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# The Rise and Fall of the Friends of Irish Freedom: How America Shaped Irish American Nationalism in the Twentieth Century

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The Rise and Fall of the Friends of Irish Freedom: How America  
Shaped Irish American Nationalism in the Twentieth Century

By  
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## ABSTRACT

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The Rise and Fall of the Friends of Irish  
Freedom: How America Shaped Irish American  
Nationalism in the Twentieth Century

No other immigrant population to come to the United States in the twentieth century was as large, as ethnically tied to their home country, or as vocal in local politics than the Irish. The millions of Irish who flocked to the United States in the twentieth century brought with them memories of British oppression as well as hope for a better life. Irish Americans during this time were paying close attention to the struggle for independence unfolding back in Ireland. The idea that the establishment of an Irish Republic could directly benefit the United States as well as Irish Americans was also widespread. The extent of these nationalist tendencies and support for Ireland within America manifested itself in the creation of the Friends of Irish Freedom in March 1916.

The Friends of Irish Freedom were an Irish American nationalist organization that consisted of prominent leaders and members from other nationalist groups that also attracted more moderate Irish Americans. This thesis focuses exclusively on the leaders and activities of the Friends between 1916 and 1921. During these years membership both skyrocketed and plummeted within a matter of months. Contributing to both their rise and fall was American public sentiment, the onset and conclusion of World War I, and interactions with nationalist leaders in Ireland. My thesis shows how despite their seemingly radical nationalist activities and beliefs, it was the gradual

Americanization of the Friends' leaders that ultimately led to a split within the group and a decline in their influence. The Friends of Irish Freedom at their height raised millions of dollars in support of an Irish Republic, organized massive educational publicity campaigns about the struggle of Ireland under British rule, and effectively used their influence within both the Democratic and Republican parties to gain Congressional support of the fight for Irish independence.

## Chapter 1

### The Immigrant Experience and Early Irish American Nationalism

No other nationalist organization was as influential or prominent in Irish American politics in the twentieth century than the Friends of Irish Freedom. Lending their financial as well as congressional support to Ireland's leaders, the men and women of the Friends worked tirelessly to promote the Irish cause in America. The Friends made many contributions to Ireland's fight for freedom, however by 1920 a split would occur between the ideology of Irish American and Irish nationalism. In order to gain an understanding of the root of Irish American nationalism and the legacy of nationalist agitation within the United States from which the Friends descended, one would have to examine the experiences and beliefs of early Irish immigrants.

After the Great Famine swept across Ireland between 1845 and 1852, millions of Irish immigrants flocked to the shores of America in hopes for a better life. Many looked to the United States as a place of new hope and opportunity that would erase the traumas of the past. They may have left behind starvation, poverty, and oppression, but they never forgot the land of their fathers. Second, third, and fourth generation Irish Americans carried with them the "folk memories" of British discrimination and landlords evicting them from their homes.<sup>1</sup> The fight for an independent Ireland began long before the 1900s, with insurrections beginning as early as the seventeenth century.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas N. Brown, *Irish American Nationalism, 1860-1890* (New York: J.B Lippincourt Company, 1966), p. 24.

Immigrants brought their hopes for Irish freedom with them to America and by 1850 there was a branch of Irish nationalists in the U.S. called the Fenian Brotherhood. Dedicated to securing Ireland's independence from British rule, this wing of Irish nationalism in the States swelled in its numbers but was eventually dissolved after pressure by papal authorities.<sup>2</sup> The next fraternal brotherhood to arise from the ashes of the Fenians and carry on their mission was Clan na Gael. Founded in 1867, the Clan shrouded itself in secrecy and retained characteristics of a freemason society.<sup>3</sup> The organization also had close ties with Dublin and quickly took on a militant persona in the U.S., acting as an extension of its revolutionary, fraternal counterpart in Ireland, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB).

The effectiveness of the Clan was damaged by negative public opinion in the U.S. toward Irish American groups, as well as their links to militancy. A shifting support base within Ireland as well as ideological clashes with Irish leaders continued to weaken their position in the States. Internal conflicts usually revolving around strategy or political ideology, a common theme in Irish American nationalist groups, caused a split in the Clan that was not healed until 1900. During this time men such as John Devoy, Daniel F. Cohalan, and Joseph McGarrity emerged as leading figures.<sup>4</sup> Despite the rejuvenation of the Clan in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it became apparent as tensions boiled over in Ireland that

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Tansill, *America and the Fight for Irish Freedom* (New York: The Devin-Adair Co., 1957), p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Francis M. Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question, 1910-1923: A Study in Opinion and Policy* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1978), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

nationalist organizations were going to have to better unite the Irish American population of the United States. In March 1916 an Irish Race Convention was held in New York City to bring together all the major Irish American leaders and citizens concerned with the direction the fight for Irish independence was taking.

One of the most important results of this Convention was the creation of the Friends of Irish Freedom (FOIF). The mission of the organization as stated in their constitution was to “encourage and assist any movement that will tend to bring about the National Independence of Ireland.”<sup>5</sup> While a separate organization that would remain in existence till the 1930s, the Friends were essentially a front organization for Clan na Gael, with fifteen of the seventeen executive seats held by Clan members.<sup>6</sup> Between 1916 and 1921 the Friends raised hundreds of thousands of dollars in support of the fledgling Irish government and promoted awareness in America about the predicament of Ireland and its right to autonomy. The popularity of Irish nationalism in America fluctuated with World War I, the successes and failures of the Irish War of Independence, and American politics. Scholars have debated the ways in which religion, racial prejudice, and the Irish immigrant experience within America all played a role in shaping the evolution of Irish American nationalism and the effectiveness of the Friends of Irish Freedom between 1916 and 1921.

Author Carl Wittke goes into detail about the extent of Irish immigrant sentiment in the nineteenth and twentieth century and the role of the Catholic

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<sup>5</sup> Tansill, *America and the Fight for Irish Freedom*, p. 189.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



Church in immigrants' life. He emphasizes how unique the Irish were as one of the only immigrant groups to retain such strong ties to their native soil generations after they had left—men and women who had never even set foot on Irish soil still held deep rooted affection for the land of their ancestors.<sup>7</sup> This manifested itself in the way Irish Americans reacted to news of events occurring in Ireland, particularly those that involved British controversy. If anything, by moving across the ocean the Irish were freer to disparage the British government. However, while at times critical of British policy, overall the United States maintained a friendly political relationship with Britain. Irish American leaders might have been able to play on Anglophobia in the nineteenth century, but this changed drastically in the twentieth century, especially after World War I broke out. During the twentieth century the United States was at its core a nation considered to be Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, and closely aligned with Great Britain. Because of this Irish Catholicism was seen as inferior and the root of much prejudice against early immigrants.

However, the Catholic Church remained such a strong institution for the American Irish because of the safety net it created for immigrants. Lawrence J. McCaffrey published a book in 1976 titled, *The Irish Catholic Diaspora in America*. He draws parallels between prejudices Americans' had about Irish-Catholics as similar to those the Irish faced in Britain—in particular by the way Irish immigrants were always the last to move up from menial jobs and improve

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<sup>7</sup> Carl Wittke, *The Irish in America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), p. 161.

their socio-economic status.<sup>8</sup> Anglo-Saxon Protestantism was so ingrained as the dominant culture in the States that Catholics (and therefore synonymously the Irish) were seen as an inferior race much the way discrimination against African-Americans in the South was justified.<sup>9</sup> McCaffrey builds his argument around the ways Catholicism and the prejudices that followed it channeled Irish immigrants into politics: politics at this time was seen as a second or third rate profession, perfect for Irish Catholics who were considered second and third rate citizens.<sup>10</sup>

Despite focusing more on the American response to Irish nationalism, author Francis Carroll also examines the impact and perception of Irish Catholic immigrants in America. Given that the Irish were not the only Catholic, ethnic group arriving consistently to the United States, Carroll distinguishes between the reactions of Anglo-Americans toward these various populations. What he believes set the Irish apart from other immigrant groups, as other scholars who examined the impact of the Great Famine have mentioned, is the sheer size of the groups they arrived in. Americans were less likely to be suspicious or prejudiced against Belgians or Swedes, two nationalities that were also very Catholic and non-Anglo Saxon, because they did not arrive in such large numbers the way the Irish did.<sup>11</sup>

Carroll argues that because of the rapid influx of Irish immigrants into major cities, particularly in the Northeast, native-born Americans had an unfair

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<sup>8</sup> Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *The Irish Catholic Diaspora in America* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1976), p. 83.

<sup>9</sup> McCaffrey, *Irish Catholic Diaspora*, p. 91.

<sup>10</sup> McCaffrey, *Irish Catholic Diaspora*, p. 119.

<sup>11</sup> Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question*, p. 12.

image of every Irish immigrant as a virtual ambassador from their country—an image they did not necessarily hold of other ethnicities. For this reason Irish Americans were often viewed as a group rather than as individuals. In addition, Carroll writes that because many Irish Americans felt “cut off from mainstream American culture, they fell back on their Catholicism, on Gaelic culture and on Irish nationalism as a means of self-fulfillment.”<sup>12</sup>

Author Thomas N. Brown focuses on these aspects of Irish American culture in his work as well. Brown notes that Irish Americans believed that their status in America could and would improve if they could claim to come from an independent, democratic country—not one impoverished and colonized by another power.<sup>13</sup> As other authors have done, he connects the Great Famine to this belief, citing the shame many Irish carried with them that the British had starved them out of their own country. These memories of British oppression would continue to haunt the Irish, and the sense that they were forever broken off from the mother country would not fade even with the passing of generations. Like Carroll, Brown also compares the Irish to other immigrant groups, making an interesting point about the role language played in the assimilation of ethnic groups into the U.S. The English language during this period would have been almost synonymous with Anglo-Saxon Protestantism, so for the Irish to speak the language and yet share none of the “esteemed” qualities

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<sup>12</sup> Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question*, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas N. Brown, *Irish American Nationalism*, p. 24.

of Protestantism that America had been founded on would have alienated Irish immigrant populations further.<sup>14</sup>

The prejudice Irish immigrants faced from nativist Americans also seemed to be an extension of British hatred toward the Irish; therefore it only seemed natural that a solution to the problems immigrants faced in America could come from a solution for Ireland.<sup>15</sup> The rhetoric nationalist groups used would reflect these notions in the mirrored struggle of America during its own Revolution. Brown draws out the parallels between the Irish and American patriot: both were “products of English culture, both spoke the same language...and as nationalists both were engaged in rejecting English claims to moral and political superiority.”<sup>16</sup> Irish American nationalist organizations like the Friends of Irish Freedom made comparisons such as these their bread and butter. The Friends would continue to promote these comparisons to win the support of non-Irish sympathizers throughout the duration of their existence.

In his recent work on Irish American diaspora nationalism, Michael Doorley focuses on the rise and fall of the Friends of Irish Freedom and how other major events, in particular World War I, affected their message and membership. According to Doorley, the real strength of the Friends was that they were a more inclusive organization than Clan na Gael, being shaped by politicians, writers, activists, and the common citizen alike.<sup>17</sup> However, building

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<sup>14</sup> Brown, *Irish American Nationalism*, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Doorley, *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism: The Friends of Irish Freedom, 1916-1935* (Dublin: Four Courts Press Ltd., 2005), p. 41.

membership for the Friends was initially a challenge. The execution of sixteen Irish leaders involved in the Easter Rising of 1916 once again stoked the embers of rebellion into flame within Ireland and also drove moderate Irish Americans into the arms of the FOIF.<sup>18</sup>

Doorley chooses to include this element in his argument because it draws attention to the fact that in trying to gain access to mainstream American culture there was also a large segment of the Irish American population wary of radical nationalist groups. Previous works such as Brown and McCaffrey both teeter on losing sight of this when dealing with the Irish immigrant experience, making it seem as if extreme nationalism was naturally occurring within every person of Irish descent. While the support of Irish Americans during Irish uprisings is undeniable, it should also not be overstated.

This is especially true after the United States joined World War I and FOIF membership subsequently declined. Leading Irish American newspapers such as the *Gaelic American* and the *Irish World* were censored or shut down for the remainder of the war. Accusations were flung at FOIF leaders such as Cohalan for rumored dealings with Germany, and so he and others were forced to keep a low profile. The shaky alliance Ireland had made with Germany leading up to and during the early years of the war cast a pall over Irish American organizations in America and gave fodder to those already critical of the Irish nationalist movement in the States.

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<sup>18</sup> Doorley, *Friends of Irish Freedom*, p. 47.

Carroll's *American Opinion and the Irish Question* also studies the ways in which the American government dealt with the interconnected relations between America, Ireland, and Great Britain. In 1900 alone 4,826,904 Americans were first or second generation Irish; in only a few decades those with Irish ancestry would make up nineteen percent of the country's population.<sup>19</sup> By 1920 Americans of Irish descent were too large a proportion of the American population to be ignored. This large of a demographic would have been a strong force within any constituency. However, while most Irish Americans during this time tended to vote and be active in the Democratic Party, President Woodrow Wilson had a shaky relationship with his Irish constituents during his presidency.

Carroll argues that Wilson and the United States government was only ever interested in resolving the "Irish problem" in order to preserve or improve American relations with Britain and not because of any real sense of sympathy or kindred patriotism with the Irish themselves.<sup>20</sup> Despite the obvious parallels that could be drawn between Irish and American history, Great Britain was still the role model of the United States and its ally in the twentieth century. Wilson was not about to endanger that relationship for Irish nationalist ideology in his own country.

Carroll also points out how the events of World War I allowed a veritable witch hunt for potential sabotage plots amongst "hyphenated" nationalist leaders. The insinuations and outright accusations against the Friends that

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<sup>19</sup> Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question*, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question*, p. 19.

leaders such as Cohalan had acted treasonously was enough to damage their organizations in 1917 and 1918. Carroll mentions the lack of press coverage in American newspapers about actions the British government took during the war years to arm against Home Rule supporters as an example of one way the U.S. was more Anglophilic in its sympathies.<sup>21</sup> This would be in direct contrast to the post war years, when American newspapers exploded with information about events occurring in Ireland and England.

Bernadette Whelan also focuses on the American government's relations with other European nations and concentrates on the years between 1913 and 1929 in her work, *United States Foreign Policy and Ireland*. She describes Wilson's initial aversion to American involvement with foreign affairs of any kind as his administration attempted to continue its tradition of isolationism. Complicating interactions between the Irish nationalist movement in America and Ireland further is the fact that this was not a bilateral relationship, but a triangular one between the States, Ireland, and Britain.<sup>22</sup> She notes how it is easy to lose sight of this when describing Irish American relations because so much of the focus is on the events and leaders in Ireland rather than England. Whelan argues that Wilson's main interest in settling the Irish question was to gain support of the Irish Catholics in his political party, and to back up his own theories on self-determination and sovereignty.<sup>23</sup> In addition, she makes the case that Wilson was not expecting to have to deal with extensive foreign issues when

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<sup>21</sup>Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question*, p. 23.

