925, as many Unionists left the Free State they brought with them fresh stories and experiences of political and sectarian violence and, for Nationalists the B-Specials who "terrorized" their border communities could be added to communal memory bank with the Famine, penal laws and land dispossession.¹⁶ However, what divided people near the border also

¹² Brian Hanley, "Kelly, Liam William Seán," *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, (ed.) James McGuire, James Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), Cambridge Core.

¹³ Farrell, *The Orange State*, viii.

¹⁴ Farrell, *The Orange State*, viii.

¹⁵ Ó Baoighill, "Liam Ó Ceallaigh" 22.

¹⁶ Peter Leary, *Unapproved Routes, Histories of the Irish border, 1922-1972* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 50.

gave them a cross-communal commonality not shared with their co-religious in, say, the west of Kerry or the north of Antrim. Still, Ireland's partition left many Irish Nationalists adrift and presented an abrupt break with the past which was not straight forward. Charting the unapproved routes that the Catholic borderland would take, one historian points out that many of "the hitherto rising Catholic middle classes found themselves stranded politically, culturally, and emotionally by the sudden ebb of the nation-building tide," and by inclusion in Northern Ireland they were perpetuated in a history they were attempting to exit.¹⁷ If curious to the alternate political reality, opposite them on the Free State's side of the border was the prospect of a future they had envisioned for themselves.

For the people living in Kelly's Tyrone through the early years of the Northern Ireland state, there was a period of adjustment to the new norms of the state: gerrymandered politics and an unequal distribution of social services, divided cultural institutions in education, housing, and communal organizations which stemmed from the congregational divide. For security, the RUC sustained a membership base almost exclusively from the Protestant community, primarily in the former garrison towns established three centuries earlier. Rural Tyrone, and much of Mid-Ulster, continued to be strongly Irish Catholic with Republicanism an almost dormant ideology. Yet, Republican politics would take a backseat to more constitutional Nationalism during the 1930s and 1940s, paralleling the evolution of republican nationalism in the South, as demonstrated by the "Republican Party" of Éamon de Valera, Fianna Fáil.

By the 1930s, changes to the Southern political order would bring the first Fianna Fáil-led government to power. The process of a shift in domestic and foreign policy as

¹⁷ Leary, *Unapproved Routes*, 51-52.

directed by de Valera would begin and take place over the next two decades. Many of the dismal economic outcomes of the 1950s would be instigated during this time, as post-1932 Fianna Fail attempted to “build an Irish industrial base behind protective tariff barriers” which continued well beyond their Emergency-era “sell-by date” as labor demands never reached the levels needed given the high population increase.¹⁸ If the seeds of later economic collapse were first sown in the 1930s, the government would put in motion another monumental factor. The writing of the Irish Free State Constitution, the Bunreacht, would be another monumental moment in the development of Republicanism. While not accepted by the majority of radical republicans, this would be one of the first fracture points for Kelly’s brand of Republicanism: “[The hope was for] the Bunreacht to be extended throughout the country and the goal they set out [in it] to be achieved and they have no means of doing that only the old one.”¹⁹ Kelly came into his political awareness, as most do during secondary school, as the Constitution was making legal claim over the whole of Ireland. Kelly would join the IRA by 1940, and participate in operations during the Second World War, perhaps frustrated at the lack of political movement at that time.²⁰

After the time of state formation in the early 1920s, Northern Ireland moved towards a solidification of institutions and processes from the late 1920s into the 1940s. During that time, the borderland development was minimal in all governmental areas

¹⁸ John Bradley, “Changing the Rules: Why the failures of the 1950s Forced a Transition in Economic Policy-making,” in *The Lost Decade: Ireland in the 1950s*, ed. Dermot Keough, Finbarr O’Shea, Carmel Quinlan (Douglas Village, Cork: Mercier, 2004), 108.

¹⁹ Ó Baoighill, “Liam Ó Ceallaigh,” 24.

²⁰ By the time of his enlistment in the IRA, Kelly has limited career opportunities but shows both a political awareness with a desire for adventure. On the economic side, he recalls working until almost midnight during the week at the Dungannon cinema, earning seven shillings and sixpence a week, and contributing to the family finances. From Ó Baoighill, “Liam Ó Ceallaigh,” 24.

outside of security. Security became a greater emphasis during the Second World War as the divide grew between belligerent Northern Ireland and the neutral Free State.

Politically, the scale continued to be tilted towards the Unionist party and Protestants more broadly. The voting blocks were maintained, and minimal impact was made by Nationalist politicians at Stormont or local county councils. The largely agrarian Tyrone would see deprivation characteristic of much of Ireland in this era; Kelly remembers the hunger of his childhood, “In those days, my youth, my memory was of being cold, wet and hungry.”²¹ Kelly’s formative years of schooling in Dungannon would have seen the Nationalists oscillate between abstentionist policy and attempting to work within the constraints of Stormont. Neither amounted to much.

Perhaps more than many of his contemporary Republicans, Liam Kelly understood the realities of life in Northern Ireland particularly regarding the Unionist community. The Dublin-based leadership’s inaccurate picture of Northern Irish society would later be an undoing of the Border Campaign. Co-opting the language of the 1950s IRA, Kelly also knew the blunt reality of Partition: “It was clear that that the Brits could not just be forced out, and that both governments would be obliged to play a role in doing away with the Government of Ireland Act 1920 and re-examining the terms of the Treaty.”²² That self-awareness was forged on the borderland, and would later guide the political philosophy of Liam Kelly, the Stormont candidate, and then his political party, Fianna Uladh.

²¹ Ó Baoighill, “Liam Ó Ceallaigh,” 23.

²² Ó Baoighill, “Liam Ó Ceallaigh,” 25.

3.1.2: Republicanism in Mid-Ulster, 1940-1959

From the 1940s onward, two changes occurred. Foremost, the people of Northern Ireland generally enjoyed identical social welfare benefits to those of mainland Britain in a post-war embrace of government programs. Secondly, development, particularly after the Ireland Act of 1949 continued to occur disproportionately in Unionist-controlled Protestant areas of the Northeast. There was a divide between services that would be provided 'west of the Bann' and those east of the Bann River which ran vertically from southeast of Portadown through Lough Deagh on to Coleraine, bisecting the province. The waterway did mark a split between the Protestant areas of north Londonderry, Antrim, Down and north Armagh and the Catholic majorities farther westward.

Precedence existed from the start of the 20th century. The failure, or perceived betrayal, of constitutional means led to the gun being inserted in to Irish politics on the eve of the First World War. This process happened relatively quickly with the formation of the Ulster Volunteers followed by the Irish Volunteers shortly after.²³ In the middle of the century the process was more nuanced, as militancy had gone in two divergent paths: Ulster militancy to the security forces, Irish militancy in Northern Ireland to a smaller, milder IRA.

Counter-measures by the RUC had long-made the Northern IRA a shadow of its former self, but still physical force Republicanism persevered. Not long after joining his local IRA unit, Liam Kelly would be arrested by the security forces. He was placed on remand in Belfast's Crumlin Road gaol where, like Republicans before and after, he

²³ The Ulster Volunteers were founded in 1912, brought together under the Ulster Unionist Council from January 1913 onward. The Irish Republican Brotherhood began planning for their own organization, the Irish Volunteers at that time. Their formal founding occurred in November 1913.

would keep his mind sharp through the use of the Irish language. “There were Irish classes in the Crum – years God will never give me back! God forgive me! - and I was supposedly teaching some of them,” Kelly would recall years later.²⁴ It can be inferred that Kelly gained a boost in confidence with this authoritative role in the gaol, not just deriving respect through a military persona but as a cultural authority. Upon release in 1945, Kelly would make his first trip to the Gaeltacht, forever to be changed.

The years 1946-1947 were crucial for both Liam Kelly and the IRA as a movement. Kelly was back living in Tyrone when he was granted a summer teaching opportunity in Ranafast, Donegal, his first experience living outside of Northern Ireland.²⁵ The experience would be extremely formative on Kelly who immersed himself in the local culture, and it certainly would fuel his cultural advocacy shortly thereafter when he began a foray into politics. Returning to Tyrone, Kelly would continue teaching the Irish language at the primary school level. A year later, in 1947, the IRA would also make its first substantial tactical adjustments since their disastrous efforts coinciding with the Second World War. Kelly was an active IRA man and recalls the IRA meeting as a reformulation of the movement’s political and military aims:

When we started the reorganization of the IRA in the 1940s (say, 1947) some of us had made our minds up that we would not get caught with the foolishness of the 1930s: we would abandon the claim that the IRA Army Council retained legal authority over the country; to give full recognition to the Oireachtas as the lawful government of the country and the acceptance of the Constitution as the sole legal body in the land.²⁶

²⁴ Ó Baoighill, “Liam Ó Ceallaigh,” 23.

²⁵ Kelly was granted the language excursion by a Father Eamann O Doibhlin of South Armagh, “a true Gael and a proper Republican,” who offered him the chance to teach in Ranafast, Donegal for two months. From Ó Baoighill, “Liam Ó Ceallaigh,” 23.

²⁶ Ó Baoighill, “Liam Ó Ceallaigh,” 23.

While Kelly would be central to re-organizing the IRA in Tyrone, his stance on acceptance of the legitimacy of the 26-county legislature was certainly unique among the organization. Sinn Fein was still strictly abstention for both of Ireland's legislatures.

As the IRA attempted to stay relevant during rapidly changing times, the social life of Northern Ireland was changing along with the rest of the United Kingdom. The extension of the welfare state would occur as the Cold War descended on the world, security against the foreign threat became an obsession to some in Westminster, as well as in Belfast and even Dublin. With the end of the Second World War, and a new era of post-colonial politics seemed to abound; yet, there still was no cohesive nationalist opposition to the Protestant Unionist ascendancy. In continuing to withhold participation and pretend the state did not exist, Republicans were actually playing into the hands of the ruling regime at Stormont. Alvin Jackson deduced that "Nationalism had for long been debilitated, not only by the restrictive political rules devised by the state but also by their own divisions," which were partially alleviated with the launch of the Anti-Partition League in Dungannon in November 1945.²⁷ Northern Nationalism had hoped to rally around a renewed push against partition, aided by the Free State's inter-party coalition which came to power in 1948. One of the political parties to gain power, Clann na Poblachta, would attempt to drive forward a Republican vision more aligned with views held by Liam Kelly and his supporters. The Republican fragmentation and reforming of the central strands of nationalist republicanism and egalitarian-social republicanism was ongoing for much of the Free State and early Republic period, but this post-war energy

²⁷ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: War, Peace and Beyond* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 353.

did represent something new in light of developments north and south from 1949 onward.²⁸ With the declaration of the Irish Republic by Taoiseach John A. Costello, and the assurance of Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom with the Ireland Act, each government seemed squarely at odds on the partition issue. In this way, 1949 began a decade of the 1950s where political mobilization of Republicans seemed absolutely vital.

The social and economic situation along the borderland continued to be dire into 1950. As sustained disproportional Catholic emigration continued out of Northern Ireland, some to the Free State but most farther afield, many republicans would face a decision of how to act. Some chose to pursue the constitutional route politically, some chose active resistance against the state, some chose physical force resistance against the security forces, while some would choose to just leave. Liam Kelly would, in the span of a decade, do all four.

3.2: Liam Kelly's politics

Beyond the political and social convulsions and irregularities of the early decades of the Northern Ireland state, there persisted a strong Republican spirit in the context of everyday family life. For ardent nationalist areas, there remained a continuity with their Southern counterparts in communal reverence for Fenians of the past and more recent heroes of 1916 and 1919. Liam Kelly showcased a pride in his own families connections to the 1916 Proclamation of an the Irish Republic, relaying that his grandfather was a

²⁸ Eithne MacDermott, *Clann na Poblachta* (Cork: Cork University Press. 1998), 5.

close associate of one of the signatories, Tom Clarke.²⁹ If the Dungannon-born Clarke set an example of anti-British resistance to young men in the early 20th century, that spirit remained alive during Kelly's formative years.

