

THE PRO-AXIS UNDERGROUND IN IRELAND, 1939–1942

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ABSTRACT. *During the first half of the Second World War, a network of secretive ultra-right movements emerged in Ireland for the purpose of assisting the Axis cause. These groups had little contact with fascist organizations overseas, but rather were indigenous expressions of discontent with the perceived failure of Irish liberal democracy to address the country's political and economic problems. Numerically weak, poorly led, and ideologically unsophisticated, the pro-Axis underground made little progress in its subversive activities and was kept in check by the security services. Nonetheless, evidence suggests that a considerable number of Irishmen and women on both sides of the Border shared its underlying objective of aligning Ireland with what they regarded as an emerging post-democratic world order.*

I

It is no longer seriously questioned that during the Second World War (the so-called 'Emergency'), the government of Ireland under Éamon de Valera supported and assisted the Allies to the point that such a stance was consonant with the dictates of formal neutrality.¹ This, however, has too easily led to the assumption that the sympathies of the Irish people as a whole were similarly engaged. While there is no doubt that a large number of Irish citizens did identify with the Allied cause – as evidenced by the considerable number who volunteered for service in the armed forces or war industries of Great Britain – the extent and nature of pro-Axis sentiment in Ireland has never been fully appreciated, or systematically studied. Scholarly literature on the question of support for the fascist powers has focused almost exclusively on interactions between the Irish Republican Army and the colourful assortment of intelligence operatives the Abwehr occasionally deposited on Irish soil.² Such works emphasize the

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¹ R. Fisk, *In time of war: Ireland, Ulster and the price of neutrality* (London, 1983); B. Girvin and G. Roberts, eds., *Ireland and the Second World War: politics, society and remembrance* (Dublin, 2000); K. P. Hale, 'Irish neutrality: the myth and the memory' (Ph.D. thesis, Ohio University, 2002).

² E. Stephan, *Spies in Ireland* (Harrisburg, 1965); C. J. Carter, *The shamrock and the swastika: German espionage in Ireland in World War II* (Palo Alto, 1977); M. M. Hull, *Irish secrets: German espionage in Ireland, 1939–1945* (Dublin, 2003); J. P. Duggan, *Neutral Ireland and the Third Reich* (2nd rev. edn, Dublin, 1989); E. O'Halpin, *Defending Ireland: the Irish state and its enemies since 1922* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 225–53.

anti-British, rather than specifically ultra-rightist, attitudes manifested by the Republican movement during the Emergency. Overt expressions of fascism are typically dismissed as residual, and insignificant, echoes of General Eoin O'Duffy's Blueshirt movement.³ These narratives thus ignore the indigenous roots of the Irish pro-Axis underground, whose antecedents are to be found in the right-wing leagues of the 1930s rather than the Blueshirts. They also implicitly assume that those Irish citizens who did not desire to see an Allied victory were content, unlike their democratic-minded counterparts, passively to await the outcome of events on the battlefield. On the contrary, as an examination of the pro-Axis underground's history makes clear, a significant number of Irishmen and women not only followed the course of the conflict with keen attention but were prepared to take action so as to bring the country into conformity with what they, in common with many observers elsewhere in Europe, believed to be an emerging post-democratic world order.

The absence to date of any comprehensive study of the activities of pro-Axis societies in Ireland can be accounted for in part by the movement's ideological invisibility.⁴ Possessing to an even greater degree than the mainstream parties the hostility of the Irish political class to any kind of systematic theory, the ultra-right produced no sustained and coherent statement of its philosophy – nor even a manifesto worthy of detailed scrutiny – until 1942. Nonetheless, the pro-Axis underground was a manifestation of a distinctive and profoundly alienated cohort within Irish society. Its moving spirits consisted on the one hand of young people of 'the generation of 1939',⁵ who were disillusioned by the failure of their elders to satisfy the exaggerated expectations to which the achievement of Irish independence had given rise, and on the other of middle-aged activists who had played some part, though rarely a prominent one, in the national struggle and who likewise considered that their efforts had been for nothing and their patriotic ideals betrayed by their political leaders.

By the end of the 1930s, both of the contending factions in the Irish Civil War had not only had an opportunity to assume control over the state, but even to compose and promulgate their own respective versions of its Constitution. Yet

Somewhat broader in scope is Hubert Sturm's useful *Hakenkreuz und kleeblatt: Irland, die Alliierten und das 'Dritte Reich', 1939–1945* (Frankfurt am Main, 1984), though its publication preceded the release of all but a few of the relevant Irish and British official documents.