<sup>22</sup> Bernadette Whelan, *United States Foreign Policy and Ireland: From Empire to Independence, 1913-1929* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> Whelan, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Ireland*, p. 29.

he took office, and had built much of his platform around domestic issues when elected.<sup>24</sup>

Whelan builds on many of the arguments Carroll makes in his work *American Opinion and the Irish Question*; she also cites Irish American nationalists' opposition to the League of Nations, American entry into World War I, and attempted alliance with Germany as major factors that caused divisions between Wilson and Irish American leaders such as Cohalan. Whelan also focuses much of her work on Joseph Tumulty, Wilson's Irish American private secretary. Tumulty influenced Wilson's opinion on Irish matters and aided in relations between organizations such as the Friends and Clan na Gael and the U.S. government.

Whelan's work is important because it shows not only Wilson's changes in foreign policy before, during, and after World War I, but also the shifts in British-American relations and Irish American opinion during those time periods as well. She also shows the ways in which Irish American organizations such as the Friends of Irish Freedom were able to influence Wilson's actions abroad. After the Easter Rising in 1916, Irish American leaders in the U.S. put pressure on the government to intercede on behalf of captured Irish leaders, such as Roger Casement. When the resolution the Senate passed on behalf of Casement never made it to London in time before his execution, some Irish American leaders believed it had been an intentional delay and demanded an

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<sup>24</sup> Whelan, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Ireland*, p. 58.



explanation from Wilson's administration.<sup>25</sup> Joe Tumulty immediately took charge of the accusations and set about getting the truth from the State Department. Whelan uses this anecdote to show how in many ways the Casement affair further destabilized Wilson's Irish American support and only provoked outrage or at least indignation from Americans who had previously been unaware or unsympathetic to the Irish plight.<sup>26</sup>

The execution of Casement and the other Irish leaders hit Irish Americans strongly and mobilized their nationalist organizations in the U.S. into action. Whelan again cites Carroll, who describes how Wilson was hindered by "diplomatic protocol from speaking out publicly about Ireland," while urging English diplomats in private to give Irish nationalists an outlet rather than merely trying to crush them all together.<sup>27</sup> Like Carroll, Whelan also agrees that Wilson took this stance in order to improve American-English relations, which took priority over Irish independence. Unlike other sources which display Wilson's relationship with Irish Americans as being entirely antagonistic during the First World War, she argues that Wilson's belief that they would turn their attention from "putting 'Ireland first' to putting 'America first'," was an accurate prediction.<sup>28</sup>

However, once the Great War ended, Irish American nationalists were able to regain influence in society, inviting Irish leaders to the States to ramp up support for the recognition of an Irish Republic. Journalist Dave Hannigan

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<sup>25</sup>Whelan, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Ireland* p. 113.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 119.

<sup>27</sup> Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question*, p. 18.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 139.

centers his work on the eighteen-month tour Irish President Eamon de Valera took of America in 1919. While his book focuses on de Valera and his fundraising mission in the U.S., Hannigan has depicted the actions of the Friends of Irish Freedom as told from the standpoint of an Irish leader. He also illustrates the ways in which de Valera attempted to use American policy, in particular Wilson's "self determination of small nations," to sway opinion toward Ireland. Hannigan quotes De Valera during one of his addresses to American audiences:

Why are you so anxious not to offend Britain, yet continue to offend Ireland? Is it because Britain is strong and Ireland weak? Britain has no right to be offended if you act according to the reason for which you entered the war. The act of recognition of Ireland does not mean war. Britain would have to borrow the money from you to carry on that war.<sup>29</sup>

This passage sums up common Irish sentiment, and links back to Thomas Brown's work, where he relates how most immigrants viewed America as a powerful benevolent force for Ireland.<sup>30</sup> De Valera's view that America was stronger than Britain, and therefore should have no problem recognizing an Irish Republic, was also shared by many Irish American leaders. Unfortunately, even in the early months of de Valera's stay in the U.S. it became evident that tensions and divisions between de Valera and Irish American leaders such as Cohalan were becoming more strained.

Cohalan had long been a popular speaker for all things related to the fight for Irish independence—the tensions between him and de Valera developed into a power struggle for command of Irish America. Hannigan mentions de Valera's

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<sup>29</sup> Dave Hannigan, *De Valera in America: The Rebel President and the Making of Irish Independence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 148.

<sup>30</sup> Brown, *Irish American Nationalism*, p. 19.

uneasiness toward the popularity of Cohalan, describing him as “an increasingly troublesome ally stealing the limelight.”<sup>31</sup> Whereas Hannigan for the most part cites this as a side effect of the many strong personalities involved and differences in political strategy, authors such as Doorley and Charles Tansill chose to look at the issue from a different lens.

Tansill, in his book on *America and the Fight for Irish Freedom*, depicts a much more one sided image of the Friends and Cohalan and their dealings with both Woodrow Wilson and Eamon de Valera. He gives a scathing review of Wilson’s treatment of Irish American delegations, citing his desire to tell them to “go to Hell” and writing, “for the people of Ireland he had little sympathy and no desire to be their champion in a fight for self-determination.”<sup>32</sup> For the President of the Irish Republic he had little better to add. Tansill described de Valera’s sly “double talk” and “contempt” for the “friendly gestures” Judge Cohalan had made toward him.<sup>33</sup> What Tansill fails to recognize in his description of the interactions between de Valera and Cohalan is that Cohalan and Devoy were not entirely innocent of engaging in petty bickering, nor was de Valera out to sabotage the Friends from the beginning. Tansill fails to address the fundamental differences in the histories of these men that would lead to differences in the type of nationalism they subscribed to.

Doorley, when writing about the Friends of Irish Freedom, recognized that as the Irish American leaders and their followers became more

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<sup>31</sup> Hannigan, *De Valera in America*, p. 102.

<sup>32</sup> Tansill, *America and the Fight for Irish Freedom*, p. 334.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 353.

Americanized during the twentieth century their nationalism also became more Americanized.<sup>34</sup> This would explain why de Valera, upon concluding his time in America, could not understand why he did not have the full and unwavering support of Irish American leaders such as Cohalan and Devoy. Doorley believes it is because they were unwilling to completely alienate themselves once again from American culture and because the Friends had developed almost as strong a sense of American nationalism and patriotism as Irish.

In examining Irish nationalist trends in the United States through the leadership and activities of the Friends of Irish Freedom, the main thrust of this thesis aligns most closely with the argument established in Michael Doorley's work on the FOIF. The bulk of primary source evidence for this investigation comes from archival published material: circulars, meeting notes, fundraising advertisements, etc. In order to gain a sense of the public sentiment and reaction toward FOIF meetings and rallying attempts, newspapers are an invaluable source of insight into the general reactions of the public. Given the large population of Irish Americans in New York City and the Friends' head quarters stationed there, the *New York Times* is an indispensable newspaper that will be used to represent a historically more Anglophilic American view of Irish American events. On the more radical Irish American side is the *Gaelic American*, a paper written and produced by Clan leader John Devoy. The *Gaelic American* sought to promote an agenda of independence for Ireland and to rebuke

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<sup>34</sup> Doorley, *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism*, p. 161.

American policies such as the Treaty of Versailles and League of Nations that its editors felt to be detrimental to the Irish cause.

## Chapter 2

Irish American Nationalism on the Eve of World War I

During the Irish Race Convention held at the Astor Hotel in New York City on March 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> 1916, over 2,300 men and women from around the country, all delegates of Irish nationalist or cultural organizations, came together to discuss the issues facing the Irish “race” in America and abroad. The Convention was called to unite all members of Irish descent living in America against pro-British forces—a union that would “make possible the alignment of the whole race behind the men in Ireland who have resolved to make their country free.”<sup>1</sup> The culmination of these deliberations resulted in the birth of a new Irish American nationalist organization, the Friends of Irish Freedom (FOIF). The Friends were designed to support nationalist forces within Ireland, while also bringing the so-called “Irish Question” to the attention of millions living in America. The organization would eventually gain national attention for their fundraising drives, controversial political stances and massive publicity campaigns that promoted an awareness and understanding of the plight of Ireland.

The first constitution of the FOIF laid out their set goals and responsibilities:

- (1) To encourage and assist any movement that will tend to bring about the national independence of Ireland, and as part of such work—
  - (a) Assist in the development of the labor and industrial interests of Ireland.
  - (b) Encourage the use and sale of Irish products.

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<sup>1</sup> “The Great Irish Convention,” *Gaelic American*, March 11, 1916, p. 4.

(c) Assist in the revival of the language, literature, music, customs, and manners of the Gael.<sup>2</sup>

Irish leaders at the convention also penned a “Declaration of Irish Independence,” not unlike that which laid out the ideals of liberty and democracy in the early American Republic.<sup>3</sup> In order to carry out the duties to which they were sworn, the Friends would shape and collaborate with existing groups, as well as establish nationalist branches in cities across America.

The atmosphere of the United States during the time the Friends was created was still very anti-Irish and anti-Catholic. The American population was particularly sensitive to events that appeared anti-American because of the First World War. Even the Race Convention itself was cause for suspicion. As the *New York Times* commented, “At this time this movement is particularly unfortunate. It has an alien smack... ‘Race’ doesn’t count, for the moment. It is the time for every good citizen to be just an American.”<sup>4</sup> The general population viewed Ireland’s troubles with Britain as an “old, blind, resentment” rather than a legitimate political struggle for independence.<sup>5</sup> Americans were more focused on the fighting taking place in Europe than Irish claims to autonomy.

This environment created a unique situation for the Irish; adaptable to the American way of life because of their common English language, the Irish still struggled at the bottom of society in many instances. Irish nationalist leaders may have been fighting for a free Ireland, “but Irish independence was

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<sup>2</sup> “Constitution of the Friends of Irish Freedom,” *Gaelic American*, March 11, 1916, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> “The Great Irish Convention,” March 11, 1916, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> “The Irish Race at a Hotel,” *New York Times*, March 5, 1916, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

an abstract, distant goal compared to the pressing reality of how to win acceptance and success in America.”<sup>6</sup> The term “hyphenated-American” was used extensively in the early 1900s to describe immigrant or ethnic populations that retained a strong sense of their home culture—most often Irish or German. Attempting to combine their Americanism with Irish nationalist tendencies would often put the Irish in America at odds with the rest of the population.

American political leaders and the American population in general looked with suspicion and disdain on hyphenated Americans, heightening concerns over immigration in general. President Woodrow Wilson, while attending an anniversary dinner for the Manhattan Club in 1915, spoke to the divisions amongst Americans stating, “We should rebuke not only manifestations of racial feeling here in America, where there should be none, but also every manifestation of religious and sectarian antagonism.”<sup>7</sup> However, Wilson’s loudest applause came when in conjunction with this he warned, “These men who speak alien sympathies are...the spokesmen of small groups whom it is high time that the nation should bring to a reckoning.”<sup>8</sup> Historian Charles Tansill contends that Wilson’s blatant Anglophilism meant that he damned anyone with anti-English sentiments.<sup>9</sup> While the Irish or Germans were never explicitly mentioned in either the article or Wilson’s speech, there was no other group that was so often condemned for “alien” or questionable behavior.

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<sup>6</sup> Kevin Kenny, *The American Irish: A History* (New York: Pearson Education, 2000), p. 171.

<sup>7</sup> “Wilson Outlines Nation’s Defense,” *New York Times*, November 5, 1915, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid p.4.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Tansill, *America and the Fight for Irish Freedom, 1866-1922* (New York: Devon Adair Co., 1957), p. 194.



The possibility of disloyal hyphenate groups present in the U.S. was a topic of debate and concern for the general American public, as seen in a *New York Times* spread by prominent American journalist Horace White. White defined hyphenated Americans as “persons who legally owe allegiance solely to the United States, but who give their allegiance mostly to some other country.”<sup>10</sup> White claimed that the Irish Americans were a subversive segment of society, despite their small numbers, because of how they were “constantly seeking to get us into a war with Great Britain.”<sup>11</sup> Given that all of Europe was in the midst of a world war, the notion that there was even a small segment of the American population agitating for conflict with a Western ally would have been repulsive to the general public.

Because of this Wilson was also quick to publicly condemn and distance himself from Jeremiah O’Leary, a known anti-British agitator and president of the American Truth Society. The American Truth Society was notorious for its bitter hostility toward Great Britain, opposition to the war, and support of Germany.<sup>12</sup> In response to a telegraph from O’Leary, Wilson said, “I would be deeply mortified to have you or anybody like you vote for me. Since you have access to many disloyal Americans and I have not, I will ask you to convey this message to them.”<sup>13</sup> While the American Truth Society was Irish orientated, O’Leary did not represent the views of the Friends, eventually condemning

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<sup>10</sup> Horace White, “Hyphenated Americans. Some Reflections by Horace White Upon Their Most Recent Activities,” *New York Times*, February 1, 1915, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Horace White, *New York Times*, February 1, 1915, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question*, p. 51.

<sup>13</sup> “Wilson Wants No Disloyal Vote Cast on His Side,” *New York Times*, September 30, 1916, p. 1.

Cohalan's conservative wartime stances.<sup>14</sup> However, Wilson's cutting response to O'Leary showed how little tolerance his administration would have toward any persons who could be labeled as disloyal.

Tensions surrounding Irish Americans and other more identifiable immigrant groups was also a topic of debate between Republicans and Democrats in the 1916 general elections, with each party accusing the other of courting their vote and therefore courting disloyalty. Given that Irish Americans had typically voted Democrat, this was more of a liability for the party of Wilson. One concern for conservative voters in general was the possible "hyphenate agenda" of those who "spoke alien sympathies...and who loved other countries better than they loved America."<sup>15</sup> These concerns may have been vocalized during the election of 1916, however it would be the challenge of maintaining American neutrality in the face of pressure from both domestic and foreign powers to join the war that really confronted Wilson's second term in office.

For Irish American nationalists living in America this posed a conflict of interest. There was a minority who fundamentally opposed Great Britain and hoped for a German victory for the sake of Ireland. Before the United States entered World War I, Irish American nationalist groups such as the Friends fell into this radical minority. However, the majority of Irish Americans were actually quite moderate, had a strong sense of "Americanism" and patriotism, and believed any reward for Ireland would come from standing by England and

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<sup>14</sup> Doorley, *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism*, p. 55.