The RUC's thorough file on Liam Kelly as of September 1958 charts his involvement with the physical force republicanism from the Second World War to the IRA's Border Campaign in significant detail.³⁰ Kelly's recruitment to the IRA occurred in 1940 and within a year, despite still being a teenager, had risen to be an intelligence officer. Arrested in Tyrone in September 1941 for possessing documents relating to the affairs of the IRA, Kelly was sentenced to two years in Crumlin Road. When the May 1943 release date came, Kelly found his imprisonment extended as he was deemed "a danger to the security of the State," remaining in jail until the conclusion of the war and a general amnesty to IRA men in September 1945. Despite his preoccupation with the Irish language, Kelly must have been frustrated spending the first four years of his twenties locked away. It was widely known that the Northern command of the IRA was infiltrated with informers and rife with internal feuds and powerful localized fomenters, primarily in Belfast.³¹ What impact would the disastrous IRA efforts during the early 1940s have on Kelly, who spent years interned because of disorderly-planned missions?

²⁹ Ó Baoighill, "Liam Ó Ceallaigh," 22. This is corroborated by RUC records that designate Liam Kelly's grandfather as William John "Fenian" Kelly. From typescript of Royal Ulster Constabulary secret report "LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH," 3 September, 1958, HA/32/1/955A, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 1.

³⁰ All details, unless otherwise noted, pertaining to Kelly's IRA involvement in this paragraph are from typescript of Royal Ulster Constabulary secret report "LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH," 1.

³¹ Des O'Hagan, dismissed from the Belfast IRA after testing with the civil service in the mid-1950s, would go on to join Kelly's Saor Uladh. O'Hagan claims that Jimmy Steele and other Belfast Republicans viewed the IRA as their private army and saw Kelly's group as "a bunch of mavericks." Arrested in 1957, O'Hagan's release in 1960 came at a point of disillusion for himself and other Northern Catholics. He explains that "the nationalist consensus in Northern Ireland was that the gun brought misery and that the time had come for a reevaluation of nationalist and republican politics..."

Kelly appeared to channel any misgivings about the recent history of the Republican movement towards productive means and new directions. The RUC recorded a decline in Kelly's direct engagement in physical force activities between 1945 and 1950, stating he was more or less inactive, but noting he remained an avowed Republican speaking at Easter 1916 commemorations in April of 1949 and 1950.³² Behind the scenes, however, Kelly was distancing himself from what he saw as outdated and corrosive Republican rhetoric.

From the 1947 Army Council meeting that reset policy for the organization, the IRA and Sinn Féin entertained a series of new approaches from political and military perspectives. If the Republican political apparatus cracked open the door to acknowledging elements of the Southern State being the idealized 'Irish Republic,' then Kelly's motives seem to kick the door in. The IRA reorganization in Mid-Ulster by the late 1940s was a sincere attempt to explore new challenges as Ireland approached a new decade with post-war realities. Northern Republicans like Kelly had no illusions as to what could be accomplished given the entrenched Unionist culture: "It was clear that the Irish Republic would not come about in one leap, even if Sinn Féin or the IRA were to be involved in the talks."³³ By "talks" Kelly means the trilateral government discussions between Dublin, Belfast and London over partition that would come out of a successful IRA campaign against the Northern Ireland state. Kelly's logic was that a British policy shift on the status of Northern Ireland would not be facilitated by force alone, and that the

glamour had been stripped from the IRA." From Martin Dillon, *God and the Gun* (London: Orion Press, 1997), 134-135.

³² Kelly read out IRA proclamations at the Easter 1916 commemorations in Carrickmore, Tyrone. From typescript of RUC report "LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH," PRONI, 1.

³³ Ó Baoighill, "Liam Ó Ceallaigh," 24.

threat of force with real political mobilization could necessitate talks between the two governments on the island of Ireland. Because of this, Kelly believed that militants had a critical role to play in maintaining a tense atmosphere for political change:

We knew well that the IRA and whatever other [militant] movements there might be would have to put up a good fight and would continue the fight for as long as necessary. We had to show the two governments that this fight would not end until they accept their part in arranging an agreement.³⁴

It is unclear precisely when Liam Kelly would come to the realization of cross-border cooperation as a political necessity to addressing – if to ultimately end – partition.

From a series of key events between late 1948 and the end of 1951, it appears Kelly charted an irreversible path forward for himself and his radical aims. From Costello's public declaration of the Irish Republic through to the Ireland Act, 1948 and 1949 were years of state solidification. The border arrangement would persist as each government prioritized economic progress. The promise of change once held by the inter-party Coalition began to fade by 1950, and its loss of government to Fianna Fail in 1951 certainly showed a return to older modes of governance under Taoiseach de Valera.³⁵ Significant, too, was the collapse of the Anti-Partition League at that time, which had been thoroughly infiltrated by more radical republican elements. Lastly, the creation of an IRA military council in 1951 commenced planning for a full-scale, meticulously devised campaign against the security forces of Northern Ireland.³⁶ Key Dublin-based IRA men like Sean Cronin (later Chief of Staff and the Director of Operations during Operation

³⁴ Ó Baoighill, "Liam Ó Ceallaigh," 24.

³⁵ Henry Patterson links the return of Fianna Fail in 1951 to a "shift towards a softer line on the North and an attempt to build up practical links in areas such as cross-border cooperation on transport and electricity production" which the APL condemned as a policy of "fraternization." From Patterson, *Ireland Since 1939, the Persistence of Conflict* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006), 132.

³⁶ J. Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army: A History of the IRA, 1916-1970* (London: Sphere, 1972), 296.

Harvest) went about formulating plans for flying columns to create “liberation zones” first along the borderland that would expand towards Belfast by crippling the state’s functionality (targeting security installations and vital infrastructure) forcing inevitable surrender from the Unionist hegemony.³⁷ This plan appears to have been devised with little to no consultation from Northern Ireland-based Republicans, even though they would have been essential collaborators for stabilizing the “liberation zones” along the border. In light of this disregard for their input, it is not surprising that Liam Kelly would act on his own accord around the time of operational planning. At the least an obvious sign of hierarchical indifference, Kelly also may have been showing his own capacity to lead unsanctioned missions on targets he deemed legitimate. After carrying out an “illegal” raid in Derry, an area outside of his official operational capacity, Kelly’s rogue spirit would get him cast out of the IRA, officially expelled for insubordination.³⁸ In September 1951, Kelly was sanctioned by IRA GHQ in Dublin as the officer commanding an East Tyrone unit; he then used this group to engage in unapproved behavior one month later. The RUC believed that cell to feature only three to four men and that Kelly was “reluctant to submit to any authority.”³⁹ Overly-simplistic, it is doubtful that the cell was that small and Kelly’s departure so small-minded: he knew full

³⁷ Barry Flynn summarizes the IRA plan as developed through the early 1950s: “Lead by flying columns, the IRA would undermine the very fabric of Northern Ireland through a series of attacks that would cripple the ability of the state to function effectively - in essence, it would collapse from within.” The wider impact was to create “so-called liberated zones within the nationalist border regions of Northern Ireland [...these] zones would provide the foundations from where the campaign would grow in strength, enabling the offensive to increase in momentum and, in theory, become an unstoppable uprising.” From Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 49.

³⁸ Hanley, “Kelly, Liam William Seán,” *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, records that Kelly “was expelled from the organisation in October 1952 for unauthorised activities,” although it appears October 1951 is the most widely held date (Farrell, *The Orange State*, 360; Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 604).

³⁹ The RUC report states “Kelly’s mind was set on action” and that he “found the I.R.A. too unenterprising and slow for him.” From typescript of RUC report “LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH,” 1.

well what a formal break with the IRA and Sinn Fein could do in allowing him to chart an alternate republican path along his own ideological lines.

Tragedy producing triumph is a common theme throughout revolutionary movements in Irish history, and here Liam Kelly would seize the opportunity to assert himself with new institutional independence. Having built a reputation and gathered considerable clout during the previous decade of activity in the IRA, Kelly would immediately build a dual political-militant organization. Saor Uladh would be, as Michael Farrell later called it, “a new Northern organization born directly out of the frustration of the minority,” those frustrated by Sinn Fein and IRA inefficiency.⁴⁰ Farrell claims that Kelly took most of the Tyrone IRA membership with him, and evidence suggests he also attracted disillusioned IRA members in Derry and Monaghan, indicated by the IRA leadership’s desire to reign back in Kelly’s expanding group as late as August of 1952.⁴¹ By that point, Kelly had taken his followers along a different path. With Saor Uladh, Kelly tapped into reserves underutilized by Sinn Fein and the Southern-based IRA, as he “won the support of a new generation of northern republicans impatient at IRA inaction and contemptuous of the Anti-Partition League’s constitutional campaign.”⁴² They remained militant with attacks on government civil servants in Dungannon in January 1953 and customs post bombings in April.⁴³ The border attacks were a sign of things to come, as Kelly selected what he perceived to be security weak points in Culmore, Molenan, and Galliagh Cross, Derry. The RUC also gained

⁴⁰ Farrell, *The Orange State*, 202.

⁴¹ Farrell, *The Orange State*, 205 and typescript of RUC report “LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH,” 1.

⁴² Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 604.

⁴³ Typescript of RUC report “LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH,” 1.

intelligence – perhaps from informants or Specials in the borderland – that Saor Uladh men were engaging in training exercises in the Ballygawley area of South Tyrone, just across from the Irish border.⁴⁴

Two public declarations twelve months apart would alter the Irish Republican landscape in Northern Ireland for the rest of the decade. In October 1952, the IRA released a statement publicly repudiating Kelly as “an erratic individual” and warning Republicans against joining him. The statement asserts that Saor Uladh’s recklessness could “endanger the liberty of loyal volunteers in County Tyrone and bring the Army in general into disrepute.”⁴⁵ One could scarcely imagine the IRA’s reputation being any lower after some of the incidents during the 1930s and 1940s, including botched arms raids and the court-martial of a sitting Chief of Staff. One year later, emboldened by his expulsion from the IRA, an organization to which he had dedicated decades of his life, Kelly was elected to the Northern Ireland legislature at Stormont. If his exclusion from the IRA surprised Kelly, his election stunned his former comrades. Resourceful and charismatic, Kelly ran for his local constituency, Mid-Tyrone, winning by a tight margin over a Nationalist Party incumbent.⁴⁶ Still, the election of a known militant Republican was a change of direction for anti-partitionist politics used to the electoral and armed split as shown by the McAteer brothers.⁴⁷ The RUC believed that Kelly’s entrance in to

⁴⁴ Typescript of RUC report “LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH,” 1.

⁴⁵ Typescript of RUC report “LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH,” 1.

⁴⁶ Kelly won 4,178 votes to Edward McCullough’s (Nationalist) 3,376 Hanley, “Kelly, Liam William Seán,” *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

⁴⁷ Derry’s famed McAteer brothers went in divergent Northern Catholic nationalist paths: Eddie the electoral route as a Nationalist Party stalwart and his brother Hugh a long-standing IRA man (although also a one-time Sinn Féin candidate for Stormont). From Eamon Phoenix, “McAteer, Edward Gerard (Eddie)” *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, eds. James McGuire, James Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), Cambridge Core.

politics was a calculation to obscure his paramilitary activity, but his candidacy for Stormont seems to have organically sprung from his desire to bring republican politics out of the shadow that had descended on the movement in the 1940s.⁴⁸ Kelly's victory in October 1953 catapulted him into the public sphere, and he would make a public declaration that immediately compromised his position.