³ See, e.g., Martin White's 'The Greenshirts: fascism in the Irish Free State, 1935–1945' (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 2004). This study must, however, be treated with some caution.

⁴ A useful, if likewise not always wholly reliable, introduction to the subject is provided in Xavier Audrain's 'Les milieux fascistes en Irlande du sud durant la seconde guerre mondiale' (MA thesis, Université Pierre Mendès-France, Grenoble II, 1999).

⁵ I use this term analogously with Robert Wohl's 'Generation of 1914', to describe that cohort of Irish youth that was arriving at adulthood, and political consciousness, around the time of the Second World War; had grown up largely or entirely since the achievement of independence; and whose members' most distinctive characteristic, like that of their pre-1914 continental counterparts, was their conviction that 'they had the misfortune to be born into a dying world that lacked energy, vitality, and moral fiber'. R. Wohl, *The generation of 1914* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 215.

national reunification remained as far distant as ever; the economy had proven incapable of supplying the minimal requirements of the Irish people, as the disastrously high annual emigration figures attested; and the aspiration of creating an Ireland 'not free merely but Gaelic as well' was at best an unfulfilled ideal. These shortcomings appeared all the more starkly when set against the apparent ease with which the totalitarian and authoritarian states of Europe at precisely the same moment were recovering their territorial irredentae, revivifying their national cultures, and setting their peoples to work. While the achievements of German National Socialism were not ignored, Benito Mussolini in Italy, Engelbert Dollfuss in Austria, and, above all, António de Oliveira Salazar in Portugal featured in innumerable journalistic, political, and clerical treatments as models for an independent Ireland to emulate. All had come to head countries in economic crisis; all professed respect for the Catholic Church; and all had dealt robustly, and when necessary extrajudicially, with socialism, liberalism, and parliamentarianism. To many Irishmen and women, therefore, the failure of their own country to match these achievements was traceable to the system of government established at the time of the creation of the state. By adopting wholesale a parliamentary liberal democracy on the Westminster model – and its accompanying mentality – complete with an elaborate bureaucratic apparatus, the new Irish polity had chained itself to an ideological corpse. The only hope seemed to be to begin again and reconstitute the state from its foundations, this time drawing upon those continental European examples that were proving themselves by their effectiveness.

In addition to the lead given them by fascist and authoritarian movements overseas, advocates of a radical reconstitution of Irish life along totalitarian lines had domestic examples upon which to draw. Although the Blueshirt phenomenon of the early 1930s had little in common with true fascism beyond what Maurice Manning has described as its 'liturgical' aspect,⁶ the advent of Blueshirtism did lend encouragement to those who saw in the movement's successful regimentation of Irish youth a hopeful precedent for the future. The 1930s had also witnessed the rise of a wide variety of anti-Communist and anti-Semitic groups, many of which had made little effort to conceal their hostility to the democratic system. In the former category were included such organizations as St Patrick's Anti-Communist League (SPACL) whose appearance in March 1933 coincided with the outbreak of the most serious civil disturbances to occur in Dublin since the Civil War, and the Francoist Irish Christian Front (ICF); in the latter, bodies like the Financial Freedom Federation, Aontas Gaedheal (Unity of the Gaels), and the small Irish-Ireland Research Society. None of these

⁶ M. Manning, *The Blueshirts* (Dublin, 1971). Fearghal McGarry accords greater weight than Manning to the fascist overtones and undertones within Blueshirt culture and ideology, but concedes that a Blueshirt regime would most closely have resembled 'the dictatorships of Franco's Spain and Dollfuss's Austria'. F. McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy: a self-made hero* (Oxford, 2005), p. 243. See also M. Cronin, *The Blueshirts and Irish politics* (Dublin, 1997).

organizations had a lasting impact on Irish political life, although in their heyday SPACL and the ICF could routinely draw crowds numbering many thousands to their public meetings. But the rise during the pre-war years of a constellation of far-right movements, a significant proportion of whose members belonged to several societies at once, provided a network of contacts and a basis for organization upon which Irish fascist groups were subsequently able to capitalize.