<sup>15</sup> "Alien Voices and America," *New York Times*, February 1, 1915.

the Allied cause.<sup>16</sup> Moderate Irish Americans and other distinguishable ethnic groups resented the suspicion cast on them by both radicals and the government.

*The Fatherland*, a monthly newsletter published in the 1900s by German and Austria-Hungary supporters, criticized those who would only classify “true” Americans as those who lived in America before or during the Revolution.<sup>17</sup> While this piece was written for an organization that supported German-Americans and other Eastern Europeans, the notion that only Anglo-Saxon Protestants who could trace their lineage back to the days of the American Revolution were above scrutiny was an issue that impacted Irish American lives as well. According to the editors of *The Fatherland*,

The hyphenated citizens are such because they have been made such. No sooner did people protest against the one-sided manner in which the war news is handled in the daily press of New York than the protestants were contemptuously referred to as ‘hyphenated citizens.’<sup>18</sup>

However, Irish Americans would soon come under fire for their support of Germany during a time when the persecution and censorship of Germans in America was increasing. Germany’s own willingness to support the Irish cause stemmed from a deep-seated desire to embarrass England on its own territory. Popular historical belief in Ireland supported the notion that “Irish liberty depended on the perils of the British Empire when engaged in a great

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<sup>16</sup> Bernadette Whelan, *United States Foreign Policy and Ireland: from Empire to Independence 1913-29*, (England: Four Courts Press, 2006), p. 66.

<sup>17</sup> George Sylvester Viereck and Frederick F. Schrader, “Hyphenate Citizens; Who are Americans?” *The Fatherland: Fair play for Germany and Austria-Hungary*, January 20, 1915, p. 1, Villanova Digital Collection.

<sup>18</sup> *The Fatherland*, p. 1.

continental war.”<sup>19</sup> While the outbreak of World War I provided just such a “great continental war,” there were several reasons for Irish nationalists to believe Germany in particular held the key to success. The *Gaelic American*, an Irish American newspaper run by Clan na Gael leader and Friends supporter John Devoy, dealt exclusively with Irish issues and events, was notoriously Anglophobic, and offered a platform for various nationalist organizations to voice their opinions. In defense of Ireland’s stance toward the war, contributors wrote “The English yoke, the English heel, has dragged and crushed Ireland until today she is struggling for her very existence... Is it any wonder Ireland sees her destiny in German success?”<sup>20</sup>

In addition, James Kennedy McGuire, a well-known Irish nationalist with close links to both Clan na Gael and the Friends, was an American politician from New York who published a three hundred-page book in 1916 titled, *What Could Germany Do for Ireland?* McGuire was known for his support of Germany and goes into great detail in his work describing the ways in which the rise of Germany could aid the Irish cause. First, he described the poverty the Irish lived in and blamed this on English oppression and colonization. In contrast, he compared the relatively high standard of living exhibited in major German cities, both in terms of wages and sanitation.<sup>21</sup> Second, he examined the provisions made for the arts and culture of Germany, once again comparing this to the way the English repressed the Celtic language and culture until it was almost

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<sup>19</sup> James K. McGuire, *What Could Germany Do for Ireland?* (1916), p. 274.

<sup>20</sup> “Why the Irish Want Germany to Win,” *Gaelic American* April 1, 1916, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> McGuire, *What Could Germany Do*, p. 73.

nonexistent. Finally, McGuire wrote that in order to “live and prosper and occupy a real place in the world’s affairs she (Ireland) must become an integral part of an alliance composed of strong nations.”<sup>22</sup> This alliance was clearly not going to come from Britain or any of its counterparts given the structure of alliances during the First World War. He also refuted any claims that Catholic Ireland was somehow bound to England in its defense of Catholic Belgium, or any other small nation, given that Britain was not willing to grant sovereignty to Ireland as an independent small nation.

With such a fundamentally different view on the war and its aims, it is no wonder the *New York Times* and other American publications reacted as negatively as they did toward radical Irish American nationalism. It was never the intention of the Friends to pressure the American government to join Germany in her assault on Great Britain—that much was obviously inconceivable. What the Friends did hope for however, was recognition from the States that Irishmen should not be expected to fight for England during a time when they were simultaneously seeking to establish their independence as a nation.<sup>23</sup> While the concern with Ireland’s own fate after World War I ended was justifiable for nationalists in Ireland, it led to conflict for Irish Americans at home. This did not stop nationalist sentiment from spreading in the U.S. entirely, and as planning began for an Irish uprising in 1916, it became clear Germany would not be the only nation to directly contribute arms or funds for the rebellion. As much as critics of the blossoming German-Irish alliance would have

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<sup>22</sup> McGuire, *What Could Germany Do*, p. 276.

<sup>23</sup> Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question*, p. 53.

focused solely on Irish arms deals with the Germans, a fair amount of the money for munitions for Ireland came from the pockets of Americans.

The Friends of Irish Freedom had pledged support to “any act that would bring about the national independence of Ireland”—in the spring of 1916 it seemed imminent that this would mean open, armed rebellion. John Devoy brokered negotiations between Ireland and Germany to supply a shipment of arms for the Irish Republican Brotherhood.<sup>24</sup> In addition, well known New York Supreme Court Justice Daniel Cohalan pledged \$200 to the Defense of Ireland Fund. The purpose of the Fund was “To enable the Irish people to defend their homes, their rights, their liberties, and their persons, now menaced by a Foreign Government, and to assert and maintain the Independence of Ireland.”<sup>25</sup> Drives to raise funds for arms or aid were commonly hosted by the Friends or a coalition of other nationalist groups in America and were often very successful. The *Gaelic American* published a list of donors just two days before the Easter Rising who had raised a sum of \$46,281.64 to arm Irish nationalists.<sup>26</sup> While the Friends did not sponsor this particular drive, it shows how willing Americans were to donate to the Irish cause.

However, the continued use of Irish American nationalist leaders as a sort of middleman between Ireland and Germany did not go unnoticed. Only a week before the Rising was to take place, the New York office of Wolf von Igel, a member of the German embassy, was raided by American intelligence and

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<sup>24</sup> Charles Townshend, *Easter 1916: The Irish Rebellion* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), p. 116.

<sup>25</sup> Defense of Ireland Fund membership card, April 12, 1916, Box 7, Folder 11, Daniel Cohalan Papers, AIHS.

<sup>26</sup> “Contributions to Arm Men of Ireland,” *Gaelic American*, April 22, 1916.

documents that contained details about the Rising and that linked both Cohalan and Devoy to arms deals and negotiations with the Germans were seized by American intelligence.<sup>27</sup> Given America's neutral position at this time the contents of the papers were not released, nor were any charges filed against those involved. However the von Igel incident would come back to haunt Cohalan in less than a year's time when the U.S. had joined the Great War and news of the event came out. Until then, all eyes were turned on the events unfolding in Dublin.

From the outset, the fighting that took place in Dublin and in small pockets all over Ireland during Easter Week of 1916 was meant to be an act of open rebellion to seize control of the government. Nevertheless, leaders such as Padraic Pearse knew from the outset that the true strength of the revolt would come from what Pearse often referred to as "blood sacrifice"—in effect the martyrdom of its participants.<sup>28</sup> He could not have been more right. While key locations, both symbolically and politically, were held in Dublin for almost a week, ultimately the rebellion was an utter failure much the same as Irish uprisings had been for the last two hundred years. Despite all this, the Easter Rising would change the course of history for both Irish and Irish Americans alike.

In order to spread the word about the extent of damage done to Irish citizens, the Friends reported in one of their news bulletins "300 were slain

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<sup>27</sup> Doorley, *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism*, p. 44.

<sup>28</sup> Ruth Dudley Edwards, "Patrick Pearse: Writer and Revolutionary," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004, online.

during the insurrection, 15 were executed by Courts-martial, 134 have been condemned to penal servitude, 2,650 were deported without trial, and 400 await sentence by Courts-martial.”<sup>29</sup> Arnold Bennett, a noted English author who’s editorial was printed in the *New York Times*, scoffed at the Easter Rising, calling it a “tragic and tawdry theatrical display,” the likes of which owed more to a few radicals dissatisfied with social rather than political issues in Dublin.<sup>30</sup> Bennett was also quick to put blame on the Irish American organization Clan na Gael, accusing its members of instilling in the Irish rebels a “false” promise of support and concluding it merely sought to cause strife between Ireland and England.”<sup>31</sup> The fact that no equivalent editorials from an Irish perspective were printed would be further proof for Irish nationalists that British propaganda permeated the American press.

The *Gaelic American* fought to combat British censorship of the events by publishing as much on the details and scope of the fighting as possible. Printing news as fast as it could acquire it, the *Gaelic American* wrote of an Ireland that was “gallantly fighting for her independence” and of freedom fighters who had managed to secure vital points in Dublin city despite their small numbers.<sup>32</sup> The destruction of cable and telegraph lines in Dublin made the full story of the fighting that took place during Easter Week come out only sporadically in the American press. The damage done to Dublin city itself was staggering and the

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<sup>29</sup> “To the Charitable People of America,” July 22, 1916, Box 3, Folder 4, Friends of Irish Freedom Papers, American Irish Historical Society.

<sup>30</sup> Arnold Bennett, “On the Irish Revolt: Famous Author Blames Irish Americans—Problem Due to ‘Incompatibility of Temperament,’” Special Cable to *New York Times*, May 28, 1916, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Bennett, “On the Irish Revolt,” p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> “Ireland in Arms, Fighting for Freedom,” *Gaelic American*, April 29, 1916.



vast majority of Irish natives were horrified by what appeared to be a costly suicide mission put on by a radical minority.

There were those who saw the Rising as a revival of militant nationalism induced by Britain's failure to settle the Home Rule issue diplomatically.<sup>33</sup> The execution of the sixteen leaders of the rebellion only further supported this. Just as the sinking of the *Lusitania* swung the American public against the Germans, the execution of Pearse, Connolly and fourteen other Irish leaders only increased the ire of nationalists further while simultaneously steering those who had previously been moderate into more radical positions. One can only imagine that the executions of the leaders recalled once again "folk memories" of British oppression and subjugation that had taken place time and again during Ireland's history.

The *Gaelic American* ran extensive reports on the "murders" and "butcheries" committed by the English following Easter week. Editors of the paper denounced those in the American press who had commended the "leniency extended to the Irish" from King George.<sup>34</sup> Headlines blared: "Military Massacre In Dublin Under the Rule of an English Court Martial."<sup>35</sup> After hailing the brave actions of the men and women of the Rising the *Gaelic American* concluded, "The English have already been compelled to drop the rubbish about vulgar 'riots' led by half crazed men and have to admit that it was quite a

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<sup>33</sup> Michael Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence* (Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> "The Dublin Massacre," *Gaelic American*, May 13, 1916, p. 1

<sup>35</sup> "The Dublin Massacre", p. 1.

respectable insurrection, led by highly educated men and by people of high social standing.”<sup>36</sup>

The tragedy and senselessness of the deaths were not lost on the American public. Only a few weeks after the Rising, close to four thousand American men and women of various nationalities gathered at Carnegie Hall in New York City, with thousands more gathered outside, to pay tribute to the fallen.<sup>37</sup> Even the *Times* referred to the execution of the leaders as a “killing in cold blood”—given that the paper had not always been sympathetic to the Irish cause, this illustrates how much of an impact the Rising and its executions had on the American public.<sup>38</sup> In the defense of the British government’s decision to execute the rebels, and possibly in response to the *Times*, Bennett would later approvingly write, “at present the structure of social order is ultimately based on cold-blooded homicide.”<sup>39</sup>

Regardless of Bennett’s attempt at rationalizing the decision made by judge and jury, the fact remained that in reality the Crown had created its own public relations disaster. The British government had permanently created sixteen martyrs for Irish nationalism. The Friends of Irish Freedom circulated a document to all its members stating that in order “to relieve the families of those massacred or slain, as well as of those who are actually starving or in danger of starvation, a fund is being raised...which is purely humanitarian and

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<sup>36</sup> “The Dublin Massacre”, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> “Irish Pay Tribute to Dublin Rebels,” *New York Times*, May 15, 1916, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Bennett, “On the Irish Revolt,” May 28, 1916.

charitable.”<sup>40</sup> Because of the fighting that occurred all over Dublin, civilians were trapped in sections of the city by rubble and were unable to access food or medical aid. This was also an effective emotional and political strategy on the part of the Friends. By using terms that made the situation seem more of a humanitarian effort to help those affected by the violence and despotism of the Crown, they created an option more Americans would be willing to contribute to given its charitable rather than militant nature.<sup>41</sup> In Ireland the executions had the result of increasing national pride, especially given that the rebels had “fought well, acting like soldiers and not mistreating their prisoners.”<sup>42</sup> The backlash against martial law, military style trials and executions also reflected badly on the British Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, who never openly acknowledged the executions (and who was not even aware of them until they had already occurred).<sup>43</sup>

The execution of Irish nationalist Roger Casement attracted a large amount of attention in the States, partly because he was not caught and arrested until after all sixteen leaders of the Rising had been shot by firing squad in early May. It became a primary aim of nationalist organizations such as the Friends to save him from a similar fate. Casement, born just outside Dublin in 1864, worked for the British Consulate in both South America and Africa for years, gaining international attention when he was knighted in 1911 for submitting a report on

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<sup>40</sup> “To The Charitable People of America,” July 22, 1916, Box 3, Folder 4, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>41</sup> Doorley, *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism*, p. 52.

<sup>42</sup> William H. Kaut, *The Anglo-Irish War, 1916-1921: A People's War* (Westport: Praeger, 1999), p. 49.

<sup>43</sup> Kaut, *The Anglo-Irish War*, p. 49.

human rights violations in Peru and the Belgian Congo.<sup>44</sup> Casement's service to the Crown seemed at first to make him an unlikely Irish patriot, but his dedication to Home Rule in Ireland led to involvement in the Gaelic League and Irish Volunteer Force; his downfall would come from plotting with Germans to obtain arms and foot soldiers for an Irish revolt.<sup>45</sup> Casement's exploits in Germany and his trial by the Crown were given ample space in a special report done by the *New York Times* in June—reading more like a well-detailed epic story than journalistic exposé, and illustrating already the martyr like status he would achieve in America as well as Ireland.<sup>46</sup>

The Friends acted quickly, petitioning Washington to intervene on Casement's behalf. Sending petitions and appeals to the U.S. government was a common FOIF political activity, and while Wilson was occasionally slow to react to the pleas of some of his constituents, his Irish American secretary Joe Tumulty did what he could to keep Irish issues on the table.<sup>47</sup> The British treatment of the Irish rebels during the Easter Rising sparked debate among senators from around the country. Senator James Martine of New Jersey was quoted as saying, "My efforts have been directed at stopping this cruel and brutal execution...Oh, that the spirit of '76 might prevail to-day! Oh, Mr. President, think of what our Washington said, think of his deep sympathy for Ireland, and then look upon us—dumb, stoic, and idle."<sup>48</sup> From the constant action of FOIF leaders and their

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<sup>44</sup> D. George Boyce, "Casement, Roger David: Diplomatist and Irish rebel," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> "Casement to Die for High Treason," *New York Times*, June 30, 1916, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Doorley, *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism*, p. 50.