Once he became "Liam Kelly, Stormont MP," the militant Saor Uladh moved aside to make way for a political wing: Fianna Uladh. Years later, Kelly would recall that his election was the catalyst for the party formation, calling it "an accident that Fianna Uladh came to be," after his election.⁴⁹ He was savvy enough to know he needed to standardize his party's ideology, as well as put in place party officials who could assist him in day-to-day tasks. But while showing a clear political vision, Kelly was also overplaying his hand with public pronouncements in a state still hostile to perceived dissent. Kelly knew well of the RUC's attitude towards unsanctioned meetings, seditious speech and inflammatory proclamations, yet in the wake of his election victory Kelly would speak openly and unrestricted. "I believe in the use of force, the more the better, the sooner the better," Kelly remarked on 23 October to a crowd of supporters at a victory rally; more pointedly, Kelly went on to state that the time for force was now and that "England does not understand what we mean by force but we will make them [...] understand by the strong-arm method."⁵⁰ Kelly also had directly slandered the Queen of England, calling her "a foreign queen in a bastard nation," and succeeded in attracting the

⁴⁸ The RUC report calls his candidacy in the Mid-Tyrone election "an end in itself" but then self-contradicts by writing that it was to "enhance his stock and cover up his illegal activities." Kelly was enigmatic even to the security forces tasked with tracking his every move. From typescript of RUC report "LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH," 1.

⁴⁹ Ó Baoighill, "Liam Ó Ceallaigh," 24.

⁵⁰ Typescript of RUC report "LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH," HA/32/1/955A, PRONI, 2.

ire of the Unionist state eager to suppress any perceived threat to the social fabric of the state. Kelly was duly charged and convicted for sedition, with more fireworks in the courtroom. Receiving a fine, Kelly refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the court before launching into an extended tirade stating that he had rejected the prison uniform: “you may hold me in your jails but you will hold me naked.”⁵¹ The Northern Ireland security forces would hold the 1950s ‘blanketman’ Kelly, and in a place familiar to him – Crumlin Road – most of the next year. Yet, by 1954 Kelly’s incarceration would actually lead to a second political office, this time across the Irish border.

3.2.1: Political foundation, maintained militancy

Liam Kelly was more than an inflammatory orator and Republican rabble-rouser; he held political office in Stormont and had gained, in a little over two years, a following of committed physical force republicans as well as a sizeable portion of the Tyrone electorate. He had mobilized a significant grassroots Republican movement in the heart of Mid-Ulster behind a fresh vision of what accepting an Irish Republic could be, still rejecting partition in practice but building a cooperation towards a more tenable solution for the Northern Catholic community. Fianna Uladh was meant only to draw from the Northern Ireland electorate: “Fianna Uladh has no involvement with any party in the 26 counties. Fianna Uladh has no intention of participating in the work of the 26 counties.”⁵²

⁵¹ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 34-35. Kelly was fined £100 but remained principled to the end, facing down Justice Lancelot Curran on 4 December 1953. When he asked Kelly to consider his family, Kelly quipped that he would keep his self-respect and that “[m]editation will not alter my convictions.”

⁵² Ó Baoighill, “Liam Ó Ceallaigh,” 24.

If the original design was local politics, Kelly's party would gain all-Ireland attention when he was nominated by Seán MacBride to Seanad Éireann.

MacBride, mystifying for his numerous complexities and varied iterations in Irish public and political life spanning seven decades, would be an IRA leader, party founder, international human rights activist and Nobel Prize recipient.⁵³ The French-born son of John MacBride and Maud Gonne, was IRA Chief of Staff from 1936 until 1938 before becoming a barrister – obtaining Senior Counsel status of the Irish Bar in seven years, the quickest in history to that point – and committing to a constitutional route.⁵⁴ MacBride remained a committed ideological Republican while also being practical about the state of Irish politics in the 1940s; he would take on de Valera's Emergency-era IRA policies through legal means, particularly stirring in defense of Sean McCaughey and the rights of political prisoners held in the Irish Free State. Notably, in 1946 MacBride brought embarrassment to the state in forcing an admission that the prison conditions to which McCaughey was subject were inhumane.⁵⁵ From leadership in the IRA to a leader in the legal profession, MacBride would bring a new approach to Irish politics after the Second World War in an attempt to bridge traditional Republicanism, contemporary social issues, and constitutional politics.

⁵³ Elizabeth Keane, *Seán MacBride: A Life* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2007), ix-xi. Keane links MacBride to a myriad of Irish political figures who “move from revolutionary terrorist to constitutional politician” but states he was distinct in his later international role.

⁵⁴ Keane, *Seán MacBride*, 57, 68-69. MacBride maintained a relationship with the IRA post-1938, if not entirely clear how linked he was to armed militancy there was a clear defense of IRA men in 1942 when six men were convicted of an RUC officer's murder in Belfast. MacBride organized a reprieve committee and gathered 200,000 signatures, eventually contributing to 5 of 6 men avoiding execution.

⁵⁵ Keane, *Seán MacBride*, 69-70. MacBride questioned a Portlaoise prison doctor, T.J. Duane, with “would you allow your dog to be treated in this fashion?” Duane's response was in the negative, affirming MacBride's defense of McCaughey's hunger strike as the desperate measures “that led this boy to go on hunger strike.”

While the fragmentation of Republicanism was the norm more than exception during the early 20th century, there was reason to believe MacBride's party could demonstrate something new and opportunistic when it was founded in the late 1940s. After Fianna Fail's drift to the right in anticipation of gaining ministerial posts in the late 1920s, Saor Eire was formed in September 1931 as a republican combination of radical nationalism with Connelly-inspired socialism.⁵⁶ Condemned by the Catholic Church for being a Communist organization, Saor Eire's moment was brief – the political movement lasted less than a year – yet, it showed how a republican party could advocate for socialist programs and reforms in land and farming, workers' rights, healthcare and housing.⁵⁷ MacBride's new party the Clann na Poblachta would revisit some of Saor Eire's key policy positions once in government, perhaps most notably in Minister for Health Noël Browne's reforms popularly remembered as the disastrous "Mother and Child" episode.⁵⁸

Entering into the legislature in the 1948 inter-party Coalition government, Clann na Poblachta succeeded where previous splinter nationalist republican groups had faltered. The party made a discernible contribution to the new government – formed by radicals and conservatives, Free Staters and Republicans - a Coalition that would rule three years, from February 1948 to May 1951, before a return to Fianna Fail.⁵⁹ In that

⁵⁶ MacDermott, *Clann na Poblachta*, 6. Saor Eire, with strong IRA ties, was founded by Sean MacBride, Michael Fitzpatrick, Michael Price – later to leave the IRA and become a Labour Party member – and Peadar O'Donnell, all of a physical force Republican and left-leaning political background.

⁵⁷ MacDermott, *Clann na Poblachta*, 6-7.

⁵⁸ MacDermott, *Clann na Poblachta*, 84. David McCullagh, *A Makeshift Majority, the First Inter-Party Government, 1948-51* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1998), 202-209. McCullough writes of the "crisis" in the context of Ireland's first – and perhaps only – 20th century church-state schism over public policy.

⁵⁹ McCullagh, *A Makeshift Majority*, 2-5. McCullough surveys the oddity of coalition governance in British-style Western democracies, citing the British reality of coalitions existing only in wartime or the economic low-point of the early 1930s. He further explains the uniqueness of the 1948-1951 and 1954-1957 coalitions based on ideological adherence and political cleavage; for the partnership of

time a Republic was declared, and MacBride moved his party to attempt real cooperation with Northern Ireland. Simultaneously, MacBride had integrated Clann na Poblachta into mainstream public Irish Republicanism by participating in the annual Bodinstown Wolfe Tone commemoration first in 1948 and then in successive years.⁶⁰ While some historians judge Clann na Poblachta to be a reactionary movement with a strange assortment forming the “negative consensus” of Ireland around 1950, this would diminish efforts to transition radical Republicanism towards constitutional measures fitting with the post-1949 realities North and South.⁶¹

MacBride would push for greater North-South cooperation, economically as well as diplomatically, during his time in office 1948-1951 and then again 1954-1957.⁶² In particular, MacBride made it a stated policy to bring Northern Nationalist voices in to the Oireachtas, something that de Valera and Fianna Fail had historically opposed. While it seemed implausible that a Northern representative could enter the Dáil, MacBride did see a path through the Seanad as guided by the rules of procedure; Clann na Poblachta would nominate Denis Ireland, a Belfast-born Protestant Nationalist, and the Taoiseach would appoint him in 1948.⁶³ It was established that a path forward in North-South

Fine Gael and Clann na Poblachta, he points to the basic opposition to de Valera (for entirely different reasons), marking Ireland out as a “deviant case when it comes to coalition theory.”

⁶⁰ Typescript of Gardaí Report on “1948 Wolfe Tone Commemoration,” 20 June 1948, 1, JUS/8/900, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

⁶¹ Particularly, R.F. Foster in *Modern Ireland* described the emergence of Clann na Poblachta as a reactionary movement that “brought together old Republicans, anti-Partitionists, socialists and dissident members of the Fianna Fail in what has been called a ‘negative consensus’” adding that the inner councils of the organization were IRA-dominated. While broadly factual, this demeans the movement’s electoral windfalls in 1948 and 1954 and over-emphasizes the Republican roots in shaping policy once in ministerial positions. Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 565.

⁶² McCullough, *A Makeshift Majority*, 116-122. Economic co-operation could be demonstrated in a shared interest in the Erne Scheme, the Foyle fisheries, and the Great Northern Railroad, although from 1948 to 1950 progress was certainly not linear.

⁶³ McCullough, *A Makeshift Majority*, 122-123.

collaboration could be the use of Seanad appointments, and MacBride would later look to Liam Kelly for such a nomination.

It is worth examining the political events which brought Liam Kelly into the Seanad at a time when Northern Republicanism officially failed to recognize the legal authority of the Oireachtas. By April 1951, Sean MacBride was at odds with many within his party's leadership, most notably Noël Browne, and he was wisely looking for allies elsewhere.⁶⁴ While, it is a fair critique that Clann na Poblachta's policies of Republican-socialism left little impression or evidence of either on the 1950s landscape, it was not for want of attempts at institutional change.⁶⁵

Clann na Poblachta's impact on the second inter-party Coalition, beginning in 1954, was diminished from the first as its 'external support' role placed it more on the periphery of the government.⁶⁶ However, it is at this time that MacBride would nominate Liam Kelly to the Seanad. Serving a sentence for sedition, Kelly would sign the Roll of House from Crumlin Road gaol.⁶⁷ Kelly's appointment was met with opposition from some in the establishment, notably the longtime Fianna Fail stalwart William Quirke; the Tipperary-born Senator spoke ahead of Kelly's maiden speech to denounce the practice of incorporating Northerners in the Oireachtas:

I fail to see that anybody could come in here from the Six Counties or anywhere else and tell us anything we did not know already. In other words, you would be preaching to the converted. Practically everybody in both Houses is keenly interested in the abolition of Partition. Everybody has made a very definite study

⁶⁴ MacDermott, *Clann na Poblachta*, viii.

⁶⁵ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 576.

⁶⁶ Keane, *Seán MacBride*, 210-211. MacBride biographer Elizabeth Keane writes that Clann na Poblachta's two major contributions to the second inter-party government was the Kelly nomination and then its role in collapsing the government in 1957 with proposing the vote of no confidence (210).

⁶⁷ "Seanad Éireann debate - Thursday, 22 Jul 1954," Seanad Debates, Parliamentary Debates, Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas, Leinster House, Dublin.

of the problem and would jump at any opportunity to bring about an end to this sore which has been festering in this country for a considerable number of years.⁶⁸

If the 1950s still demonstrated a period of economic transition for Fianna Fail towards the later efforts by Lemass with O'Neill, perhaps this sentiment fits. But as a continuation of previous policy, the anti-partition efforts were as unsuccessful by 1954 as any point in the post-Treaty era.