II

One of the pre-war societies, the Celtic Confederation of Occupational Guilds (CCOG), was to play an important role by bridging the gap between the anti-democratic but lawful leagues of the 1930s and the frankly subversive and pro-Axis movements that commenced activity in 1940. The founder in January 1939 of the CCOG, William J. Brennan-Whitmore, was a fifty-three-year-old retired soldier, gentleman farmer and commercial printer from Wexford, the highlights of whose martial career had included service in the British Army, the Irish Volunteers during the 1916 Easter Rising, the Free State Army, and the Blueshirts.⁷ A confirmed anti-Semite and anti-democrat, Brennan-Whitmore believed that the Christian states of the world had become targets of a 'scientifically organized' campaign by an atheist and Communist coalition bent on world domination. The victims of this onslaught, he asserted, could never hope to mount any effective resistance so long as they were subject to the 'disunion, intrigue and corruption that is the inevitable outcome of the parliamentary regime.'⁸ Calling for the reorganization of society along authoritarian and vocational lines, Brennan-Whitmore nominated himself as 'Supreme Guardian' of a reconstituted Irish state and announced the formation of a network of 'All-Purpose Guilds' to carry out the necessary work of political mobilization.

Although the CCOG remained throughout its existence a fringe body whose total membership probably barely reached three figures, it did succeed in attracting the interest of German intelligence agents in Ireland.⁹ In February 1939 Oscar C. Pfau, an Abwehr officer and agent for the Nazi overseas propaganda agency, the *Deutscher Fichte-Bund*, was dispatched to Dublin to make contact with

⁷ For a synopsis of his pre-war career, see Pauric Travers's introduction to W.J. Brennan-Whitmore, *Dublin burning* (Dublin, 1996), pp. x–xv.

⁸ W.J. Brennan-Whitmore, 'A new political and social philosophy for Ireland', 1 Jan. 1939, Department of Defence Military Archives (DDMA), Cathal Brugha Barracks, Dublin, G2/0016; *An tIolar/The Standard*, 8 Mar. 1940.

⁹ It is likely that the individual responsible for bringing the Celtic Confederation of Occupational Guilds (CCOG) to the Germans' attention was Lia Clarke, Dublin representative of the *Graf Reischach Dienst* news agency, who filed stories on the group's meetings for her employers. Mrs Clarke was also the moving spirit behind the 'Irish Ireland Research Society', which she directed under the pseudonym of 'A.J. Browne'. Report by Chief Supt. P. Carroll to Col. Liam Archer, 'Anti-Jewish propaganda, etc., in Dublin', 25 May 1939, DDMA G2/X/0040.

the IRA and other potentially pro-German groups.¹⁰ Using as a cover story his accreditation as a journalist, Pfaus met both Brennan-Whitmore and another member of the CCOG Executive Committee who worked as a clerk at the Italian Embassy, Captain Liam D. Walsh. Notorious as the secretary of the Blueshirt League of Youth and erstwhile adjutant of its leader, General Eoin O'Duffy, Walsh had been associated during the later 1930s with a variety of far-right organizations, including the Irish Christian Front and the fascist-international *Comitate d'Azione per l'Universalità di Roma*. Pfaus was sufficiently impressed by Walsh to arrange for him to travel to Hamburg in July 1939 at the *Fichte-Bund's* expense to meet with its head, Heinrich Kessemeir. With Brennan-Whitmore's approval, Walsh offered his hosts at this meeting the assistance of the CCOG and the journal it proposed to launch, the *Irish World Review*, in spreading propaganda 'in defence of Germany and her lawful claims'. He also undertook to publish a weekly 'German Bulletin (Irish Edition) devoted entirely to news from Germany and her allies'.¹¹ Upon his return to Ireland, Walsh lost no time in orienting the CCOG more explicitly towards the Axis powers, condemning at a meeting of the organization the 'pious mouthed phrases and hysterical hypocrisy against the strong Nazi regime ... uttered by the democrats' and expressing the hope that 'the Celtic Professional Societies [i.e. CCOG] will line up with Germany, Italy, Spain and Portugal and others who have the Totalitarian ideal in view'.¹² In recognition of this support, the *Fichte-Bund* made a donation of £50 to the CCOG in October 1939, although in light of Walsh's well-deserved reputation for speculation it is doubtful whether any of these funds actually reached the organization.

Notwithstanding this modest degree of external encouragement, the CCOG failed to make significant progress. Although an attempt was made in November to increase the movement's appeal by adopting the slightly less unwieldy name of Saoirse Gaedheal (Freedom of the Gaels), drawing up an eighteen-point draft manifesto, and arranging to hold public meetings in Dublin city and county, the expenses associated with the launch of the *Irish World Review* – no issue of which ever appeared – quickly exhausted the resources of the parent organization.¹³ By the beginning of 1940, the CCOG had become virtually defunct.