<sup>48</sup> "U.S. Senate Makes Pleas for Irish Prisoners," *Gaelic American*, July 29, 1916, p. 1.

sympathetic counterparts in the Senate, a resolution was adopted by a vote of 46 to 19 “directing President Wilson to transmit to the British Government an expression of hope that it would exercise clemency in the treatment of Irish political prisoners.”<sup>49</sup> While the Senate resolution was passed for the benefit of Casement and other Irish prisoners, it did not reach the British government in time.<sup>50</sup> Casement was hanged for high treason on August 3, 1916.

While this was one instance of an Irish nationalist organization successfully appealing their representatives in Congress, there was little Wilson could do on an executive level. In response to Tumulty’s inquiries as to why he hadn’t acted toward the matter, Wilson replied, “It is absolutely necessary to say that I could take no action of any kind regarding it,” and later, “It would be inexcusable for me to touch this (matter). It would involve serious international embarrassment.”<sup>51</sup> Even so, there were those in the Friends who felt that the delay in communication between Washington and London was an intentional stall tactic that ultimately cost Casement his life.<sup>52</sup> In addition, Wilson felt his hands were tied given that he had not intervened in similar situations in Central Europe.<sup>53</sup> Whether in reality the delay was indeed intentional seems unlikely, but bitterness over this combined with past grievances with the President only further strengthened the idea that Wilson was an anglophile who would not be cooperating or supporting the American Irish in the future.

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<sup>49</sup> “U.S. Senate Makes Pleas for Irish Prisoners,” *Gaelic American*, July 29, 1916, p. 1.

<sup>50</sup> Doorley, *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism*, p. 50.

<sup>51</sup> Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question*, p. 73-74.

<sup>52</sup> Doorley, *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism*, p. 55.

<sup>53</sup> Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question*, p. 74.

The Easter Rising and the sacrifice its leaders made for Ireland may have pulled at the heartstrings of Americans across the country and created new converts to the cause, but the imminent approach of American intervention in World War I once again became the primary focus of political leaders as well as the average American. For Ireland, any hope that fighting alongside the British during the war would create unity or somehow reward them with Home Rule quickly became a disillusionment. The Friends may have been able to use the upswing in public opinion to gain support for their fledgling organization but their activities and membership would slowly grind to a halt in early 1917.

## Chapter 3

Irish America During the Great War

The Friends of Irish Freedom had been able to capitalize on the public's changing outlook toward the plight of Ireland after the execution of rebels from the Easter Rising in 1916. However, entry into World War I once again shifted focus away from the nationalist causes of other countries as Americans experienced their own surge of nationalism and patriotism. Radical Irish nationalists were quick to portray American foreign policy as extremely pro-English but this in fact was only a half-truth. The Allies may have been seen as the "upholders of democracy," but in fact the "majority of the U.S. public were not pro-ally and even less pro-British because of the blockade, the blacklist, censorship, and London's policies on Ireland, Mexico, and Russia."<sup>1</sup> Politicians and the general public alike had hounded on the danger of hyphenate groups, particularly Irish Americans in 1915 and 1916, and while the war continued to heighten suspicion toward these groups, it also created a rallying point that Irish Americans and their native born counterparts could unite on.

Irish American nationalism was no longer a purely domestic issue for either Great Britain or the United States, but a playing chip in the foreign policy of each. Wilson hoped that by Great Britain granting Ireland the democratic processes she demanded, the "Irish-Question" would cease to be an issue and Anglo-American relations could progress.<sup>2</sup> For Irish nationalists, the single

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<sup>1</sup> Bernadette Whelan, *United States Foreign Policy and Ireland: From Empire to Independence, 1913-1929* (New York: Four Courts Press, 2006), p. 128.

<sup>2</sup> Francis M. Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question, 1910-1923* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), p. 19.

greatest change brought about by entry into the Great War was the utter destruction of any hope of a German-Irish alliance. Coincidentally, Cohalan had been asked to give a speech at Carnegie Hall on April 9<sup>th</sup> to commemorate the declaration of the Provisional Government of Ireland, the anniversary of which fell just five days after the United States had declared war on Germany. While still commemorating the events of Easter Week, Cohalan's speech shifted focus, explaining how the interests of America in the Great War could align with those of Ireland.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, he stressed, "there will not be in any quarter of the country a single man of Irish blood who will not now think of America first, last, and all the time."<sup>4</sup> The patriotic nature of Cohalan's speech was clearly an assurance that the Friends were American first and Irish second, while also acting as a message to other national branches of the Friends that the game had changed.

Animosity toward Germany and German-American sympathizers had been growing in the U.S. for years, but once America joined the Allied nations even the most radical nationalist leaders knew Irish Americans would have to realign themselves with pro-American, and potentially even pro-British, ideologies to gain anything for Ireland during the war. Cohalan was asked to give a speech in early January 1917 to the League of Foreign Born Citizens, a society based in New York that organized and aided newly arrived immigrants to the United States. Cohalan's speech, while not directly related to the Irish, describes

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<sup>3</sup> Hon. Daniel Cohalan, "Speech at Carnegie Hall, New York," p. 3, April 9, 1917, Folder 5, Box 23, Daniel Cohalan Papers, AIHS.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



life in the U.S. for newly arrived, foreign citizens. He refers to the ways in which public perception of immigrant, ethnic groups often impacted public opinion toward those groups.<sup>5</sup> This could have been an allusion to Cohalan's own run-ins with the press over his alleged German dalliances. His speech to the League was also encouraging, stating "we need the best that every race and every strain of blood brings to U.S. from abroad in order to make the most of our unique opportunity and to influence, for the better, the history of the world."<sup>6</sup> While it is possible Cohalan was referring to the influence of Irish Americans on American politics to better the case for Ireland, even here he was careful to remain neutral.

This is because even within a matter of weeks the shift in public sentiment toward the Friends was apparent. At this time the Friends and other Irish American political agitators were still promoting street gatherings and protests in New York City that focused on the war in Europe, anti-British sentiment, and the Irish question. Often spilling out onto street corners, these meetings accumulated thousands of people at a time. Now, because of the war more than ever, these mass meetings were labeled by the press as promoting seditious acts and treasonous ideas at a time when American men were being sent to the front lines. A meeting held on the corner of Broadway in New York City on August 15<sup>th</sup> featured speakers from both the Friends and Sinn Féin parties who made statements the *Times* labeled as "disloyal and seditious" for

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<sup>5</sup> "Extract from speech of Justice Cohalan to League of Foreign Born Citizens," p. 2, January 24, 1917, Box 23, Folder 5, Daniel Cohalan Papers, AIHS.

<sup>6</sup> "Cohalan to League of Foreign-Born Citizens," p. 3.

their apparent “anti-British, anti-American, pro-German” sentiments.<sup>7</sup> The newspaper’s outrage over these activities is most apparent in the article when a “loyal” American citizen, resentful of the apparent treachery he was witnessing, attempted to break up the meeting and was arrested for “disturbing the peace” while the speakers were allowed to go free. The *Times* accused the police department, an institution heavily Irish American in this time period, of “coddling Sinn Feinism” and concluded “we have nothing to do with an Irish ‘freedom’ that means vassalage to Germany. We are fighting for the freedom of the United States.”<sup>8</sup>

The past links between Germany and Ireland only continued to fuel the animosity exhibited by pro-American groups toward the Friends. The *Times* reported on a second meeting of Friends’ leaders and supporters, this time approving of the arrest of nationalist leaders such as John D. Moore and the use of both police and soldiers to break up the large crowds. While it may have been impossible to make arrests solely on the content and nature of the speeches given, the police were still compelled to halt such meetings, even if only on the grounds of disrupting traffic.<sup>9</sup> The article painted the Friends as seditious rabble-rousers who had not had enough of their “soapbox oration” and continued to be the catalysts for events that turned into riots and fighting between protesters and police. The widespread anti-British speeches being given on street corners all over New York City were seen as anti-American as

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<sup>7</sup> “Sinn Féin and Police,” *New York Times*, August 15, 1917, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> “Sinn Féin and Police,” p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> “Grand Jury Calls Soap Box Leaders,” *New York Times*, September 21, 1917, p. 3.

well because of their criticism of American involvement in the war. The American Defense Society, an American nationalist organization known for its pro-Ally, interventionist views on the war, brought these meetings to the attention of a grand jury.<sup>10</sup> The Society called for an end to the street meetings altogether during wartime or to impose a law that only allowed “loyal Americans whose purposes are in accord with our national military policy” to address crowds with police authorization.<sup>11</sup>

The most intense backlash toward Irish American groups came with revelations about the contents of the von Igel papers that had been confiscated in 1916. The specifics of the documents were never fully revealed, nor were charges brought against either Cohalan or Devoy due to the fact that the apparent ties to German espionage occurred while America was still neutral and not at war with Germany.<sup>12</sup> However, the mere allegation that Cohalan had been in direct contact with German officials to plot the insurrection by Irish rebels against the British was enough for the press to have a field day. One reporter stated, “Justice Cohalan in public utterances has expressed a desire to see England beaten. He has always been in accord with the most extreme advocates of Irish freedom...and is alleged to have transmitted (his) message to the Kaiser urging Zeppelin raids on England.”<sup>13</sup>

For Irish American nationalists, the fact that it took almost seventeen months for the incident to be brought to the public’s attention, just in time for

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<sup>10</sup> “Grand Jury Calls Soap Box Leaders,” p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> “Grand Jury Calls Soap Box Leaders,” p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Doorley, *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism*, p. 44.

<sup>13</sup> “Will Seek Evidence Against Cohalan,” *New York Times*, September 26, 1917, p. 4.

America's men to be crossing the front lines, seemed like a ploy by the U.S. government to delegitimize the Irish nationalist movement in America.<sup>14</sup> While there is no proof to support this was actually the case, radical nationalists also shifted the blame for what they saw to be a smear campaign against Irish American leaders onto British officials in London. Drawing parallels between the slanders brought against Roger Casement right before his execution, Cohalan is quoted as saying, "a grave error of judgment is being made by those who attack the loyalty of citizens of Irish blood. This is a time for unity and not for disruption."<sup>15</sup>

Despite the fact that no federal charges were ever brought against Cohalan for any of his alleged activities, this did not stop newspapers or other political figures from labeling him as a traitor. Cohalan came under attack from Mayor John Mitchel of New York City who accused him of plots to foment revolution in Ireland as well as of disloyalty to his country.<sup>16</sup> In response to these charges Cohalan stated "The men who are really guilty of disloyalty to our common country are those who are now, for their own selfish purposes, engaged in sowing dissensions and discord among the various racial groups...instead of working zealously to unite them against the common enemy."<sup>17</sup> Cohalan was able to win a libel suit against the *Evening Mail* for similar statements regarding his character. A representative from the paper made a public statement admitting that the charges contained in the paper "are wholly unfounded and

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<sup>14</sup> "Judge Cohalan's Denial," *Gaelic American*, September 29, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> "Judge Cohalan's Denial," p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> "Cohalan Answers Disloyalty Charges," *New York Times*, November 3, 1917, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

without the slightest justification;" a sum of five thousand dollars was to be paid to Cohalan in repairs.<sup>18</sup> While this would come as a victory for Cohalan, the fact that someone as prominent as he was now seen as a target for those looking to expose anti-American sentiment, damaged the confidence of moderate Irish Americans who had already been uncertain about the soundness of an Irish-German alliance.

Irish Americans were ever more cognizant to the fact that their loyalty to the U.S. was being called into question. Parallel to this were similar accusations against Irish men and women charged with disloyalty to the Crown during a time of war. While the conduct of Irish troops might not have seemed an important issue for Americans, Irish Americans would have felt it reflected back on them and their support of an independent Ireland. The Irish themselves were already on the defensive and accusations of treason frustrated Irish soldiers who had immediately enlisted when the war began. In the summer of 1918 the *Boston Globe* published an exclusive interview with Captain T.F. MacMahon of the Irish Guards titled "What the Irish are Doing in the Great War." Captain MacMahon was quoted as saying, "If Ireland were pro-German, do you suppose 58.1 percent...of her man power would have volunteered up to last January? If she were pro-German can you imagine 40,000 or 50,000 men enlisting since the uprising in Dublin?"<sup>19</sup> The various instances of valor and bravery performed by Irish regiments during battle and the awards given to Irish troops were extolled

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<sup>18</sup> "Judge Cohalan Wins Libel Suit," Box 17, Folder 9, Daniel Cohalan Papers, AIHS.

<sup>19</sup> "James T. Sullivan, "What the Irish Are Doing in the Great War: Interview with Capt. T.F. MacMahon, M.C of the Irish Guards," *Boston Globe*, June 30, 1918.

throughout the piece to reinforce the notion that Ireland was doing her part in the war. Irish American nationalists would later use evidence such as this to show that the Irish were deserving of post-war recognition.

Even as the war raged on Irish men attempted to appeal to the American government. In 1917 the British government released a multitude of Irish rebels who had been held prisoner since Easter Week of 1916. These men now saw an opportunity to use their experiences during the Rising and imprisonment to impact opinion both in the American public and government. These newly released prisoners put forth a letter to President Wilson and the United States government claiming Ireland's right to "defend itself against external aggression, external interference and external control."<sup>20</sup> The twenty-six signers of the letter, the first of whom was Eamon de Valera, future President of the Irish Republic, used the rhetoric of Wilson's own war aims and response to the Provisional Government of Russia extensively when outlining the aims of an independent Ireland. Quoting Wilson directly they included, "No people must be forced under a sovereignty which it does not wish to live," and suggested that, "wrongs must first be righted and then adequate safeguards must be created to prevent their being committed again."<sup>21</sup> U.S. war aims presented an opportunity for Irish nationalists who believed America would stand behind Ireland's claims to independence.