Undeterred by the hostility of detractors in his midst, Liam Kelly would deliver his first, and only, speech before the Seanad. Opening in the Irish language, he thanked his fellow Senators before advocating for the inclusion of Northern representatives in the Oireachtas. Partition was an injury to the nation, a disruption caused by state formation; Kelly employed traditional Republican rhetoric, saying “Whenever a powerful State determines to disrupt a nation by lending its financial and military support to a minority, it can usually succeed in sowing seeds of internal dissension.”⁶⁹ Britain had maintained this “scheme of disruption” throughout his lifetime, and Kelly believed the solution would first come through political re-integration and a 32-county representative parliament. By providing Northern Irish Nationalists the opportunity to place representatives in the Dáil, like Kelly and Charles McGleenan fellow Fianna Uladh Senator from Armagh⁷⁰, the Irish Republic could move closer to representing the full

⁶⁸ William Quirke, “Audience for Six-County Representative—Motion (Resumed)” (Seanad Éireann, Volume 44, 25 November, 1954), Seanad Debates, Parliamentary Debates, Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas, Leinster House, Dublin.

⁶⁹ All speech excerpts and quotes, unless otherwise noted, from Liam Kelly “Audience for Six-County Representative—Motion (Resumed)” (Seanad Éireann, Volume 44, 25 November, 1954), Seanad Debates, Parliamentary Debates, Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas, Leinster House, Dublin.

⁷⁰ Charles McGleenan, a South Armagh-born IRA man from the War of Independence, had the distinction of contesting local elections decades apart. McGleenan, first contested the constituency in 1935 and then again in 1950. Acting as an abstentionist Stormont MP from 1950-1958, McGleenan would enter his last contest in 1966, losing the Westminster election to Unionist John Maginnis. From

Irish nation. As Northern Catholics did not fully accept the Northern Ireland government which had not fully embraced them, Kelly believed that “the Irish people are prevented from determining their own affairs freely by democratic means” which would lead to “a section of our own people, the most courageous, generous and patriotic section, [seeking] to assert by any means available to them the sovereignty of the Irish people in our own country.” This aligns with political means, Fianna Uladh, maintaining a closeness with physical force tactics, Saor Uladh, to sustain pressure.

To Kelly, partition had not *occurred* but was a thing continuing to occur daily in the borderland, calling it the ongoing “dismemberment of our nation.”⁷¹ The trauma of partition on people in Kelly’s constituency could begin to be addressed when the Dáil and Seanad allowed their voices to be heard, in accordance with the Irish Constitution that claimed territorial rights over the entire island. “It would be the first step towards the extension of the Constitution to the whole of Ireland,” Kelly added that this motion would “restore the confidence of the people not only in the Six Counties but of the whole of Ireland and in her national institutions.”⁷² In the absence of that chance at national political inclusion, the alternative route is armed resistance, to which Kelly warns will lead to a loss of faith and patience and the use of direct action. Like Republicans in the

Northern Ireland Elections, “Armagh 1950-1970” Ark – Northern Ireland’s social policy hub, accessed December 5, 2019, <https://www.ark.ac.uk/elections/darmagh.htm>.

⁷¹ The full quote is: “It is an inescapable result of such a situation. That, indeed, is not a reason why we should hang our heads in shame. We might, indeed, have cause for shame were we to accept silently or without protest the dismemberment of our nation and the negation of justice to our people.” Kelly uses the present tense powerfully while otherwise discussing the historic effect of partition.

⁷² All speech excerpts and quotes, unless otherwise noted, from Kelly “Audience for Six-County Representative—Motion (Resumed),” Seanad Debates. Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas, Leinster House, Dublin.

physical force tradition before him, Kelly states that an unwillingness to advocate for the Northern Catholic population is tantamount to supporting Britain and upholding partition.

On partition, he directly addressed Costello and the government asking: “Is the Taoiseach not aware that the maintenance of Oireachtas Éireann as a Partition Assembly in the eyes of a section of the people has forced successive Governments to accept the role of watchdog, jailer and hangman to the British Empire?” This point gained the ire of Liam Cosgrave, the Minister for External Affairs, who decried Kelly’s logic as incompatible with his party’s acceptance of the Bunreacht. If he pledges his support to the government, which is given sole authority by the Irish Constitution to raise an army, then he cannot also advocate physical force. Kelly believed that literal sovereignty extended to Northern Ireland, a point Cosgrave nor the government could unequivocally endorse. In the absence of working to integrate the Northern population, the government was being negligible and left people no other option but to act. At the closing of this, and other spirited debates around the motion, the proposal failed to pass. Later, when violence again broke out along the borderland in 1956, Kelly would link the Seanad repudiation to the resumption of conflict.⁷³

Ultimately, Kelly’s spirited maiden speech had no long-term effect on politics in the Republic of Ireland. Kelly’s voice in Southern politics more broadly never reached the audience MacBride had envisioned. While Kelly failed to leave an imprint on the Southern political scene that year, his return from prison to his native Tyrone only three months before was indeed a disruptive event in Northern public life. Originally assigned twelve months’ remand, Kelly was let out early in August of 1954. Liam Kelly would

⁷³ Hanley, "Kelly, Liam William Seán," *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

travel from Belfast to Dungannon before planning a triumphant return to his home village. Word travelled fast, and a celebration was organized drawing many from the surrounding townland of Pomeroy.

Despite the orders and recent actions of the RUC, flags and flutes would accompany this local hero home to Tyrone. And while often a quiet place, Pomeroy was certainly not that on August 19th, 1954. As detailed in Chapter Two, Kelly's homecoming reception was met by RUC force. The security forces claimed they were enforcing the Flags and Emblems Act, forbidding the flying of the Irish tricolor, but they also wanted to send a message to Kelly. The Northern Irish security force response indicated that Kelly's movement was seen as a significant threat not just to social law and order but also to the peace and stability of the state's political apparatus. For the previous three decades of existence, the Northern government had enjoyed not facing any grassroots Republican challenges to their power. The RUC's response indicated the Unionist hegemony felt at least nominally threatened in the borderland, and would move over the ensuing months to minimize Kelly's impact. An examination of Kelly's political party, Fianna Uladh, reveals the values that attracted MacBride to the Tyrone-man as well as what alarmed Unionist Northern Ireland.

3.2.2: Fianna Uladh party and policy, 1953-1958

Fianna Uladh, “the Ulster Republican Movement,” was the most forward-thinking and ambitious attempt by Republicans in Northern Ireland to forge a new path since Partition. Its failure would leave a deficit in grassroots Republican activism for almost a decade, and signal a strong return to Unionist hegemonic control by the close of the 1950s. As fast as Liam Kelly’s Fianna Uladh rose, it would fall and ultimately vanish from the political scene. What were the motives and aspirations of the individuals involved in the political party, and what made it truly revolutionary in an era of wider political conservatism and adherence to the status quo?

Liam Kelly first publicly outlined his party policy in his 4 December, 1953 seditious trial: the party accepted the legitimacy of the Irish constitution and its claim that Northern Ireland comprised part of its national territory, which would be reclaimed politically and by force. His party accepted the legitimacy of the Dublin government as a manifestation of the Irish Republic, but rejected the authority of Stormont or Westminster. Kelly would also call on the Northern Ireland government to “realise that my election by the people of Tyrone is but the first indication of a new awakening.”⁷⁴ However grandiose this statement was, Kelly did set in motion a new political moment in the Catholic borderland that represented something unique in the history of Northern Ireland.

Supporters made a formal declaration at a public convention of 600 attendees held in Pomeroy on 6 December, 1954. The event conveyed the groundswell of support around Kelly and his policy to “develop an organisation of Republicans in occupied Ireland into a disciplined political movement and to use every legitimate means to bring

⁷⁴ Farrell, *The Orange State*, 205-206.

about the re-unification of the territory of the Republic of Ireland.”⁷⁵ Speaking to the Seanad in November 1954, Kelly emphatically pledged his party’s support to the Constitution and the Oireachtas, particularly if it included representatives for the people of Northern Ireland:

We in Fianna Uladh recognise the Constitution of the Republic of Ireland under which this State operates and we are prepared to work within its framework to extend its operation to the whole of Ireland. Recognising only the Constitution and the sovereignty of the Irish people, we naturally reject the claim of Britain and of any of her institutions to exercise sovereignty in any portion of Ireland. We decline to prostitute our nationality and our consciences by taking the Oath of Allegiance to the British Crown as a condition of parliamentary representation. The people of mid-Tyrone who honoured me by electing me to be their candidate have unequivocally endorsed this and have given me a mandate to take a seat in Oireachtas Éireann and nowhere else.⁷⁶

That mandate was crystallized into a political party with its own organizational structure designed to both spread Kelly’s radical brand of Republicanism and establish outposts throughout the Catholic borderland of Tyrone, Derry, Armagh and Fermanagh.⁷⁷

Fianna Uladh published its constitution in a twelve-part pamphlet around 1954 or 1955. The constitution declared, foremost, the objective of Fianna Uladh was “to secure the re-integration of Ireland as a complete, free, independent Republic, and its cultural and spiritual rehabilitation.”⁷⁸ Initially employing standard Republican language, the intent to rehabilitate Ireland culturally perhaps was a nod to Liam Kelly’s Irish language passion. The declaration both affirms conventional Republican rhetoric from the post-

⁷⁵ Typescript of RUC report “LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH,” 2 and *The Irish News*, December 7, 1953, front page (1), Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

⁷⁶ Kelly “Audience for Six-County Representative—Motion (Resumed),” Seanad Debates. Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas, Leinster House, Dublin.

⁷⁷ Typescript of RUC report “LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH,” 2. The RUC felt that the movement “seemed to lack a sense of purpose” and did not expand its base much beyond Kelly’s Tyrone (RUC report, 2).

⁷⁸ Pamphlet “Fianna Uladh, Constitution and Rules,” HA/32/1/955A, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 1.

Treaty era as well as delivers a new vision of desired collaboration with the Southern state.

While it self-declared as open to Irish people in “any part of the world,”⁷⁹ Fianna Uladh was foremost for citizens in the partitioned area: understandably, as a grassroots Northern party this was their primary target; however, it is interesting that membership was not initially extended to people across the borderland in, for example, Monaghan where Liam Kelly was known to have numerous contacts. This could have been a bluff, meant to keep the Garda at bay and not suspicious of political mobilization, or it could have been an admission that Fianna Uladh was focusing on Northern Ireland for its political base. Either way, the party was announced with some delicacy to not disrupt Clann na Poblachta’s electoral base but to act as a balance to new strands of Republicanism occurring South of the border.

Regardless, membership was based on the recognition and acknowledgement of the Bunreacht as well as the Oireachtas, radical breaks from public Sinn Fein policy at the time. This was important to Kelly, who felt Sinn Fein’s reference to the second Dáil of 1919-1921 was keeping them in the past, stunting political growth at a crucial time. Kelly objected to the IRA Army Council maintaining a claim of legitimacy, believing it futile: “There’s no point in going through it again [deferring to 1921], old nonsense, that across the years turned Irishman against Irishmen, that left under the tide” of the Civil War and subsequent IRA arrests and deaths at the hands of the Free State.⁸⁰ This break with long-standing Sinn Fein and IRA ideology would further lead to strain between Kelly and his former comrades in 1955.

⁷⁹ Pamphlet “Fianna Uladh, Constitution and Rules,” 1.

⁸⁰ Ó Baoighill, “Liam Ó Ceallaigh,” 25.