The Friends also drafted and circulated their own political appeals during this time. One petition addressed to the President and Congress stated, "Ireland

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<sup>20</sup> "To the President and Congress of the United States," p. 2, Folder 4, Box 3, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>21</sup> "To the President and Congress," p. 1.

is a distinct nation, deprived of her liberty by force and held in subjection by England by military power alone.”<sup>22</sup> In an attempt to compare the plight of Ireland with that of other small nations, the petition also compared the subjugation of Ireland under England as synonymous with that of Belgium under Germany. To further establish that the aims of a free Ireland coincided with past American policy, the Friends closed the petition with, “We earnestly hope that, like Cuba, Ireland will be made free by the action of America.”<sup>23</sup> Irish American leaders hoped to win over support of Congress by showing how their petitions aligned with previous actions of the United States and how intervention for Ireland would be a continuation of U.S. foreign policy.

Despite their attempt at mimicking the rhetoric of American diplomacy, there were still many in the general public who condemned the actions of anyone who spoke in the name of countries other than the United States. Irish Catholics came under fire, in some instances from other Catholic priests. At one meeting held in Madison Square in early May, Rev. Peter E. Magennis, then the National President of the Friends of Irish Freedom, opened his speech by quoting an “American soldier of Irish blood now in France” who had told him “that when he got through fighting in Germany he would be ready to go to Ireland and fight against England.”<sup>24</sup> Two women were eventually removed from the mass

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<sup>22</sup> Friends of Irish Freedom, “Petition to the President and Congress of the United States for the Independence of Ireland,” 1917, Folder 3 Box 4, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>23</sup> “Petition to the President and Congress.”

<sup>24</sup> “Sinn Féin Speakers Attack the Allies,” *New York Times*, May 5, 1918, p. 12

gathering after standing up and declaring the sentiments expressed by Magennis and other Irish keynote speakers to be “un-American.”<sup>25</sup>

It was not uncommon for women who had male relatives fighting abroad to become more critical or passionate about those they felt could pose a threat to the war effort. For example, Mrs. Francis C. Barlow wrote to the Archbishop of New York, Cardinal John Farley, about the public activities of Irish Catholic priests and Sinn Féin members. Having failed to initially receive a reply from Cardinal Farley, Mrs. Barlow published her letter in the *New York Times* and quickly received an equally public response from the secretary of the Cardinal. The reply assured both Mrs. Barlow and the readers of the *Times* that Cardinal Farley was unaware that Magennis would be presiding at either meeting, and had since been informed he would not “be permitted to remain in the Archdiocese of New York” if he attempted to preside over meetings of a such a political nature in the future.<sup>26</sup>

The influence of the Catholic Church also played a role in changing the priority of Irish Americans during the war. In Ireland, the Catholic Church had attempted to remain “ambivalent” toward nationalist activities, although there did appear to be a clear shift in sympathy toward the rebels of 1916.<sup>27</sup> In America, the Catholic hierarchy remained more focused on the issue of World War I and how to interpret Church doctrine, which typically condemned violence and fighting. However, after Pope Benedict XV “appealed to belligerents for

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<sup>25</sup> “Sinn Féin Speakers Attack the Allies,” p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> “Cardinal Farley acts on Sinn Fein,” *New York Times*, May 22, 1918, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Charles Townshend, *The Republic: The Fight for Irish Independence* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), p. 12.



peace,” Catholic officials were able to interpret this stance as justification for supporting Wilson and the American war effort.<sup>28</sup> One vocal, well-known allied supporter was Cardinal James Gibbons, an Irish American bishop, who preached “loyalism” as the way forward for Irish Americans.<sup>29</sup> Other priests also urged the Irish to put aside racial and religious prejudice for the sake of unity during a time of war and warned against allowing their “hatred of England to obscure the wickedness of Germany.”<sup>30</sup> The role of the Church in Irish identity cannot be underestimated—once the Catholic hierarchy aligned with the aims of the war, Irish Americans wholeheartedly jumped at the opportunity to display their loyalty to their country.<sup>31</sup>

While moderates had at first been compelled into the ranks of radical nationalist groups such as the Friends after the Easter Rising, the accusations of disloyalty that lingered around nationalist leaders coupled with a desire to prove their patriotism and merit now pulled moderate Irish Americans away from organizations that could call into question their loyalty to the United States. Small to begin with, membership to the Friends of Irish Freedom declined steadily during the years America was at war, with less than 10,000 national members registered in 1917.<sup>32</sup> Because of a fear of “political denunciation” similar to that which had been exacted against Cohalan, Devoy, and others, “mainstream Irish” were “conspicuously absent” from all nationalist

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<sup>28</sup> Whelan, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Ireland*, p. 140.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 140.

<sup>30</sup> “McMahon Assails Seditious Catholics,” *New York Times*, December 13, 1917, p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> Whelan, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Ireland*, p. 140.

<sup>32</sup> Doorley, “Regular membership, 1916-1924,” Appendix 6 in *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism*, p. 200.

organizations during the years of the war.<sup>33</sup> As historian Bernadette Whelan notes, “the radical leadership walked a tightrope; in the public they had to refrain from statements or actions that might be interpreted as disloyal and unpatriotic while insisting that Wilson’s aims applied to Ireland and working to achieve another rising in Ireland.”<sup>34</sup> If there was any question that the Friends and other nationalists were being monitored closely, the *Times* reported that transcripts of speeches given by FOIF members and similar collaborators were being submitted to both the District Attorney and to the Chief of the Department of Justice Secret Service.<sup>35</sup>

In order to combat the mounting pressures that WWI put on Irish American nationalism, a fourth Irish Race Convention was held in the Central Opera House in New York City from 18-19 May 1918. The goals of the Fourth Convention were to draft a petition to Wilson outlining the merits of a free Ireland, as well as to address the concerns of conscription in Ireland and the growing animosity toward nationalist groups in the United States. Rev. Magennis, the National President, in a memo sent out to all FOIF headquarters, outlined the ideals and goals of the Convention. He wrote, “The war cry of America is not tainted by any of the old world prejudices, nor weakened by echoes arising from past misgovernment. The warriors in the Republic are, in great part, our own kith and kin.”<sup>36</sup> Magennis was elevating America to a status

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<sup>33</sup> Doorley, *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism*, p. 164.

<sup>34</sup> Whelan, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Ireland*, p. 142.

<sup>35</sup> “Study Speeches Made at Meeting,” *New York Times*, 21 May 1918, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Peter E. Magennis, “Memo to Friends of Irish Freedom,” August 20, 1918, Folder 3, Box 4, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

unpolluted by “old world prejudice” given its own diverse background and split with Great Britain. He also warned,

We must not allow the minds of those around us to be contaminated by the powerful, subsidized, hostile agencies which unceasingly conduct a campaign of misrepresentation and defamation of everything truly Irish, and of those whom they have failed to intimidate from standing for justice to Ireland, in the hope of prejudicing Ireland’s case in the minds of Liberty-loving Americans.<sup>37</sup>

Magennis knew that the cards were stacked against them. It made more sense for the U.S. to ally itself with Great Britain during the war; however, he also hoped to keep the issue of Irish independence in the minds of Americans even as they were allied with her oppressor. In order to do this Magennis called for the Friends to “make our influence felt in local papers,” to produce pamphlets, leaflets and political books to keep the public informed. He also cautioned against “airing grievances” at public meetings, stating that they instead should be purely educative.<sup>38</sup> The milder nature of demands made at the convention and the direction Magennis was taking the Friends in 1918 was an attempt to not overstep boundaries and to make amends with a public that had begun to sour toward nationalist groups. Importantly, he ends his memo with a quote from Wilson’s Fourth of July Mount Vernon Address, aptly aligning the goals he had laid out for the Friends during the coming year with those of President Wilson.

A shorter letter from the National Secretary of the Friends, Diarmuid Lynch, followed Magennis’ memo. Lynch realized that the organization of the

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<sup>37</sup> Magennis, “Memo to the Friends,” p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

Friends was going to need to be improved upon to remain effective. He also took a different approach in keeping alive the fight for a free Ireland in the face of opposition. He implored his readers, "In memory of my dear dead comrades of Easter Week, 1916...I add a plea that all lovers of Freedom, and those of the Irish Race especially, will act promptly toward the accomplishment of the ideal for which they fought and died."<sup>39</sup> Lynch feared that the "critical moment" to secure for Ireland her liberty would catch the Friends unprepared and "imperfectly organized."<sup>40</sup> In order to tighten management, he called for the remission of any "surplus funds" for the expense of reorganization, issuance of membership cards to keep track of members in good standing, and the collection of late fees on a more regular basis.<sup>41</sup> The reorganization and amendments to the Friends' constitution was an effort by the group to rally leaders and revive membership at a time when their numbers were falling. It was clear by the end of 1917 that the Friends were going to have to adapt their strategy to the shifting attitudes of their base supporters. What followed was a publicity campaign steeped in the rhetoric of American liberty and republican idealism, aimed at merging the fight for a free Ireland with America's own struggle for independence in 1776.

The Friends would use examples of Irish contributions during the Great War to promote in the States sympathy and camaraderie toward Ireland even after the conflict had ended. For example a propaganda poster released by the Friends in 1919 depicted an Irish officer on the front lines leading his troops in a

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<sup>39</sup> Diarmuid Lynch, "To the Secretary," April 20, 1918, Folder 4, Box 3, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>40</sup> Lynch, "To the Secretary."

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

charge up and over an embankment with the headline, “Let us pay our debt—America! Remember what you owe to Ireland. As you honor the Irish blood shed for American liberty, help the cause of liberty now.”<sup>42</sup> A timeline at the bottom gave the year of every major war fought in America, beginning in 1776 up until 1918, with the caption at the top under the crest of the bald eagle, “They never disobeyed an order, they never lost a flag.”<sup>43</sup> Such rhetoric and visual imagery was meant to convey the patriotism and tenacity the Irish had shown and continued to exemplify during the Great War.

Particularly important is the notion that Americans had a debt to pay, or “owed” Ireland something—it denotes the fact that the Irish were not looking for a handout, but rather had fought for American independence and now were deserving of similar aid. Even more explicit was a pamphlet titled, “Eighteen Reasons America Should Love Ireland;” the first reason asking, “Did you know that Ireland is the cradle of liberty and the house of democracy, her sons have always loved freedom and always espoused the cause of the oppressed.”<sup>44</sup> What followed were various instances of Irish participation in early American democracy, (“did you know that nine of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were Irish?”), that move outward in time and become more and more obscure as Irish American leaders attempted to prove a genealogy linking Ireland with the United States. Similarly, “Why America Should Insist On Self-Determination For Ireland,” was yet another broadside that contained twelve

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<sup>42</sup> “Irish Victory Drive for the Freedom of Ireland,” Folder 4, Box 3, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>43</sup> “Irish Victory Drive”.

<sup>44</sup> “Eighteen Reasons America Should Love Ireland,” Folder 4, Box 3, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

arguments for the “liberation” of Ireland from English rule. Tenth on this list, set apart in all capitals, is: “Irishmen did more than those of any other nation to win the independence of America,” followed by a breakdown of percentages and proportions of Irish soldiers in the Revolutionary, Civil, and First World Wars.<sup>45</sup> Such direct references to the Revolutionary War were a common theme in FOIF posters, pamphlets, and newsletters.

Other common arguments invoked the long history of Irish rebellion against English rule. One insert claimed, “Ireland never surrendered her National rights. Ireland fought against English rule in every century since 1172,” with five armed rebellions occurring within the last century.<sup>46</sup> This point continues to lend itself to the idea that, just as America had sought national rights from England, Ireland had been fighting a continuous war of independence for the last eight hundred years. Adhering to Magennis’ suggestion that published material should be largely educative, the Friends put out pamphlets and advertisements that described or quantified the capability of Ireland to self-rule. They were in effect preparing counterarguments for every argument that could be brought against the Irish that labeled them as undeserving or unqualified to attain independence on political, economic, social, and ideological levels.

The Friends did more than argue or illustrate how Ireland deserved freedom; they also showed how the Irish would be able to sustain their independence. In addition to showing how Ireland would be able to support

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<sup>45</sup> “Why America Should Insist On Self-Determination For Ireland,” Folder 4, Box 3, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>46</sup> “Why America Should Insist on Self-Determination for Ireland,” AIHS.

herself, Friends' notices referenced the revenues, geographic size, and defense capability of other small nations such as Belgium, Greece, Hungary, and the Ukraine that had all regained national independence.<sup>47</sup> This again was an allusion to Wilson's war aims regarding self-determination for small nations; the Friends were showing how Ireland was on par or even better suited for total autonomy when compared with other small nations that were fighting for or had been granted the same.

By the end of 1918 it was clear that Ireland's independence would not be established during wartime. However, the Friends and other nationalist organizations hoped that with their fundraising and advocating this might yet become a post-war aim with the aid of American diplomacy. Wilson's "wartime approach" to Irish Americans had consisted of a "mixture of restriction, toleration, and mollification,"<sup>48</sup>—a strategy that had managed to pass the test of war. Just as American entry into the Great War in April 1917 had changed the expression of Irish American nationalism, the end to the war on November 11, 1918 would once again alter the course of events for the Irish and for Irish American nationalists living in the United States.

Freed from military obligation and the necessity to show loyalty to the crown once the war ended, general elections were held in Ireland in December 1918 for the first time since 1910.<sup>49</sup> The Irish Volunteers, along with other Irish nationalist and militant organizations, had been campaigning and strengthening

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<sup>47</sup> "Can Ireland Support Herself?" Folder 4, Box 3, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>48</sup> Whelan, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Ireland*, p. 158.

<sup>49</sup> Townsend, *The Republic: The Fight for Irish Independence*, p. 60.

the Irish Sinn Féin party throughout the duration of the war.<sup>50</sup> The election was a revolutionary move itself given that for the first time women could vote as well as run for office, Sinn Féin representatives had all sworn to abstain from Westminster, and many elected were done so from prison.<sup>51</sup> The elections showed that Irish men and women voted overwhelmingly for an Irish Republic and self-determination, with seventy-nine out of one hundred and five constituencies voting for the Republic over maintaining the status quo.<sup>52</sup> The Friends made sure to broadcast maps and leaflets showing the extent of support for an Irish Republic during the December election in newspapers and bulletins all over America.

Ireland may have declared her freedom, but whether the British Empire would recognize or honor the vote cast by Irishmen and women was yet to be determined. Patrick McCartan, as a representative to the United States from the Provisional Government of Ireland, issued a notice to all Irish citizens living in America and Canada shortly after the December elections. The letter may have been triumphant in tone but also warns, “the Irish people are not at war with any people, nor do they contemplate any act of aggression against any foreign government, but they will not suffer the destiny of Ireland as now determined by the free will of the Irish people to be warped or thwarted by any selfish power or by any group of such powers.”<sup>53</sup> Ireland was slowly moving toward autonomy

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<sup>50</sup> Townsend, *The Republic: The Fight for Irish Independence*, p. 62.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 60.

<sup>52</sup> “Map of the Irish Republic showing Result of General Election,” Dec. 1918, Folder 4, Box 3, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>53</sup> “To the Citizens of the Republic of Ireland Who are at Present Resident in the United States and Canada,” Patrick McCartan, December 30, 1918, Folder 4, Box 3, FOIF Papers, AIHS.



from Great Britain—the real goal for Irish American nationalists now lay in securing for Ireland her right to remain independent as one of the major points in the post-war peace negotiations to come.

## Chapter 4

### The Friends of Irish Freedom in Post War America

The Friends of Irish Freedom may have survived the war years, but they were left with a dwindling membership and a divided Irish American population. By 1919 and through 1920 and 1921, the Friends sought to revive their organization and capitalize on rejuvenated public morale and political opportunity that the end to the war brought about. The Friends hoped to use Wilson's post-war rhetoric, mainly his principle of self-determination, to secure for Ireland her rightful place as an independent nation. One of the challenges was that the term itself was fairly vague in practice and nationalists feared it could be interpreted as to suffice as a form of "local autonomy" rather than national independence.<sup>1</sup> The main strategy then, as the Friends entered into their third year of existence, was to continue putting pressure on the American government and endeavoring to win over the support of the American public to the Irish cause.

The Friends in December 1918 sponsored a "Self-Determination for Ireland Week" to bring the Irish question "back into the public mind."<sup>2</sup> The events held nationwide culminated in a gathering of over 25,000 people in Madison Square Garden on December 10, 1918; the main speakers included Cardinal O'Connell of Boston and New York Governor Charles S. Whitman, although both Cohalan and Devoy made speaking appearances as well.<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Doorley, *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism: The Friends of Irish Freedom* (Portland: Four Courts Press, 2005) p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> "Irish by Wireless Appeal to Wilson," *New York Times*, December 11, 1918, p. 14.

mass gathering produced a wireless telegraph sent to President Wilson “asking that he stand at the peace conference for self-determination for Ireland.” The *Times* made note that the Garden was decorated more in the colors of the American flag and less so with the tricolor of the Irish Republic and that at one point cheering over the mention of President Wilson grew so loud and prolonged that the speaker had to stop for several minutes until it died down.<sup>4</sup> Cardinal O’Connell was also passionate in his support of Wilson’s post-war plan, stating:

Who was it who by the enunciation of these great principles united the peoples of the whole suffering earth? It was our own President—once President of America, now President of the world. Tomorrow he lands at Brest...to obtain from England the very principle of self-determination, which today Ireland demands and which we of America, in accordance with the principles enunciated by our President, today also determined by every legitimate and lawful and Christian means to aid Ireland to obtain.<sup>5</sup>

It was clear that at this point Wilson, for his proposed Fourteen Points and repeated reference to the right of self-determination, was seen as the champion of small nations. Ironically, it was Wilson’s overly optimistic and loose terminology that ultimately brought him into conflict with Irish Americans when it became apparent he could not deliver on his words in the way they had hoped.<sup>6</sup>

In order to keep pressure on Wilson, Irish Americans utilized one of their strongest and most sympathetic support bases, the United States Congress. Irish Americans were often able to exert the most pressure on their Congressmen

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<sup>4</sup> “Irish by Wireless Appeal to Wilson,” *New York Times*, December 11, 1918, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Francis Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question 1910-1923* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd, 1978), p. 124.

based on the large proportion of them in many constituencies. With the support of two-thirds of the House, Congressman Thomas Gallagher of Illinois was able to propose and pass a resolution requesting the “commissioners plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the international peace conference to present...the right of Ireland to freedom, independence, and self-determination.”<sup>7</sup> The wording of this resolution would be changed in February 1919 to only include the “right of Ireland to self-determination”—omitting “freedom” and “independence” after pressure was put on Gallagher by Joe Tumulty, Wilson’s Irish American secretary, who knew the House’s vocal opinion on the Irish matter was becoming an “embarrassment” for Wilson.<sup>8</sup>

Irish American leaders believed they were best suited to draw a direct link between the Paris Peace Conference and Irish nationalism, claiming to represent over twenty million American citizens who had a vested interest in the Irish cause. At the Irish Race Convention held in Philadelphia in 1919, a trio of Irish American envoys were selected to attend the Paris Peace Conference if Irish delegates were barred from attending.<sup>9</sup> Hon. Frank P. Walsh, Hon. Edward F. Dunne, and Hon. Michael J. Ryan were chosen to “present to the Peace Conference the case of Ireland and her insistence upon her right to self-determination and to the international recognition of the republican form of government established by her people.”<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, Walsh, Dunne and

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<sup>7</sup> “Gallagher Resolutions,” December 3, 1918, Folder 14, Box 20 FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>8</sup> Carroll, *American Opinion*, p. 125.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel F. Cohalan, “To the Peace Conference,” March 25, 1919, Box 7, Folder 10 Cohalan Papers, AIHS.

<sup>10</sup> Cohalan, “To the Peace Conference.”

Ryan's trip to Ireland prior to the Peace Conference ultimately did more harm than good. Originally meant to stay within Paris, the delegates were granted visas from British Prime Minister David Lloyd George to visit both England and Ireland. However, the sentiments expressed by the American delegates during their tour of the country provoked "an explosive reaction in England."<sup>11</sup> Walsh, Dunne, and Ryan "met with political and religious representatives of nationalist Ireland...criticized British rule in Ireland and implied that their presence had official British and U.S. government sanction."<sup>12</sup> Lloyd George had originally planned to meet with the American delegates, but these plans were cancelled along with any hope of an Irish delegation attending the conference.<sup>13</sup>

The Friends, after the Race Convention held that February 1919, had also prepared a delegation of representatives to meet personally with Wilson to further present the "resolutions and conclusions adopted by that body."<sup>14</sup> The signers of the letter did not receive a reply from the President for weeks and so submitted a second letter in March informing Wilson that the resolutions passed by the Race Convention would be left for his perusal at the White House. They closed their second appeal by reminding him "there can be no just or permanent peace for the world until the blessings of liberty are secured for Ireland, this oldest among all the hitherto submerged Nations."<sup>15</sup> Ireland was not alone in its fight for recognition or aid from the President of the United States. The Irish

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<sup>11</sup> Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question*, p. 133.

<sup>12</sup> Carroll, *The American Commission on Irish Independence*, p. 12-13 in Bernadette Whelan, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Ireland*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), p. 208.

<sup>13</sup> Carroll, p. 134.

<sup>14</sup> "To the President," February 28, 1919, Folder 14, Box 20 FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>15</sup> "To the President," March 1, 1919, Folder 14, Box 20 FOIF Papers, AIHS.

were “competing” with Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Jews, Italians, and many other small European nations who all hoped for some sort of U.S. intervention in their “respective territorial and sovereignty problems.”<sup>16</sup>

The reality of the situation facing the major leaders present at the Peace Conference, in particular Wilson, was such that the possibility of Ireland’s independence being made a focal point had always been slim. Far more pressing on Wilson’s mind at the conference were matters relating to the repercussions of WWI—settling Italy’s territorial claims; handling the collapses of the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Turkish empires; and dealing with the threat of Bolshevism now present in Eastern Europe.<sup>17</sup> Wilson had at times been convincing of his sympathy for Ireland, and vocalized in personal statements his desire to see Britain settle the Irish question, but never was he willing to allow the wishes of Ireland to damage Anglo-American relations.<sup>18</sup> However it was because of Wilson’s sympathetic and somewhat appeasing tone toward Irish Americans that had led many to believe Ireland would receive far greater appearance at the Conference than what happened.

Wilson returned to the U.S. from Paris in early 1919 to take care of political matters at home. While he may have avoided any mention of the Irish question in Paris, Irish American leaders at home were still pushing for an audience with the President before he returned to Europe. Wilson agreed to a brief meeting on March 5<sup>th</sup> with members of the Friends after they came to the

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<sup>16</sup> J.P. O’Grady, “Introduction,” in Whelan, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Ireland*, p. 178.

<sup>17</sup> Whelan, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Ireland*, p. 188.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 184.

Metropolitan Opera House where he had been speaking. Upon the delegation's arrival however, Wilson sent a messenger down to say he would only meet with them if Justice Cohalan removed himself from the room "within five minutes"—it would seem the anti-British activities of Cohalan and the von Igel incident had not been forgotten.<sup>19</sup> Cohalan, in equally dramatic fashion, exclaimed that the "cause is bigger than any man. It is bigger than I am," and left the room "without question."<sup>20</sup>

During the meeting Wilson once again expressed his unofficial support of Ireland's aspirations and the goals of the Irish Race, but concluded that he should not and could not be called upon to answer the Irish question at the Peace Conference as the official representative of the American government given the "complicated and delicate situation with which he had to contend."<sup>21</sup> Wilson referred to the shaky ground his plans for a League of Nation were already on. He knew he would need the support of Great Britain to gain the support of other European nations. Therefore he was unlikely and unwilling to push the British government on matters not directly related to issues that were of import to his own agenda. In addition, the trio of Irish Americans who took it upon themselves to tour Ireland just prior to the Paris conference had so inflamed British opinion due to their "indiscretions" that Wilson feared there was no way to act "without involving the government of the United States with

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<sup>19</sup> "Wilson Won't Meet Cohalan with Irish, President Waits Until Justice Leaves Room Before He Talks with Delegates," *New York Times*, March 5, 1919, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> "Wilson Won't Meet Cohalan with Irish," p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

the government of Great Britain in a way which might create an actual breach between the two.”<sup>22</sup>

Despite the negative impact the Irish American delegation had during their time in Ireland, the failure to procure for Ireland any sort of representation during the Peace Conference was used against Wilson as his relationship with Irish American leaders continued to sour. Perhaps partly due to frustration over the lack of direct political support from Wilson, the Friends now focused their attention toward one aspect of the Treaty of Versailles they found to be inherently counterproductive to both the aims of America and Ireland—the League of Nations. The Friends were strongly convinced that a League dominated Europe would only further cement the colonial holdings of Great Britain. This opposition was once again an example of the American-centric ideology of the Friends. Whereas the leadership of Irish America sharply criticized the League, Sinn Féin leaders in Ireland “had no objection to a League of Nations provided that Ireland was a member.”<sup>23</sup> Irish leaders such as Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith welcomed the idea of a League, believing that it would secure for Ireland a place among European nations.

This shift in Irish Americans that had only a few months earlier cheered Wilson as a defender of small nations became more and more apparent. John Devoy gives a scathing response to a letter from Patrick McCartan, the Irish Dáil Éireann envoy to the U.S., in which he counter’s McCartan’s attack on Cohalan

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<sup>22</sup> Wilson to Tumulty, June 9, 1919, quoted in Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question*, p. 134.

<sup>23</sup> Doorley, *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism*, p. 97.



and anti-League press in the *Gaelic American*. Devoy writes, “The excuse given for letting the League of Nations go unopposed is that ‘we must not antagonize Wilson.’ Why? What have we ever got out of him except by opposing him and making him feel that we are a force to be reckoned with? There is no doubt of his antagonism to Irish Nationality and his implacable enmity to all of us.”<sup>24</sup> While Devoy had always been lukewarm at best toward Wilson, his response to McCartan is an indication of how by 1919 tensions were already arising between the strategy of Irish leaders and their Irish American counterparts.

The Friends launched a publicity campaign in 1919 that was as pro-Irish as it was anti-League. In correspondence with the Friends, an advertising agency outlined its plans for a national advertising campaign, claiming, “the cause of Ireland does not at present receive anything like the amount of serious attention it merits.”<sup>25</sup> The majority of the publicity would center, as in past strategies, on highlighting Ireland’s contributions to American history and the Great War, as well as on fighting the League of Nations. One early pamphlet addressed to the “Women of America,” warned that “this League means endless war, the cost of which will make the cost of living higher and higher, while permanent conscription will break up your homes and send you boys to die and rot in distant lands!”<sup>26</sup> At the bottom of the insert was an enrollment card to join the “American Women Opposed to the League of Nations.” The Friends feared

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<sup>24</sup> Devoy to McCartan, April 21, 1919, Folder 4, Box 3, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>25</sup> Tucker Agency to Mr. McGuire, May 10, 1919, Folder 2, Box 4, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>26</sup> “Women of America!” Folder 4, Box 3, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

American participation in the League would forever entangle the U.S. in foreign wars—particularly those that benefitted England at the cost of Ireland.

The Friends published a bulletin in one of their monthly newsletters titled “Where Did the Fourteen Points Go?” Questioning Wilson’s decision to continue his campaign for American entry into the League, one major headline asked, “Why on earth did not President Wilson state the case to the American people, as Lincoln would have done, and let the people decide?”<sup>27</sup> As had occurred during the war years, the Friends once again invoked the name of historic American leaders to lend credibility and patriotism to their cause. Rather than George Washington, the Friends aligned the image of the Great Emancipator with the fight for Irish freedom and seemed to claim that Lincoln himself would have been against the League of Nations. The disparity between what had been promised or had seemed tangible in 1918 as compared to 1919 was apparent especially for Irish Americans. The Friends wrote:

Lulled with the belief that President Wilson’s promise of self-determination for all peoples meant justice for the land of their fathers, meant the recognition of American ideals of Liberty and Equality for all in that Land, the citizens of Irish blood among you have had a rude awakening. Alive now to the danger which threatens this Republic they would have the country aroused to the cry of America First!”<sup>28</sup>

The Friends, while focusing on Ireland as an important piece of post-war policy, were still using the United States as more of a rallying point to gain the support of both Irish and non-Irish Americans.

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<sup>27</sup> “Where did the Fourteen Points Go?” Box 3, Folder 4, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>28</sup> “Then and Now,” Box 3, Folder 4, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

Cohalan, while aggressively reiterating the traditional isolationism of the United States, realized that Irish concerns could not be lost during the fight against the League. The National Council of the Friends met at the Waldorf Astoria in August 1919 to reiterate some of these issues. They argued, "There is no Irish question. There is an Irish case before the American People and the more that there is explained and discussed the more clearly fair-minded people are convinced of its Justice...We therefore regard it as a sacred duty to oppose the ratification of the League of Nations by every legitimate means within our power..."<sup>29</sup> By combining both sympathy for the Irish with American patriotism Irish nationalist organizations employed their large numbers in various regions throughout the U.S. to put pressure on elected representatives.