The Fianna Uladh constitution further laid out a developed organizational structure (see Figure 3.2). The Supreme Council acted as the governing body, subject to the annual Ard Fheis.⁸¹ The fourteen-member Executive was created by annual election and was designed to meet at least once every three months. Local clubs of five or more could then form but were subject to Constituency Committees (each District Committee would send two representatives). Local clubs had their own leadership structure,

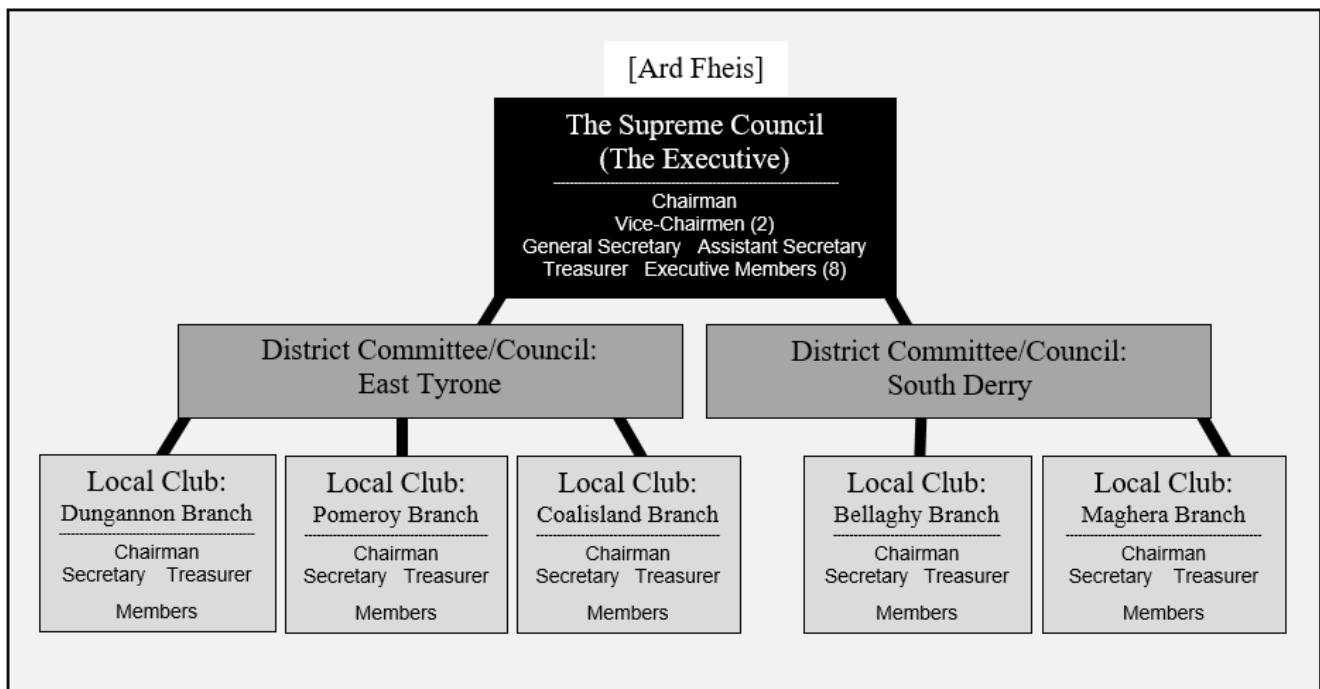


Figure 3.2: Generated by James Rynne from information contained in Pamphlet “Fianna Uladh, Constitution and Rules,” HA/32/1/955A, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 2-7.

presumably to maintain a dispersed communal presence parallel to the local councils of the Northern Ireland state, with one year terms and monthly events and quarterly general meetings. Members were to pay an annual subscriptions and have the chance to attend the

⁸¹ All details, unless otherwise noted, pertaining to Fianna Uladh’s constitutional composition, from pamphlet “Fianna Uladh, Constitution and Rules,” 2-7.

Ard Fheis as delegates of their local club. Candidates for parliamentary elections were selected from “specially convened” conventions with representatives from each club in Northern Ireland, although the Supreme Council reserved the right to refuse all nominations. The clear party structure mirrored Sinn Fein and conveyed Fianna Uladh’s desire to build clear, sustainable policies. The structure was also highly localized and attempted to incorporate input from the various established clubs at the annual Ard Fheis, which set party policy for that year.

As Fianna Uladh looked to expand its appeal from 1954 to 1955, it began publishing a periodical *Gair Uladh*. With its first edition in July 1955, the paper circulated in East Tyrone and carried statements clarifying political positions and justifying militant actions, such as the Roslea RUC attack that resulted in Connie Green’s death. As the Northern Irish government was looking to curtail Fianna Uladh’s influence, the paper was banned on 1 January, 1956.⁸² In addition to *Gair Uladh* along the borderland, two Belfast-centric⁸³ publications - *Glór Uladh* and *Resurgent Ulster* - promoted mass mobilization and attempted to rally Irish nationalists to the more radical cause. They emerged in late 1951 and had print runs through 1957 when Border Campaign arrests crippled the movement. The September 1954 edition of *Resurgent Ulster* called people to heed the ‘lesson of Pomeroy,’ namely that any division among Republicans cannot be tolerated, especially from an electoral standpoint.⁸⁴ There “must

⁸² Typescript “GAIR ULADH” [secret] RUC memorandum, HA/32/1/955A, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 1.

⁸³ *Resurgent Ulster*, particularly in the early years, was edited by Belfast IRA man Jimmy Steele, a major figure in West Belfast through the late 1950s and participant at the Wolfe Tone Commemorations at Bodinstown.

⁸⁴ Pat McGlynn, “Jimmy Steele – The life of a Belfast Republican,” *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 29 August 1985, *An Phoblacht Online*.

be no more uneven struggles like Pomeroy,” and the Catholic population needed to equal the unified front of Unionism politically, and the RUC’s might with their collective support for Republican armed resistance.

As the attempt to rally resistance in the North occurred, the RUC continued gathering intelligence on Kelly, who they labelled a “firebrand,” through his various public speeches. At the end of 1954 in Tralee, Kerry and Dublin, Kelly was reported to say the “rising generation is no longer prepared to follow the path of compromise and self-humiliation,” and, later on, that Irish reunification could only come about one way and that way “still lies open [...] the only way – armed force.”⁸⁵ Kelly was maintaining the threat of force while also fully exploring the peaceful, political route of governance.

The establishment of Fianna Uladh was initially reactionary, but quickly rooted in stable political underpinning and a desire for longevity. The structural basis was similar to Sinn Féin and Clann na Problachta at the time; policy and strategy was dependent on an annual Ard Fheis and would, ideally, link policy extending across the Irish border to Southern Republican parties. The ultimate prize would be expanding the voter base that elected Kelly in 1953 and subsequently gain more seats in elections for the Dáil, Stormont and even Westminster. To that end, Kelly would find his party at a loss, and again turn to a familiar tactic: violence.

3.3: Soar Uladh and Fianna Uladh: border and political campaigns

The increasing move towards militancy by Kelly and his followers occurred from 1955 to 1956 on the eve of the Border Campaign and included training, weapons

⁸⁵ Typescript of RUC report “LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH,” 2.

procurement and ultimately attacks. The RUC believed that Saor Uladh had over 100 adherents in Northern Ireland when it was officially outlawed on 29 November, 1955.⁸⁶ The RUC had tracked for years the existence of a training facility in townland around Tydavnet, County Monaghan, and had intelligence about weapons training with a former IRA man across the border in Donegal.⁸⁷ Only a few days before the security forces outlawed the organization, the raid on Roslea RUC barracks occurred. This attack led to Connie Green's death, the first casualty of the wider Border Campaign. Kelly had been present in the Seanad before and after leading the attack in Fermanagh, maintaining the dual political-militant strategy.⁸⁸ Within a few months of banning Saor Uladh, the Northern Ireland government also banned Fianna Uladh in an effort to muzzle Kelly. The RUC Commandos were bolstered by the end of the year, transformed from a responsive riot squad into well-armed (Bren guns, mortars and grenades) paramilitary style unit; by the spring of 1956, there were 200 B-Specials ready to be mobilized at any sign of a threat.⁸⁹ Once the political organization was classified as a threat to the state, Kelly seems to have fully committed his efforts to the armed struggle.⁹⁰ In a confidential report

⁸⁶ Typescript of RUC report "LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH," 4. This number of volunteers from Tyrone, Fermanagh, Londonderry/Derry and Belfast did not include unknown volunteers and supporters from the Republic of Ireland.

⁸⁷ Typescript of RUC report "LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH," 4. The IRA weapons trainer ("a notorious IRA gunman") was identified as Frank Morris of Convey, Donegal signaling an RUC informant at work around 1955 (RUC report, 3). Morris was quoted in Chapter One of this thesis in a conversation with Michael Ryan about late Border Campaign disillusionment.

⁸⁸ Flynn notes that there was widespread speculation that MacBride assisted with a 'hush up' effort around Green's death and burial; Gardai reportedly took a coroner to the farmhouse where Green was in order to write a death certificate and quietly bury Green in Monaghan. From Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 212.

⁸⁹ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 213.

⁹⁰ Flynn details some Belfast violence. On 2 July, 1955, a bomb exploded in the grounds of Stormont prematurely. Brendan O'Boyle, driving a car to the parliament's telephone exchange, had just split with the IRA and formed Laochra Uladh, a similar break-away to Kelly, but although "O'Boyle's death was the end of his organization [...] the drift towards violence had begun." From Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 211.

made in 1958 for the government of John A. Costello, Saor Uladh is understood to have rebuked an offer by the IRA for re-intergration in to the organization. The report claims that sometime in early 1956, the IRA made attempts to “absorb” Saor Uladh but did not on account of Kelly’s desire to continue planning missions independently from the headquarters command in Dublin.⁹¹

The Northern security forces had suspected Kelly’s paramilitary motives for years. The RUC believed that the acceptance of Southern institutions was a calculation to secure the goodwill of the authorities, and to provide further cover for illegal activities. These accusations aside, it is doubtful Kelly would have broken with IRA and Sinn Fein dogma in an attempt to deceive the Dublin authorities; he just as easily could have stayed the proscribed course from IRA GHQ and awaited the start of the Border Campaign. In the December 1955 issue of *Gair Uladh*, Kelly wrote that Saor Uladh operated solely in Northern Ireland and did not maintain bases or conduct missions in the Republic, specifically Monaghan.⁹² This is known to be patently false, and Kelly – at this point – was laying significant groundwork for an escalation in Soar Uladh attacks on border targets. Kelly was aware that there was a growing desire, particularly among young volunteers to act: “There was strong pressure on the leadership from young volunteers wanting the opportunity to act and if they weren’t given it would go elsewhere.” Despite a shortage of arms, ammunition and other resources, the armed struggle would lurch

⁹¹ Typescript “Review of the I.R.A. Organisation” in “Copies of various confidential memoranda, letters and a report concerning external affairs, finance, the IRA and Agriculture,” P190/708 (7), 4-5, John A. Costello Papers, University College Dublin, Dublin Ireland.

⁹² Typescript “GAIR ULADH,” 1.

ahead in 1956; Kelly would later remark, “we did our best and that was all there was to it.”⁹³

Training of Saor Uladh militants continued in Tyrone and Monaghan, as well as in Tipperary and Cork with disillusioned former IRA members, many of whom were followers of expelled Dublin IRA man Joe Christle.⁹⁴ After an attack on an aged Ballygawley man, a former B Special, by Saor Uladh, Northern Ireland Minister of Home Affairs Terence O'Neill condemned the group and said “I would in this context appeal to the loyal people of this Province in so far as they can not to yield to provocation, however hard and difficult it may be...” before chastising the government in the South for its lack of action against the IRA.⁹⁵ In July, the RUC engaged the militant group – with Liam Kelly and his brother Eamon reportedly leading - in a firefight as they attempted to set explosives off at the border. The RUC claim Kelly escaped over to the Republic's side and, even though he was detained by the Gardaí, escaped the incident without any formal charges.⁹⁶ Only temporarily deterred, Saor Uladh launched bombing attacks on six unguarded customs huts in Fermanagh, Tyrone and Armagh on 11 November, 1956 in what the RUC acknowledged was “probably the best planned and co-ordinated of all the Saor Uladh operations.”⁹⁷ Another post in Derry was destroyed 9 December as an

⁹³ Ó Baoighill, “Liam Ó Ceallaigh,” 24.