The Friends quickly capitalized on the growing dissatisfaction within the Senate toward the League, extolling those who showed activism in opposing it and claiming, "The United States Senate sees the truth. Let the Senators see that they have the support of the people."<sup>30</sup> Pamphlets and notices published by the Friends continued to ask the American public if they were "Willing to Delegate to Foreigners the Power to Send Your Boys to War?"<sup>31</sup> The Friends went even as far as to design and distribute a questionnaire to all candidates for the Senate and Congress in 1920 asking them whether they favored or opposed the League of Nations and to explain their stance on the application of Wilson's principle of

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<sup>29</sup> "The National Council of the Friends of Irish Freedom," August 7, 1919, Box 3, Folder 4, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>30</sup> "Would You Buy into a Bankrupt Concern?" Box 3, Folder 4, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>31</sup> "A Constitutional Question and a Personal Question as Well" Box 3, Folder 4, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

self-determination for Ireland, Egypt and India.<sup>32</sup> While the vast majority of Irish immigrants had from their arrival in the States stayed loyal to the Democratic Party, the large number of Republican senators speaking out against the League began attracting new followers from the Irish American population. The League of Nations would become a point of contention within both parties, however Republicans were able to make the most gains in Congress and went as far as to suggest creating an “Irish plank” within their party for the 1920 presidential election.<sup>33</sup>

The massive amounts of publicity and campaigning done by the Friends of Irish Freedom also won them high profile allies within the Senate. Henry Cabot Lodge, a Republican senator from Massachusetts, secured for them a hearing before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations during which time the Irish American delegation that had gone to Paris were able to speak on their experiences.<sup>34</sup> While this delegation had been largely unsuccessful in any of their activities abroad, they were able to make a public case for Irish self-determination before the Senate of the United States. These hearings continued to make public the great debate surrounding Wilson’s peace treaty with Germany, vision for a League of Nations, and events occurring all over Ireland. Edward F. Dunne, part of the American Commission on Irish Independence that had traveled to Ireland and Paris, reported on the oppression and martial law rampant throughout Ireland. He said,

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<sup>32</sup> “Questionnaire Submitted by the Friends of Irish Freedom to Candidates for the Senate and Congress of the United States,” 1920, Box 3, Folder 4, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>33</sup> Whelan, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Ireland*, p. 237.

<sup>34</sup> Tansill, *America and the Fight for Irish Freedom*, p. 333.

The people of Ireland were without any of the British constitutional securities which are thrown around the citizens of those islands. We found that the habeas corpus was practically suspended...we found the right of trial by jury suspended. Any man charged with political crime in Ireland could be tried only before a British court-martial, military authorities, or before a removable magistrate...without appeal.<sup>35</sup>

Dunne also went on to describe how homes were searched without warrants, Irish citizens were arrested without warrant, and men arrested were “imprisoned in British jails or deported to English jails, and not informed what charges were made against them.”<sup>36</sup> The arbitrariness of British policy toward the Irish once again demonstrated the ineptness of the British government in handling the events unfolding in Ireland during the Anglo-Irish War.

During the Congressional hearings the tyrannical actions of the British were once again linked to why it was imperative that America stay out of the League. Cohalan made several statements alluding to the fact that English dominance over Ireland would allow England to once again rule the seas, thus perpetuating its imperialist power over not just Ireland but other parts of the world as well.<sup>37</sup> Hon. Dunne, who had spoken earlier of the despotism of the British, concluded his remarks by also imploring the Senate Committee to reject the League:

We ask you to reject this treaty as American citizens, not because we are Irishmen, but because the Government over there as it now exists is an outrage upon constitutional government, because there is a situation today that rivals, if it does not exceed, the situation that prevailed years ago under the most tyrannical conditions of that time...<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *U.S. Congressional Record*, 66<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, v. 58, p. 4691. ProQuest.

<sup>36</sup> *U.S. Congressional Record* 66<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, v. 58, p. 4691. ProQuest.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4652.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4692.

To make public the condition of Ireland during the Anglo-Irish War the *New York Times* printed several special reports from Washington about the hearings throughout August and September. Hon. Michael J. Ryan also spoke of how advocating for an Irish Republic was grounds for arrest and the military-like tribunals that tried Irish men and women.<sup>39</sup> Frank P. Walsh, the third Irish American delegate to visit Ireland, reiterated the belief that “the League of Nations is not a League to prevent war, but to foment it; to put the shackles of injustice on almost half the people of the world; to embroil us in wars and contests such as our country has never known before.”<sup>40</sup>

On November 19, 1919 the Senate voted on the League of Nations three times, ultimately defeating it.<sup>41</sup> The millions of copies of FOIF literature and tireless politicking of Irish American leaders played a large role in the defeat of the League. The money to fund this extensive campaigning had come from the Irish Victory Fund; the Fund had been another important product of the Race Convention. The purpose of the Victory Fund was to raise close to one million dollars in the States; New York alone had pledged to raise \$150,000. The inception of the Victory Fund was also a pivotal moment for Irish Americans because of the re-entry of the American Catholic hierarchy into the fight for Ireland. During the war years the Church had receded from Irish American politics except to encourage their parishioners to support their country during the Great War. Now, the secretary of the New York division of the Friends was

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<sup>39</sup> “England Assailed by Irish leaders,” *New York Times*, August 31, 1919, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Carroll, *American Opinion*, p. 147.

asking that the Victory Fund be announced at all the masses held in New York on Easter Sunday along with the name and address where subscriptions could be sent to.<sup>42</sup> The secretary cited the fact that the Friends in San Francisco had already raised close to \$100,000 by working with the clergy in that diocese, and felt that Easter Sunday was the perfect time to bring up such a request given that it was now an Irish as well as Catholic anniversary.<sup>43</sup>

While it was clear that the Friends were using the Victory Fund solely for publicity and educational purposes, newly elected Irish President Eamon de Valera chose to journey to the United States in order to meet with his Irish American supporters and to persuade their leaders to use the Fund to finance the Sinn Féin government. De Valera had been elected in absentia during the December 1918 General Elections while imprisoned in Lincoln Jail. After escaping from prison in February 1919, he was elected *Príomh Aire* of the Irish Dáil—elevating him to the status of a prime minister—in this case of a *de facto* rebel government that had not yet received recognition by any other power in the world.<sup>44</sup> De Valera chose to travel to America for an eighteen-month tour of the country that would take him from one coast to the next in order to raise funds and support for the fledgling Irish government. He landed in New York City on June 11<sup>th</sup> after stowing away across the Atlantic on the British steamer the *SS Lapland*.<sup>45</sup> The fact that de Valera chose to travel to the U.S. so soon after

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<sup>42</sup> Frank Donnelly, "Irish Victory Fund," April 18, 1919, Box 7, Folder 11, Cohalan Papers, AIHS.

<sup>43</sup> Donnelly, "Victory Fund," AIHS.

<sup>44</sup> Dave Hannigan, *De Valera in America: The Rebel President and the Making of Irish Independence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Hannigan, *De Valera in America*, p. 4.

being elected shows how confident and hopeful he was in the ability of Americans to advocate for the Irish cause. As would be seen, Irish Americans did indeed welcome him into the States like a conquering hero.

De Valera immediately set to work meeting with the Irish American leaders who had supported his country for so long. Not long after arriving in the U.S., de Valera made his way to Boston for several speaking functions. Over 6,000 people showed up at South Station the day he arrived to try and get a glimpse as he got off the train.<sup>46</sup> The next day he was due to speak at Fenway Park during an Irish rally. At the peak of the World Series of that same year, the stadium only ever reached 15,000 people in attendance—on the day of de Valera’s appearance close to 50,000 men and women mobbed the stadium.<sup>47</sup> The numbers alone show how much more mainstream the support for Ireland had become since the end of the war. The membership of the FOIF exemplified this as well; their numbers skyrocketed in 1919 from a few thousand to over 100,000 regular members by early 1920.<sup>48</sup>

The issue of how and where the finances raised during the Victory Fund should be used quickly revealed the fault lines between Irish American leaders such as Cohalan and Devoy and Irish leaders such as McCartan, McGarrity, and de Valera. Traditionally, funds raised by Irish nationalists in America had gone back to finance nationalists and revolutionaries and their activities in Ireland.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Hannigan, *De Valera in America*, p. 30.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 30.

<sup>48</sup> “Regular membership, 1916-1924,” Records of the National Secretary, in Doorley, *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism*, Appendix 6.

<sup>49</sup> Doorley, *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism*, p. 97.



However, Cohalan's adamant belief that the money being collected by the Victory Fund should remain in America for political agitation divided him further from Irish leaders. It was the firm belief of Cohalan and the Friends that the money raised from the Victory Fund should be used to give out "reliable information on the Irish Question, and in this way to counteract the evils of the un-American propaganda of falsehood and misrepresentation which these five years past has been waged against the Irish cause and people."<sup>50</sup> De Valera, on the other hand, wished to use the money for more immediate purposes while campaigning in America and to send the remainder back to Ireland to support the fledgling government.

De Valera's demands for access to the financial resources of the Friends made him appear entitled to American money; the situation was made stickier by the fact that the Friends' treasury funded De Valera's entire speaking tour of the U.S. In addition, the Friends had advanced a loan of \$100,000 to kick-start an Irish Bond Drive started by de Valera.<sup>51</sup> De Valera had proposed the Drive, separate and different from the Friends' Irish Victory Fund that had come before, to attempt to start a loan of five million dollars for the Dáil Éireann. De Valera's plan was to sell "bond certificates that were to be exchanged for legally recognized bonds after the establishment of the Irish Republic and withdrawal of British troops."<sup>52</sup> Cohalan and Devoy had opposed this plan at first, but as the heads of Irish America felt they should have a hand in its implementation.

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<sup>50</sup> Daniel Cohalan, "Notice to the Friends of Irish Freedom," May 23, 1919, Box 5, Folder 4, Cohalan Papers, AIHS.

<sup>51</sup> Tansill, *America and the Fight for Irish Freedom*, p. 352.

<sup>52</sup> Doorley, *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism*, p. 108.

Despite the large financial contributions the Friends did make, McGarrity and McCartan felt that Cohalan and Devoy impaired efforts to secure even more money for Ireland, and publicly criticized both men.<sup>53</sup> De Valera's continued deference to the advice of McGarrity and McCartan was yet another source of consternation for Cohalan and Devoy.<sup>54</sup>

The Friends' continued influence within the American Congress was used to bring about a bill to provide for the salaries of a minister and consuls to the Republic of Ireland. Illinois representative William E. Mason introduced to the House a bill that would have appropriated from the U.S. Treasury a sum of \$14,000 toward these positions.<sup>55</sup> However, to do so, the American government would have had to officially recognize the government of the Irish Republic. Congressman Mason argued "Under the leadership of Thomas Jefferson, the United States adopted the policy of recognition without intervention," and later "As kings would stand together, it became the duty of republics to stand together in the interest of our form of government."<sup>56</sup> This succeeded only in sparking a debate as to whether the power to recognize a new State was held in the hands of the President or the Senate and ultimately no bill in either recognition of the Republic or its funding was ever passed.<sup>57</sup>

Acquiring funds for an Irish government and securing American international recognition of the Republic were major issues for de Valera; he also

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<sup>53</sup> Tansill, *America and the Fight for Irish Freedom*, p. 346, 350.

<sup>54</sup> Doorley, *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism* p. 108.

<sup>55</sup> "Mason Bill," May 27, 1919, Box 20, Folder 16, FOIF Papers, AIHS.

<sup>56</sup> "To Provide for the Salaries of a Minister and Consuls to the Republic of Ireland," Committee of Foreign Affairs, *U.S Congressional Record*, 66<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session, pp. 4-6, ProQuest.

<sup>57</sup> Tansill, *America and the Fight for Irish Freedom*, p. 354.

came under fire for an interview he gave to the New York correspondent of the *Westminster Gazette*. Irish Americans and Irish alike questioned de Valera's application of the Monroe Doctrine to Ireland. The quotations from de Valera's interview were often inaccurate as it was reprinted several times in various places. However, the section most controversial to Irish Americans was, "Why doesn't Britain do with Ireland as the United States did with Cuba? Why doesn't Britain declare a Monroe Doctrine for her neighbouring islands? The people of Ireland, so far from objecting, would co-operate with their whole soul."<sup>58</sup> What de Valera had really meant to refer to more specifically, was the Platt Amendment of 1901, which had stated Cuba would not allow its "territory to be used by any foreign power to attack America."<sup>59</sup> A recurring concern for the British was that should Ireland gain her national independence, the western most side of the country would be vulnerable to attack across the Irish Sea. While de Valera had been attempting to extend a reassurance of sorts to the British officials he knew would be reading the paper, those in America took his words quite differently.

For Irish Americans, this particular comparison to the Monroe Doctrine seemed to imply a far more limited form of Irish independence from Britain than had been fought for in the past. John Devoy was largely critical of this comparison between Cuba and Ireland. He wrote in a *Gaelic American* editorial, "The effect of the publication can easily be foreseen. It opens the way for the discussion of a compromise or change in objective, while England has her hands

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<sup>58</sup> "De Valera Corrects Summary of Interview," Box 4, Folder 1, Cohalan Papers, AIHS.

<sup>59</sup> Hannigan, *De Valera in America*, p. 118.

on Ireland's throat. It will be hailed in England as an offer of surrender."<sup>60</sup>

Devoy's critical remarks in the *Gaelic American* as well as Joseph McGarrity's equally passionate defense of de Valera in the *Irish Press* only made the line being drawn between Irish American and Irish parties all the more clear.<sup>61</sup>

Shortly after the Monroe Doctrine debacle, de Valera penned an aggressive letter to Cohalan demanding to know where, as an officer of the Friends of Irish Freedom, he stood on the matter. De Valera wrote, "after mature consideration I have decided that to ignore the articles in the *Gaelic American* would result in injury to the cause I have been sent here to promote."<sup>62</sup> Then later he added, "I am answerable to the Irish people for the proper execution of the trust which I have been charged... and I alone am responsible."<sup>63</sup> Not only was de Valera attempting to force Cohalan into a position where he would have to reprimand his long time friend and partner in the Irish American cause, but he was also sending a message that he alone held sole responsibility in matters of Irish nationalism.

Cohalan was prompt in his own response: "The *Gaelic American* is edited, as you know, by Mr. John Devoy, for whose opinion and convictions I entertain the highest respect. I control neither him nor them."<sup>64</sup> Cohalan continued, "What I have done for the cause of the independence of the Irish people recently and for many years past I have done as an American, whose only allegiance is to

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<sup>60</sup> John Devoy as quoted in Hannigan, *De Valera in America*, p. 117.

<sup>61</sup> Hannigan, *De Valera in America*, p. 119.

<sup>62</sup> De Valera to Cohalan, February 20, 1920, Box 4, Folder 1, Cohalan Papers, AIHS.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Cohalan to President de Valera, February 22, 1920, Box 4, Folder 1, Cohalan Papers, AIHS.

America, and as one to whom the interest and security of my country are to be preferred to those of any and all other lands.”<sup>65</sup> Cohalan was sidestepping de Valera’s control over the actions of any Irish American leaders by restating his own nationality and allegiance to the U.S. If there was any confusion as to the fundamentally different priorities between the Irish American and Irish leaders it was now entirely out in the open.

The fact that the majority of press put forward by the Friends during this time centered on defeating the League of Nations, despite the expansion of violence in Ireland, should have been an early indicator for de Valera of the sentiments expressed by Cohalan and Devoy. From their perspective, America could do nothing for Ireland if she became entangled in an alliance with England that prioritized Anglo-American relations over Irish-American relations. This said, none of the executive of the Friends were willing, as Devoy also stated, to subordinate American Irish organizations to Dublin, even in matters that potentially concerned the Irish.<sup>66</sup> Devoy’s scathing opinion on the manner in which de Valera conducted himself in the latter part of his time in America is clear when he accuses him of being “obsessed with the notion that the prerogative of the President is chief in the Republic...”<sup>67</sup> De Valera’s assumption that he would assume leadership of Irish America as the leading representative of the Irish Republic did little to win him the support of those in the FOIF.

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<sup>65</sup> Cohalan to President de Valera, February 22, 1920, Box 4, Folder 1, Cohalan Papers, AIHS.

<sup>66</sup> Devoy to Governor Dunne, September 9, 1920, p. 1, Box 4, Folder 3, Cohalan Papers, AIHS.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

The irreconcilable tensions between the Friends and de Valera came to a head on October 20, 1920 when de Valera founded a rival organization called the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic (AARIR). This move splintered the Friends of Irish Freedom. The inception of the AARIR dealt a severe blow to the membership of the Friends, which had peaked around 100,000 members; by 1921 their numbers would fall back down to 20,000.<sup>68</sup> Scholars attribute this enormous loss to the importance of having the elected head of the Irish Republic campaigning within America as well as to growing Irish American outrage over the violence being committed by the British “Black and Tans.”<sup>69</sup> The Black and Tans, derogatorily nicknamed, were instated as a type of auxiliary police force from “demobbed troops” that eventually ended up being viewed as little more than British mercenaries by the Irish people.<sup>70</sup>

While the Black and Tans had been created by the British to counteract the growing activity of the Irish Republican Army, they were infamous for exacting vengeance on the civilian population because of IRA actions rather than keeping the peace. On March 19<sup>th</sup> the Lord Mayor of Cork, Tomás MacCurtain, was murdered in his home, in “all probability” by the Royal Irish Constabulary, another hated force of the crown within Ireland.<sup>71</sup> The death of MacCurtain had a huge impact on both Irish and American public opinion, creating yet another martyr in Ireland’s bloody history, and sparking reprisal killings all over the country. The incredible spike in membership to the AARIR would seem to

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<sup>68</sup> Doorley, *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism*, p. 135.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence*, p. 28.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

support the idea that Irish Americans more than ever aligned their sympathies with the Irish and were looking for an organization that would focus its activities on direct outreach to Ireland. Somewhat inflated estimates believe the AARIR reached 800,000 members, “although that number may have been reflective of a scheme by which people were paid for bringing aboard newcomers.”<sup>72</sup>

Ultimately, the petty bickering and bitter infighting between Irish versus Irish American leaders only hurt the cause and made for a public embarrassment. Even with the strong personalities involved, the role of ideology and the evolution of nationalism within the Friends of Irish Freedom cannot be underestimated. The Friends had started out in 1916, when the Irish American population was still relatively weak and discriminated against; the Great War had only further cemented the notion that in order survive and remain an effective force for Ireland as well as America, the loyalty of its members to the U.S. could not be questioned. The same man who had once been accused of treasonous deeds and of holding the interests of other nations in priority over his own now wrote to the President of the Irish Republic, “Do you really think for a moment that American public opinion will permit any citizen of another country to interfere as you suggest in American affairs? Do you think that any self-respecting American will permit himself to be used in such a manner by you?”<sup>73</sup>

The Friends of Irish Freedom had become so Americanized by 1920 that they were no longer willing to delegate to an Irish power, no matter how

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<sup>72</sup> Hannigan, *De Valera in America*, p. 205.

<sup>73</sup> Cohalan to de Valera, p. 3, February 22, 1920, Box 4, Folder 1, Cohalan Papers, AIHS.

popular, the authority to influence or control affairs that in any way could negatively impact the U.S.—as Cohalan had said, “for America as against all the world.”<sup>74</sup> In addition, the Friends were more than financially secure and had made high profile allies in both Congress and the Senate. There was no reason for them not to believe that American diplomacy was still the best strategy for aiding Ireland. The Friends, despite their small numbers, were a tightly organized and highly disciplined organization that had made its influence known throughout the United States. While their Americanism may have ultimately undermined their relations with Irish nationalist leaders, the Friends’ staunch support of Irish independence and the many contributions they made to bring about its fruition should not be underestimated or undervalued.

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<sup>74</sup> Cohalan to de Valera, p. 3, February 22, 1920, AIHS.



## Epilogue

The Friends of Irish Freedom had represented the largest, most vocal, and most influential group of Irish American nationalists operating within the United States during the early twentieth century. However, despite their huge peak in national membership, the Friends experienced a great loss to their organization in 1920 when Irish President Eamon de Valera founded a rival organization. While there would be a small spike in membership in 1921 as the Anglo-Irish and then Irish Civil wars raged on, the Friends never returned in number or prominence to the heights they had reached after the Great War. The conflicts between Irish American and Irish leaders as well as events within Ireland all played a hand in sealing the fate of the Friends.

After Irish President Eamon de Valera founded the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic (AARIR), many of the rank and file in both the Friends and other Irish American nationalists groups changed allegiance. However, the upper echelons of the Friends' leadership would remain loyal to both Cohalan and Devoy despite attempts by de Valera to undermine what was left of their organization. The Friends had laid strong foundations for nationalist campaigns within the Irish American community but the AARIR must have appealed to a segment of the population that had yet to be tapped into simply because of the fact that at its head was the leader of the Irish Republic. De Valera used his influence to make sure that the actions of the AARIR were "in

accordance with the policy of Ireland's elected government."<sup>1</sup> The American-centric policies and activities of Irish American nationalists had long been a point of contention between the Friends and de Valera and other Sinn Féin leaders. However, the split between the de Valera and Cohalan factions only increased the Americanism of the Friends. For example, at the 1920 national council meeting the Friends passed resolutions that centered on resisting British propagandists both in the U.S. and abroad, and on domestic issues such as the Panama Canal Tolls Act and a resurgence of Ku Klux Klan terrorism in the South.<sup>2</sup>

The Americanism of the Friends may have been seen as a handicap to de Valera, yet it became quickly apparent the AARIR would never have the same Congressional support as the Friends had achieved. Notable senators who had extended sympathy or Congressional support to the Friends— Henry Cabot Lodge, William E. Borah, William E. Mason, Thomas Gallagher, and countless others— had little use for an alliance with Sinn Féin leaders given their own isolationist ideologies. However, the era of Congressional backing for Irish issues would not last forever. While historians disagree as to what extent, if any, Irish Americans played in the outcome of the election of 1920, there was talk for a time of procuring an Irish plank within the Republican Party.

Having already formed somewhat of an alliance with Republicans in the Senate over their mutual stances toward isolationism and opposition to the

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Doorley, *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism: the Friends of Irish Freedom*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> *Gaelic American*, May 7, 1921 in Doorley, *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism*, p. 138.

League of Nations, Cohalan and the Friends worked tirelessly during the Chicago Convention in 1920 to secure a plank within the Party that would support Irish self-determination. However, conflicts once again arose from the semantics Cohalan chose to use in his resolution as opposed to what de Valera found acceptable. Whereas Cohalan still spoke of Irish self-determination, de Valera adamantly refused to settle for anything except a full recognition of the Irish Republic.<sup>3</sup> Maddeningly, the Republican committee, while soundly striking down de Valera's resolution, had voted in favor of Cohalan's resolution but eventually pulled the Irish plank from the party entirely when it became apparent de Valera was not willing to concede any points unless full, formal recognition from the United States Government was given to the Republic of Ireland.<sup>4</sup>

De Valera's actions in Chicago only further cemented the notion in the minds of the Friends that he was more willing to sabotage the efforts of Cohalan and others than to work with them. The election of Republican candidate Warren G. Harding would seem to suggest that the vast majority of Irish Americans who had been encouraged by the Friends to vote for the anti-League party had indeed played an influential role in the election; however it is also recognized that the enormous margin by which Harding won means he was not all that reliant on the Irish American vote.<sup>5</sup> In addition, it would become apparent during Harding's administration that the Irish cause was no longer a top priority. It would seem as if the Irish case had served its purpose for

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<sup>3</sup> Doorley, *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism*, p. 129.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.129.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 130.

Republican politicians in weakening their Democratic opponents; the debacle at the Chicago Convention only gave Harding the excuse for dismissing the Irish case entirely.

Political matters back in Ireland along with an escalation in the fighting between Irish and British soldiers finally brought de Valera's time in the U.S. to a close as well. He returned home in 1920, leaving the running of the AARIR in the hands of its newly elected leaders. Complicating matters and coming back to haunt the administration in later years was the system by which the money accumulated during the Bond Drive could be accessed. The Friends attempted to access, unsuccessfully, some of the funds shortly after de Valera left, and subsequently publicized the convoluted and less than legally sound means the money had been stored.<sup>6</sup> It wouldn't be until 1927 that a New York judge ruled "disallowing the various claims to the funds and appointing receivers to begin the process of returning cash to the purchasers of the bond certificates."<sup>7</sup> For now though, the muddled financial matters of the Bond Drive were a problem for the future. All eyes were turned on the events unfolding in Ireland.

The death of Terence MacSwiney, Lord Mayor Cork, in late October of 1920 had captured the attention of millions living in the United States. MacSwiney's arrest and prison sentence by British authorities on the count of sedition and possession of a police cipher sparked his seventy-four day hunger

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<sup>6</sup> Dave Hannigan, *De Valera in America: The Rebel President and the Making of an Irish Republic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 213.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

strike.<sup>8</sup> News of his death, the background of those hunger striking in Cork, and the British reaction to his demise made the front-page of the *New York Times*. The London *Evening Standard* came out with a statement on the death of Lord Mayor MacSwiney that was reprinted in the *Times*: "With contempt of nature and in defiance of his own priests, the Lord Mayor persisted in his designs of suicide. The responsibility is his...it cannot be said in any measure to rest on the Government, who merely declared that under no circumstances could he be released."<sup>9</sup> The British government's attempt at repelling any culpability toward MacSwiney's death did little to damper the enthusiasm and support with which his widow and sister were greeted with upon visiting America. MacSwiney's death had generated global attention but was most important in rallying republican recruits to the Irish cause; his death was the first of an Irish republican leader since 1917.<sup>10</sup> Once again the British officials had allowed for the creation of a martyr and played into the hands of sympathetic nationalists around the world.

American support for the Irish war against the British, while never a formal political alliance, manifested itself in other ways. It was a readily acknowledged fact that gunrunning between the U.S. and Ireland was rife, particularly on the western coast of the island.<sup>11</sup> The *Daily News* Dublin correspondent to the *Times* reported that over 2,000 American rifles had been

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<sup>8</sup> Charles Townshend, *The Republic: The Fight for Irish Independence* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), p. 193.

<sup>9</sup> "MacSwiney Dies after Fasting 74 Days," *New York Times*, October 26, 1920, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Townsend, *The Republic*, p. 194.

<sup>11</sup> "American Arms for Irish," *New York Times*, January 28, 1920, p. 36.

landed in County Clare within a fortnight alone.<sup>12</sup> However, despite the support from abroad, it was clear by the end of 1921 that both British and Irish forces were wearing thin from the fighting. What came of the conflict was the Anglo-Irish Treaty signed on December 6, 1921. While it resulted in a truce that made provisions for an Irish Free State, controversy and protests about the Treaty began almost immediately.

The Friends were initially skeptical toward what, if anything, the war and subsequent Treaty had accomplished for Ireland. Diarmuid Lynch, the national secretary of the Friends, protested, “With Irish coastal fortifications under British control...with an Ireland swearing allegiance to a foreign King, the use of the term ‘Irish Free State’ is an insult to the dead who died fighting for an independent Irish Republic.”<sup>13</sup> Cohalan also warned against allowing Lloyd George to “placate the American public” with his “large measures of self rule for Ireland,” claiming that it would result in England’s domination of the oceans once again.<sup>14</sup> Eventually the Friends and a vast majority of Irish Americans would come around to the Treaty, believing its rhetoric could still secure Irish freedom later on.

The Anglo-Irish Treaty polarized opinion in Ireland—splitting the Sinn Féin party into pro-Treaty vs. anti-Treaty factions. De Valera, among those opposed to the Treaty, resigned as President and founded a new political party to reassert the establishment of an Irish Republic. From the midst of this new

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<sup>12</sup> “American Arms for Irish,” *New York Times*, January 28, 1920, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> *New York Times*, December 8, 1921 in Doorley, *Irish American Diaspora Nationalism*, p. 142.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Cohalan, “Meeting Held in Faneuil Hall, Boston,” October 9, 1921, p. 3, Box 23, Folder 6, Cohalan Papers, AIHS.

conflict would arise a bloody civil war that would cost thousands of more Irish lives. By the end of 1921 and 1922 the popularity and influence of Irish American nationalists groups such as the Friends and the AARIR began to decline. Irish Americans were overwhelmingly repulsed by the violent infighting occurring in Ireland.<sup>15</sup>

Between 1923 and 1935 the Friends lost members, prestige, financial, and political support as the organization slowly wound down to a halt. The divisions that had occurred as early as 1919 between Irish and Irish American leaders was only further weakened by divisions within Ireland. There had only ever been so much that could be accomplished for Ireland from the shores of the United States; the split between the ideology of those who opposed or supported the Anglo-Irish Treaty gave Irish Americans relatively no figure or party to put their support behind. While leading men such as Cohalan, Devoy, and Lynch would remain important figures in the Irish American community, the Friends of Irish Freedom would disband entirely by 1935. Looking back on their legacy of campaigning, fundraising, and staunch support of Irish nationalism, the impact of the Friends cannot be questioned. Ultimately it was the continued Americanization and fundamental differences in ideology between Irish American and Irish nationalism and the way it was expressed in their policy and politics that led to a divergence between the two.

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<sup>15</sup> Doorley, p. 147.

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