⁹⁴ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 58-60. In a clash of egos within the Dublin IRA, Joe Christle was expelled in June 1956 and he took with him a sizeable number of Dublin volunteers creating a splinter group based in Dalkey (Flynn 58-59). From there the IRA Army Convention in summer 1956 committed to commencing the campaign in November; if they had hesitated, it's clear Christle and his people “would find like-minded militarists in Saor Uladh in the North.”

⁹⁵ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 60.

⁹⁶ Typescript of RUC report “LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH,” 5.

⁹⁷ Typescript of RUC report “LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH,” 5. Customs huts at Tullydonnell, Carnagh, Middleton (County Armagh), Aughnacloy (County Tyrone), Contiverim, Mullan (County Fermanagh) and later Killea (County Londonderry/Derry) were completely destroyed.

afterword to the string of unsanctioned attacks; this final set of missions pushed an increasingly restless IRA to act one week later. The attacks were repudiated in the IRA's *The United Irishman*, but according to a later government report in the Republic of Ireland:

it [the Saor Uladh attacks] was undoubtedly the fuse that set off the big I.R.A. campaign which started in the Six Counties on the night of 11th-12th December, 1956, because the position had developed that most of the I.R.A. in Dublin were either moving over to the "splinter" group or withdrawing from the parent organization and standing aloof."⁹⁸

The IRA was forced to act because Kelly had pushed them to act. Subsequently, it appears that a mending of the relationship would bring some of Kelly's operations back in line with IRA headquarters. Based on the frequency of attacks during this period, Kelly had clearly pivoted from politics to armed resistance. Once the IRA entered the equation in November, the focus would be on the security force response – North and South - and its effect on the paramilitaries and its public perception. Driven by Kelly's action, the Border Campaign had begun.

3.3.1: Decade ending decline: the Border Campaign flounders

Sean Cronin and the IRA leadership built their 1950s campaign from tactics used in the 1919-1921 War of Independence. There is clear evidence of influence from *Guerrilla Days in Ireland* (published in 1949) by famed Cork IRA leader Tom Barry. A masterful tactician, Barry and the IRA of his era demoralized the forces of the crown

⁹⁸ Typescript "Review of the I.R.A. Organisation," 5.

through sabotage, attacks and assassinations.⁹⁹ The use of flying columns to launch attacks on the security forces of Northern Ireland in the hope of destabilizing was short-sighted at best. If it had succeeded, Sinn Féin in the mid-1950s lacked the political apparatus to suggest any alternate path for Nationalist areas in the would-be “liberated zones.” If Barry provided the template, sensitive to the realities of 1920s Ireland – particularly in Nationalist-heavy West Cork - and not those of 1950s Northern Ireland, the IRA made few adaptations to tactics already being employed by Kelly’s Saor Uladh or other Northern-based commanders and volunteers. The Dublin-centric leadership stayed resolute that the plan could succeed if executed properly, although it appeared Sean Cronin knew the IRA could not face down British forces; he hoped that the campaign’s core of “short, sharp exchanges with the British Army” would allow the IRA to have the advantage in choosing the time and location.¹⁰⁰

After the initial shock start to the campaign, the RUC and B-Specials rapidly responded and restored a sense of order along the borderland. Condemnation came from Northern Ireland politicians, including the Prime Minister Basil Brooke. The greatest single hindrance to the military execution of Operation Harvest was that there was no corresponding political mobilization in Northern Ireland after the initial flurry of activity. Furthermore, the nature of the ‘raids’ in to the North from across the border made day-to-

⁹⁹ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 50-51. Barry’s war manual gave details for column discipline, “rigorous training and drilling provided for volunteers over the course of a five or six week introduction. Intensive weapons preparation was undertaken, map-reading skills imparted and lectures on Irish history provided... Each column would be self-sufficient with every member completely aware of their own role within the unit.” The IRA attempted to replicate this in 1954-1956, notably in training excursions to the Wicklow mountains, but with significantly less resources and, ultimately, success.

¹⁰⁰ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 53. Flynn adds that the IRA had hoped to “draw out and engage the ‘enemy,’ forcing it eventually to disengage from the liberated area” – a tactic straight from Barry, and also one used successfully by Communist forces under, for example, Mao Zedong during China’s Civil War.

day life harder for locals and alienated even the most sympathetic of residents. The IRA failed to execute a key element of the campaign, ‘liberating’ nationalist areas along the border, and actually isolated local Catholic peoples over the course of the Border Campaign.

Despite sporadic ‘successes’ from December of 1956 until December 1957, it was clear that within that first year the RUC and Gardaí had regained the upper hand. Barry Flynn’s *Soldiers of Folly* tells how early on “the names and locations of the prime movers in the IRA’s campaign were well known to the local Gardaí on the border,” which included safe houses and training facilities, meaning nearly no operational autonomy.¹⁰¹ The RUC also went about arresting leading Nationalists and members of Sinn Féin in the initial weeks, and incapacitated the already sputtering Belfast IRA. Internment, in jails north and south, would be the largest detraction from the campaign. With Fianna Fáil back in power after the 1957 election, de Valera brought back internment – by citing the Offense Against the State Act of 1939 - as “IRA activity had been fairly constant in the North in the spring and early summer, though the only major incident had been when the Kelly-Christle group had blown up the lock gates of the Newry ship canal in May, causing considerable damage.”¹⁰²

The IRA leadership was crippled when dozens of members were arrested by the Southern authorities in June 1957, including members of the Army Council.¹⁰³ In the North, there were additional Special Powers signed to allow for “arrest without warrant, detention and internment without trial,” spearheaded by Lord Brookeborough and

¹⁰¹ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 85.

¹⁰² Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 217.

¹⁰³ Typescript of RUC report “LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH,” 4.

maintained through Terrence O'Neill's ascent to prime ministership.¹⁰⁴ Limping in to two winter campaigns, 1958-1959 and 1959-1960, it was clear the fight was lost. Mick Ryan records that amidst an effort to reorganize in the fall of 1959 he admitted to himself what many volunteers already knew: "the campaign had been over in all but name as far back as February or March 1957."¹⁰⁵ While only one volunteer's opinion, the re-introduction of internment by mid-1957 dramatically reduced the organization that had already been dealing with deficits in supplies and morale.

In an effort the Northern authorities believed was meant to breathe new life into the faltering campaign, Kelly made a fund-raising trip to the United States in October 1957. He toured, lectured and raised funds (believed to be a few thousand pounds) for five months before returning with the means to purchase weapons and a modern radio communication network, according to RUC records.¹⁰⁶ This effort would result in few discernible gains. Kelly returned to a situation in 1958 where physical force militants were reeling from internment. Still, 1957 concluded thirteen months of a campaign with a total of 366 incidents resulting in the deaths of three RUC men and seven Republicans. Beyond the Brookeborough attacks, the most notable event left four IRA men and a sympathizer dead when a bomb prematurely exploded in the November 1957 Edentubber disaster.¹⁰⁷ Another winter would curtail attacks, and arrests continued through early 1958. With the IRA's failure to achieve its stated aims of liberation zones along the border, were the political developments equally doomed at the end of the 1950s?

¹⁰⁴ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 84.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Ryan, *My Life in the IRA, the Border Campaign* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2018), 198.

¹⁰⁶ Typescript of RUC report "LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH," 4. The RUC reports that the US Immigration authorities were unsure how Kelly got in and out of the country undetected.

¹⁰⁷ Typescript of RUC report "LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH, 217.

3.3.2: Election momentum lost as the decade ends

As the physical force aims were faltering, the political gains were also beginning to decline. Politically, Fianna Uladh could never fully capitalize on the shock victory of its founder, Liam Kelly, in the 1953 Mid-Tyrone election. They would cultivate the movement and unearth candidates from the borderland, but few possessed the charisma of Kelly. Kelly's "lieutenants possessed much less ability to carry on" than their dynamic chairman, according to RUC records.¹⁰⁸ Did this lead to a decline in momentum in the initial years of Fianna Uladh? Possibly so, but also the shift back towards the armed struggle surely was more impactful on re-orienting attention and resources. In the mid-1950s, it was still unclear how a dual political-military guerrilla campaign could persist in the highly-pressurized police state of Northern Ireland.

Fianna Uladh also had to contend with the two established political parties in the Catholic Community: the Nationalist Party and Sinn Féin. Many would still regard Sinn Féin as the flag-bearers of Republicanism, and Kelly had to tread carefully not to upset the prevailing order when elections were called in 1954. Sinn Féin was still an electoral political force – albeit a diminishing one – in Northern Ireland between 1954 and 1959, negotiating a clear path with Nationalists in numerous constituencies. For Northern Catholics, election results in 1949 and 1953 were overall deeply disappointing, and cast the constitutional route as hopeless while showing the strength of Unionist mobilization. Violent republicans, Alvin Jackson believes, would seize the opportunity to elect Kelly in

¹⁰⁸ Typescript of RUC report "LIAM KELLY AND SAOR ULADH," 2.

1953 and then two Republicans to Westminster in 1955.”¹⁰⁹ And while the Border Campaign was almost entirely conceived as a military venture with no actual plans in place for the governance of liberated borderland areas, an attack would cast a long shadow on the 1957 Irish general election.

The 1957 election was the first electoral contest on either side of the border since the Border Campaign had begun in December 1956. The collapse of the second inter-party coalition was brought about by Clann na Poblachta’s motion of no confidence in early 1957; the party withdrew support for Costello’s government over the continuing bleak economic picture and the government’s movements to curtail the IRA.¹¹⁰ In the decade since its founding, the excitement around Clann na Poblachta had dissipated. In the election, their vote share dropped to 22,000 and they won only one seat; Seán MacBride would lose his first of three successive efforts to regain his Dublin South-West seat.¹¹¹ The party would disband in 1965, as the 1961 general election was a watershed for major parties: Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and Labour returned 92% of the Dáil seats.¹¹²

The main context for 1957, and a rise in public support for Republicanism, was the death of two IRA volunteers: Sean South and Fergal O’Hanlon. The funeral of South occurred on 4 January, 1957 at time of massive public support for the IRA and by extension Sinn Féin; yet the general election on 5 March returned Fianna Fail with a large

¹⁰⁹ Jackson, *Ireland, 1798-1998*, 354. Jackson writes: “The freelance militancy of Liam Kelly, a Pomeroy man who had been expelled from the IRA, caught the imagination of demoralized republicans in the west; and in 1953 Kelly was elected to Stormont for Mid Tyrone on an abstentionist ticket. In addition, the return of two Republican members at the Westminster election of 1955 seemed to highlight a broader degree of electoral endorsement for a militant initiative.”

¹¹⁰ Keane, *Seán MacBride*, 210-211.

¹¹¹ Keane, *Seán MacBride*, 211. Losing the general election in 1957, MacBride then lost a by-election in 1959, and finally the general election in 1961 in his bid to regain the Dublin area seat

¹¹² Dáil Éireann - 17th Dáil 1961. “General Election of 4 October 1961,” Elections Ireland, accessed March 1, 2020, <https://electionsireland.org/results/general/17dail.cfm>.

majority, placing them in government until 1973.¹¹³ For some Southerners, this would be the only moment the IRA and Sinn Féin would gain notoriety; for one noted historian, this electoral context would be the only mention of the IRA or Sinn Féin in the 1950s: “Sinn Féin returned four TDs in the 1957 general election, but this was a temporary upsurge, not repeated.”¹¹⁴ Indeed, Sinn Féin attempted to repeat the performance but would never again come close to the vote share gained in March 1957. In the North, Sinn Féin over-played the 1955 results and it is unlikely Sinn Féin had for a moment a northern mandate; many of the votes cast in 1955-1957 showed themselves to be a rejection of Unionism’s ineffectiveness, not an endorsement of the Republican movement.

One year after the electoral gains and high tide of public support, the militant Republicans were losing the battle over the border. The Sinn Féin electoral bubble had burst by March 1958 as little was occurring outside of the Fermanagh and Monaghan borderland. One IRA Border Campaign historian notes: “the IRA was coming to the spring and summer months without having made any progress during the second year of the campaign.”¹¹⁵ The Sinn Féin electoral success was not repeated thereafter. When Lord Brookeborough called an election in the spring of 1958 the border was the key electoral issue on people’s minds, even more so than the economy. For this election Sinn Féin and Fianna Uladh were both officially banned so they fielded no candidates and conducted no canvassing; locked out from the political process, their message was muted and allowed a Unionist triumph. In the press, Sinn Féin had asked for a ‘shadow election’

¹¹³ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 617.

¹¹⁴ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 576.

¹¹⁵ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 159.

to spoil the Unionist vote, and even with four Labour candidates winning in Belfast, Sinn Féin gained an abysmal 2,700 votes.¹¹⁶ The Catholic electorate had spoken by refraining from acting: the wind was out of the sails. As the Border Campaign came into sharper focus as a total military failure from 1958 to 1959, the short-term political humiliation compounded the failure. Internment would cripple the IRA efforts North and South and crush any momentum built up in the years 1955-1957.¹¹⁷

Even if the IRA executed a brilliantly destabilizing military campaign against the security forces in Northern Ireland, a political apparatus was needed to maintain momentum within the wider nationalist community. Farrell theorizes that this was “possibly the most unpolitical phase of its [the IRA’s] history” and suspicion of leftist views and parliamentary politics left supporters no “channel [for their] energies into the mass resistance which is complementary to all guerrilla campaigns.”¹¹⁸ Nationalists in the 1950s were still in a sizable minority in the state. Despite having Catholic majorities in the crucial borderlands of Fermanagh, east Tyrone, and south Armagh, Northern Ireland was an entrenched Unionist political entity. Perhaps most striking is the fact that despite the IRA’s efforts to demolish the border between the Republic and “occupied” Northern Ireland, the campaign actually *hardened* it for the first time in its existence. Unionists rallied around the idea of “securing the border,” and no cohesive Republican counter-movement materialized. Arguably, where Liam Kelly could most have been an

¹¹⁶ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 159.

¹¹⁷ Alvin Jackson: “The reasons for this are not hard to locate: both governments dealt with vigorously with the militants – both used internment.” From Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998*, 354.

¹¹⁸ Farrell, *The Orange State*, 221.

asset to the IRA, he was shunned and ostracized by the Dublin-based leadership due to envy and provincialism.

3.4 Fallout and emigration

Reflecting on the end of the Border Campaign, a long-time associate of Liam Kelly is clear about his impact on the IRA effort: “The campaign is said to have lasted from 1957 to 1962, but the truth was that it actually ended the day Saor Uladh attacked an armed RUC vehicle near Clogher [...] with two people were seriously injured, at the end of 1960.”¹¹⁹ This incident was one of the final discernible public moments for Liam Kelly in Northern Ireland. Not long after, Kelly made the decision to emigrate.

By the time he would emigrate to New York in 1961, Liam Kelly had ridden an electoral tide into offices in both states and – nearly as speedily – lost both political platforms. Northern Ireland had criminalized Kelly in a number of ways: he was interned a number of times, his political party was outlawed and his publications were made illegal. While Kelly’s life story is unique in a multitude of ways, in emigrating from Ireland he did as thousands of his countrymen were choosing to do. Most historians view the large-scale exodus from the island of Ireland in the 1950s as the result of two phenomena: one, an engrained cycle of leaving within Irish society and, two, particularly the domestic economic environment with a clear lack of sustained growth.¹²⁰ Kelly would certainly point to the limited economic opportunities available to him and his

¹¹⁹ Ó Baoighill, “Liam Ó Ceallaigh,” 24.

¹²⁰ Enda Delaney, “The Vanishing Irish? The Exodus from Ireland in the 1950s,” in Dermot Keogh, O’Shea, Finbarr, Quinlan, Carmel (eds) *The Lost Decade: Ireland in the 1950s* (Douglas Village, Cork: Mercier, 2004), 84.

young family by the end of the 1950s. One could also surmise that Kelly felt isolated by the Republican movement and frustrated with the unwillingness of the movement to evolve. In New York he would have found a more dynamic world, although one very foreign to his native Pomeroy.

Having made a fund-raising trip to the United States in 1957-1958, Liam Kelly would have gotten a taste of life abroad and living away from the political and social confinement of Northern Ireland. Kelly himself also indicated that, as his family grew, stable work remained elusive. "I did not have a job nor any chance of getting one. The small business I had, I was losing money in it."¹²¹ Kelly had worked in the early 1950s, before his election, as a shop manager for the Tempo Cooperative Society, as well as teaching Irish classes.¹²² While it is not clear what failed business Kelly ran in the late 1950s, he certainly found himself in a dire financial situation at the end of 1960: "When I sold all my possessions, my lorry and everything else, and then when I had settled all the bills I was left with £193."¹²³

When Kelly and his family chose to move to New York in 1961, they were not alone: from 1958-1961, over one-third of the Irish admitted to the US went to New York City; and for those who moved to major cities, half chose America's largest metropolis.¹²⁴ Kelly would settle in the Bronx, near St. Anthony's parish that would presumably form part of his parish-communal experience for the next twenty years. He worked for the New York Transit Authority, as a bus driver, and he also pursued a

¹²¹ Ó Baoighill, "Liam Ó Ceallaigh," 24.

¹²² Hanley, "Kelly, Liam William Seán," *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

¹²³ Ó Baoighill, "Liam Ó Ceallaigh," 24.

¹²⁴ Linda Dowling Almeida, "A Great Time to Be in America: The Irish in Post-Second World War New York City," in Dermot Keogh, O'Shea, Finbarr, Quinlan, Carmel (eds) *The Lost Decade: Ireland in the 1950s* (Douglas Village, Cork: Mercier, 2004), 211.

university degree in English years later.¹²⁵ Kelly took to life in New York and seemed reinvigorated in his new life and the new opportunities for success he encountered while living in the United States.

It is possible that Kelly believed he could regain a public persona and aid the Republican cause from abroad better than he could in rural Mid-Ulster. It must be noted that Irish-American advocacy for the ending of partition never historically paid significant dividends, and successive visits by Irish politicians to America yielded nothing: Frank Aiken (1941), Eamonn de Valera (1948), Sean MacBride (1951) met rousing crowds and state department officials, but the policies of Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower and even John F. Kennedy never deviated from the US-UK special relationship.¹²⁶ When Kelly landed in New York, President Kennedy would have considered the UK Prime Minister Harold Macmillan one of his closest allies, and the issue of partition to be an Irish-British concern only. Still, while in New York, Kelly would remain active in Republican clubs. As Northern Ireland of the 1960s became more volatile, Kelly championed Cathal Goulding in 1969 and – amidst the Official-Provisional split – maintained an allegiance to the Official IRA into the late 1970s.¹²⁷ While Kelly never again lived permanently in the state of Northern Ireland, he certainly aided in fund-raising for the IRA at least two decades after emigrating.

¹²⁵ Ó Baoighill, "Liam Ó Ceallaigh," 22, 24. Kelly would write: "I spent twenty years there [in New York, working for the NYTA] and then came back to Ireland. When I retired, I was the regional head in Manhattan and I had previously been the supervisor of labor relations."

¹²⁶ Maurice Fitzgerald, "Ireland and the US in the Post-War Period," in *The Lost Decade: Ireland in the 1950s*, eds. Dermot Keogh, Finbarr O'Shea, Carmel, Quinlan (Douglas Village, Cork: Mercier, 2004), 199-202.

¹²⁷ Hanley, Millar *Lost Revolution*, 142, 388-389. While Kelly was receptive to Goulding, he and his associates were less cordial to two Belfast Provisional representatives, Sean Keenan and John Kelly (no relation) later in 1969.

Was Liam Kelly's decision to emigrate an admission that the Irish Republican cause was a lost one by 1960? Had all his efforts to reorganize the IRA, create a grassroots movement in Tyrone and affect political policy change been for nothing? While flawed, the Republican movement was not doomed to fail, at least in maintaining political momentum. Had Kelly been able to build more of a Southern political base, even in north Monaghan or Cavan, he could have continued to grow his grassroots Republican efforts on a local level with influence from Dublin. He had MacBride as a backer, but in being drawn back to physical force tactics would alienate the Dublin establishment and the governments of Costello and de Valera. While a military victory was always a fantasy for the Republican movement, they could have in fact better leveraged popular mobilization along the borderland to gain traction, politically if not fully militarily. The rise of borderland Republicanism only a decade later, as noted by Peter Leary in *Unapproved Routes*, occurs "when a sustained military and political challenge, specifically to British state power, did emerge from the late 1960s onwards, [drawing] significant support from border areas."¹²⁸ A set of key factors, political, social and militant, certainly could have shifted the standard narrative for 1950s Irish Republicans.

Still, the IRA had no clear policy other than physical force and "no serious political organisation to mobilize their supporters and channel their energies into the mass resistance which is complementary to all guerrilla campaigns, and which might have steeled the Nationalist population to continue active support despite RUC and B Special harassment," according to Flynn.¹²⁹ At the end, the campaign was more of an annoyance

¹²⁸ Leary, *Unapproved Routes*, 205.

¹²⁹ Flynn, *Soliders of Folly*, 221.

to the Unionist government of Northern Ireland than any campaign of liberation. As this become clearer to Liam Kelly, it is understandable he'd look for a fresh start.

3.5 Conclusions, continuity and change

Irish Republicanism in Tyrone, of course, persisted after Kelly's departure. He was one of many 20th century Republican figures who had their political aspirations dashed and faded, subsequently, from the scene. In the decade he emigrated, though, a new brand of Irish Republicanism would rise to meet the state – and Loyalist paramilitaries – in a violent struggle unparalleled in scope, strategy and trauma: the Troubles (1968-1998). One of the most famous IRA units during the 1980s operated in Liam Kelly's former heartland. The East Tyrone Brigade was spearheaded by James Lynagh and Patrick McKearney and successfully carried out a number of attacks on the security forces in the 1980s. The mode of their attack drew comparisons to a main 1950s Saor Uladh/IRA tactic: surprising an RUC barracks with an explosion before opening fire on it hoping to kill and maim those inside while extracting weapons and possibly intelligence. East Tyrone IRA men were aided by Monaghan volunteers in what former RUC Special Branch officer William Matchett calls cross-border collaborative units.¹³⁰

Did the IRA decentralizing in to cell structured attacks in the 1980s harken back operationally to the Border Campaign? While that tactical parallel is obvious, the situation on the ground was markedly different as the Northern Ireland security forces employed deadly force. In the failed April 1987 attack in Loughgall, Armagh, a nephew

¹³⁰ William Matchett, *Secret Victory: the Intelligence War That Beat the IRA* (Belfast: William Matchett, 2016), 23.

of Liam Kelly was killed. The 32-year-old Patrick Kelly was one of the eight IRA men killed that day (in addition to one civilian shot dead by the SAS) the single greatest loss of life by a republican paramilitary unit during the Troubles. The ramifications were significant, as the former Special Branch detective attests to:

They [the East Tyrone IRA] stood the entire brigade down after Loughgall. It totally wrecked them. The witch-hunt for a mole destroyed them mentally. They'd lost all confidence. Nobody was in a rush to join or at least nobody with any sense. After Loughgall they were never the same.¹³¹

From Loughgall the security forces could begin reversing a slide in the rural borderline that had been going on since the 1970s, particularly in South Armagh. Matchett again provides insight in to the way the RUC viewed taking down the East Tyrone unit:

“Success at Loughgall publicly showed where the balance of power lay in the intelligence war. It gave Special Branch vital momentum against the IRA that neither they nor their political partner [Sinn Fein] could stop.” The RUC had briefly lost momentum in December 1956, but would regain it to turn the tide against the IRA raids in the Border Campaign. In a deadlier conflict, and at a time, the 1980s, when the Provisional IRA had begun to extend no-go areas in the rural borderland such a turn was crucial to the Northern security forces. “For a beleaguered police force and a long-suffering public, what happened at Loughgall convinced many for the first time that the IRA was beatable. Loughgall was the beginning of the end,” and the RUC would again claim victory against physical force Republicans. As formidable as the Provisional IRA had been for a time, it reached a political reality by the 1980s that the armed struggle was not enough. Even reaching a stalemate with the Northern Ireland security forces and British Army did not

¹³¹ All quotes in this paragraph from Matchett, *Secret Victory*, 23.

ensure an end. A new political strategy would be forged but take a decade and a half to evolve before it blossomed into the multi-party peace process.

When examining the strategy pursued by Sinn Féin in the 1990s in the run-up to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, it is striking that its core principles were aligned with policies promoted by Fianna Uladh and Liam Kelly almost four decades earlier. Asked in 2009 about the role of reformed Republicans in the peace process, Kelly affirmed that “[o]f course, Sinn Féin and the IRA have significantly changed their policies today [...] a good thing, [considering that] I was asking them myself, Saor Uladh and Fianna Uladh, to change their policies for the past fifty years.”¹³² Kelly appreciated the eventual acceptance of the Oireachtas and the acknowledgement of politicians who allowed them a seat at the table.¹³³ If Sinn Féin had leveraged Liam Kelly’s political influence in Tyrone, it may have led to a more sustained political impact through the 1950s. Kelly had transitioned around 1953 from only the use of physical force to the politics of force to address grievances; once he made the transition, he could not reverse course. Losing his seats at both legislatures North and South spelt the end for Fianna Uladh and for Kelly the politician. He would go elsewhere to continue advocating but with different methods. By the 1980s he was retired, finished with radical Republican politics, and built a home in Magheraroarty, Donegal. “It was my wish from the first day that I set foot on the Donegal Gaeltacht land, to have a small house and live there,” Kelly would say, adding “who knows if the God of Grace will grant this old fella a few more

¹³² Ó Baoighill, “Liam Ó Ceallaigh,” 25.

¹³³ Ó Baoighill, “Liam Ó Ceallaigh,” 25. Specifically Kelly names the SDLP’s Hume and Fianna Fail leaders: “The way it is now is that they give recognition to the Oireachtas and to the Constitution and praise due to Hume, Haughey and Reynolds who brought them in from the cold.”

years to get pleasure and contentment out of it.”¹³⁴ Liam Kelly would pass away two year later, in 2011, at the age of 88; Martin McGuinness would pay tribute to Kelly as a man who gave the Irish people “many decades of service,” and in a multitude of ways.¹³⁵ In the end, Kelly’s legacy is one of personal rehabilitation and innovative thinking for an era that was constrained by the unavoidable, sometimes uncomfortable, realities of time and space and circumstances in the borderland.

¹³⁴ Ó Baoighill, “Liam Ó Ceallaigh,”. 25.

¹³⁵ Hanley, "Kelly, Liam William Seán," *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

CONCLUSION

The 1950s was not a *lost* decade in Ireland, but it was indeed a *costly* decade. The IRA Border Campaign cost both states money: £350,000 a year in the Republic and £500,000 extra a year in Northern Ireland.¹ Damage was estimated at £700,000, and one attack alone on Newry canal caused £50,000-worth of repairs.² Money was put towards mending the state's infrastructure and symbols that had made easy targets for Republican attacks: customs huts and courthouses were the physical manifestation of partition. Irish Republicans felt their campaign of violence to destroy these symbols, and destabilize the state, could force their desired political solution: reunification. Met by a security force response, the counter-insurgency measures cost significant amounts of funds, as well as the security forces' time and effort.

The IRA's efforts, the Border Campaign, would also cost the Irish borderland some goodwill between the RUC and the Catholic community. More broadly, the state was cost some gains in cross-community capital that had been building slowly for decades.³ The failures of the Border Campaign would cost some Sinn Féin and IRA figures their status within the organizations. Speaking with the British Ambassador to Dublin in 1961,

¹ Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 2001), 608.

² Barry Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly: The IRA Border Campaign 1956-1962* (Cork: Collins Press, 2009), 147. In April 1957, "a bomb attack on the Newry Canal, which caused £50,000-worth of damage, was attributed to the Saor Uladh/Christle faction."

³ Sam Logan, *The Life of Sir Basil Brooke, Bart., The First Viscount Brookeborough* (Kibworth, Leicestershire: The Book Guild Ltd., 2018), 186. In a 1959 meeting of the Young Unionists, a motion was brought up to open (gradually) the Unionist Party to Catholics who showed they wanted to preserve the Union with Great Britain. Given the campaign, such a suggestion seemed ill-timed.

Taoiseach Sean Lemass explained the campaign had lost all momentum, as its early leaders knew their efforts were “futile.”⁴ When the IRA ceasefire brought the campaign to a halt a few months later, the resounding loss cost the Republican movement prestige, and rightfully so. Cathal Goulding would give the oration at the 1963 Wolfe Tone commemoration at Bodenstown, and while many of the rituals and routines were unchanged, his speech spoke of a new path: he affirmed the Republican objective to re-integrate the six counties of Northern Ireland but called for new measures to obtain it such as reaching out to the Protestant community as allies instead of foes.⁵

A political moment was lost as some initial gains by Republicans in the South – from the traditional flag-bearer Sinn Féin to Clann na Poblachta and Liam Kelly’s Fianna Uladh – were squandered by the end of the decade. In the Republic, Lemass led Fianna Fáil in a new economic and international direction, as the party continued to hold office until 1973. In Northern Ireland, the Unionist Party remained supremely confident electorally as the party leadership transitioned to Terence O’Neill and his vision for a *newer*, but still institutionally flawed, Northern Ireland. Both states stabilized behind established parties, and at the cost of minority voices.

The futile efforts of Republicans cost an opportunity amidst the backdrop of social turmoil. The 1950s were perceived as a “lost decade” due to dire economic

⁴ Matt Treacy, *The IRA 1956-69, Rethinking the Republic* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2011), 12-13. The full quote by Lemass to the British Ambassador, Ian MacLennan, in late 1961 was: “[It] had lost much of its strength and most of its earlier leaders who had the intelligence to realise that their campaign was futile.”

⁵ Ultán Gillen, “Theobald Wolfe Tone and the Common Name of Irishman in 1960s Ireland,” *Uncertain Futures: Essays about the Irish Past for Roy Foster*, ed. Senia Paseta, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). Oxford Scholarship Online, 2016, 216. Goulding would signal political and social progressions in 1960s thought, but grounded it in Tone’s life saying: “Tone’s dictum about uniting Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter had been paid only lip service.”

circumstances. Life in the 1950s Republic of Ireland was difficult as the economy continued to decline and the population dwindled.⁶ The failure of the traditional Republican campaign of violence brought about no change in the attitudes of the two traditional nationalist ideologies in Northern Ireland. On the partition issue, the state was in 1961 the same as it had been in 1949, at least in the entrenched communal mentalities. The only tangible change was a strengthening of border defenses by the RUC and B-Specials who had the necessity of their preparedness and vigilance reinforced by the cross-border attacks and sporadic moments of insurrection from Northern Republicans.

Most significantly, the IRA Border Campaign which should impact any effort to interpret the decade – and which has formed the core study of this project – cost lives. Twelve Republicans and six RUC officers died between 1956 and 1962. The conflict cost people bodily harm – 32 members of the security forces were injured – and it cost people their freedom: over 200 people were convicted and sentenced to time in prison, while countless more were remanded for suspected Republican sympathies.⁷ One of the men who fought, in the Seanad and in the border raids, was the enigmatic Liam Kelly.

The Northern cultural nationalist, and dedicated Republican, Liam Kelly showed for a moment what could happen with grassroots mobilization. He rose to prominence and was elected to Stormont in 1953 and appointed to the Seanad in 1954. Kelly's political impact was muted in the Southern state, however, where he failed to make an imprint on the immutable, rigid conduct of the Seanad. Yet, viewing his political career

⁶ Flynn, *Soldiers of Folly*, 4. Flynn's introduction describes Ireland as "a clinically depressed place far removed from the entity we know today," citing the staggering population decline. One in five adults would emigrate as "the population had fallen to its lowest-ever level and the establishment of the Irish Republic in 1949 had not brought any tangible prosperity."

⁷ Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, 607-608.

through a contemporary lens can demonstrate the power of inclusive identity politics and reconciliatory gestures. Kelly's presence in both parliaments on the island of Ireland, when his Republicanism was thirty years ahead of its time, was significant in itself.

As Kelly abstained from his seat at Stormont, the government of Northern Ireland moved to blunt the effects of his political party by declaring them illegal and banning their publications. The security forces continued to make public life difficult for the organization, as the culture clash between the RUC and republican gatherings over things like tricolors persisted in the mid-1950s. Fianna Uladh frustrated, the militants of Saor Uladh sprang into action in 1955, triggering the IRA's early movement of the Border Campaign. By 1957, the campaign was faltering because of failed operations, disasters like the Brookeborough raid, and internment north and south. By the time that Saor Uladh buried another volunteer, in spring 1958, the RUC file on Liam Kelly was thick and his organization compromised. Kelly lost his political office that year and began to doubt the cause he had so long championed. Like many of his generation, Kelly ended the decade of the 1950s by emigrating to New York, not to return to Ireland until the 1980s. It was a meteoric rise, and just as precipitous a fall for Tyrone's radical Republican, Liam Kelly. Kelly would be emblematic of the decade in that successes were obscured by failure, and frustrations with the past seemed to limit hopes for the future. Still, as one historian of the decade has surmised:

Underneath the surface apathy and even disillusionment, there was a new restless, modernizing spirit, which was eventually to make itself felt in many spheres, public and private. Though the bastions of tradition [...] continued to stand immobile like stone walls, they were being steadily undermined. So when, inside a decade, they collapsed with a suddenness that surprised many people, the credit

was rarely given to the submerged radicalism of the generation which had tunneled through their rock-hard foundations.⁸

That radicalism would arise in the 1960s to shake the foundations of both states. While their status would seem unchanged by the end of the 1950s, the rumblings along the borderland had been made by those tunneling, attempting to find new light.

Ultimately, the 1950s revealed the nature of the two bordering states on the island of Ireland. The Northern state was a realm different from its Southern counterpart in numerous ways: the bond with Great Britain, the adherence to strict security measures - from cultural demonstrations to dissenting political parties – and even its view of the past shaping present perceptions of loyalty and citizenship. The Southern state was still coming to terms with its recent proclamation of full independence from Britain, facing dismal domestic circumstances, all the while looking hopefully to future progress. While some in the Southern state began the decade with hopes of ending partition and integrating the Northern state into an all-island collaborative, the status of reunification was never promising. The plan had faults from supply constraints to political limitations. The borderland remained a state of mind where multiple histories converge, the product of conflict, rooted in the colonial and religious struggles that had long forged the modern state.⁹ The status of the borderland, which experienced disruptions from street protests to border raids, remained unchanged by decade's end. The border states remained as traditionally they had been: those looking to end partition and those steadfast in defending their realm.

⁸ Brian Fallon, "Reflecting on Ireland in the 1950s," in *The Lost Decade: Ireland in the 1950s*, eds. Dermot Keogh, Finbarr O'Shea, Carmel Quinlan (Douglas Village, Cork: Mercier, 2004), 47.

⁹ Peter Leary, *Unapproved Routes. Histories of the Irish border, 1922-1972* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 24.

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