At least part of the explanation for its failure to thrive lies in the chilling effect of the array of repressive measures adopted by the Irish government at the beginning of the Second World War. Even before the conflict had begun, the Taoiseach, Éamon de Valera, gave notice that Ireland would remain neutral unless herself attacked, and that one or more of the warring powers was likely to

¹⁰ For further details of Pfaus's activities, see Hull, *Irish secrets*, pp. 52–9, and Duggan, *Neutral Ireland*, pp. 59–63.

¹¹ Walsh to Pfaus, 27 Aug. 1939, quoted in unsigned and undated memorandum, 'Liam D. Walsh', G2/0016; Lieutenant E. G. Ryan, 'Report of interview – Liam D. Walsh. Internee, Curragh Internment Camp, 11th Sept. 1940', 12 Sept. 1940, DDMA G2/0246.

¹² Press release by Lia Clarke, Graf Reischach Agency, 7 Aug. 1939, DDMA G2/0016.

¹³ Report of an All-Purpose Guild meeting by Insp. M. J. Mansfield, 9 Nov. 1939; unsigned memorandum, 'Meeting of Executive Committee', 21 Nov. 1939, *ibid.*

attempt to exploit that stance.¹⁴ As the minister for co-ordination of defensive measures, Frank Aiken, was later perceptively to note: ‘Neutrality is not like a simple mathematical formula which has only to be announced and demonstrated in order to be believed and respected ... In the modern total warfare it is not a condition of peace with both belligerents, but rather a condition of limited warfare with both.’¹⁵ The government was thus acutely conscious of the need to ensure that no action by domestic political extremists should offer any pretext for intervention by the combatant powers, and took unprecedented measures to keep the belligerents’ Irish supporters in check. The Offences against the State Acts and Emergency Powers Acts, adopted initially in 1939 and afterwards extended, empowered ministers to proscribe any organization, whether formally or informally constituted; ban public meetings and processions; detain without charge or trial persons suspected of acting in a manner ‘prejudicial to the preservation of public peace and order or to the security of the State’; censor publications and communications; and prohibit the printing, dissemination, or possession of ‘treasonable’, ‘incriminating’, or ‘seditious’ documents. Although the new laws were directed principally against the IRA, their further effect was to dry up much of the pool of casual support upon which ultra-right and pro-Axis groups had previously drawn. In so doing, however, they served to drive such activity underground, the effect of which was to concentrate in those bodies that remained Irish fascism’s most determined – and dangerous – elements.

III

The first manifestation of the Irish extreme right’s turn towards outright subversion was the establishment of a loosely organized network of overlapping pro-Axis societies to which the names Irish Friends of Germany, Cumann Náisiúnta (National Club) and Clann na Saoirse (Tribe of Freedom) became attached. Even among their own membership much ambiguity existed as to the precise structure of or relationship between these entities, and the picture is not made any clearer by the tendency of the Irish military intelligence organization G2 – which closely monitored extremist groups – and the Garda Síochána (the Irish police force) to treat them as identical. A degree of confusion is perhaps inevitable, inasmuch as these societies had no real organizational structure; recruited their members through informal personal contacts; and held meetings on an ad hoc basis.¹⁶ Such evidence as exists appears to suggest, however, that the Irish Friends of Germany was the first on the scene, and that after a few months it adopted the more anodyne name of Cumann Náisiúnta in the hope of avoiding unwanted attention

¹⁴ *Diospóireachtaí Páirliminte-Dáil*, vol. 74, c. 719 (16 Feb. 1939).

¹⁵ F. Aiken, ‘Neutrality, censorship and democracy’, 23 Jan. 1940, National Archives of Ireland (NAI), S 11586A.

¹⁶ An example of the continuing confusion that exists with regard to these bodies is Mark Hull’s assertion that Cumann Náisiúnta was ‘also known as the Coras [sic] na Poblachta’. Hull, *Irish secrets*, p. 96.

from the security forces. Clann na Saoirse, an abortive political party launched at the same time, seems to have functioned as the 'legitimate' face of the movement, seeking to generate public support while the Irish Friends of Germany/Cumann Náisiúnta (IFG/CN) operated both above-ground in the search for potential recruits, and covertly for the purposes of subversive activity.

It is, at any rate, certain that an umbilical connection existed between the CCOG and all three of these subversive bodies. Towards the end of 1939, five senior CCOG members – Liam Walsh; Maurice O'Connor, a pro-Nazi railway clerk from Crumlin who had visited Germany before the war and was another of Oscar Pfäus's contacts; Kevin Duff, a member of the CCOG executive; and two serving soldiers with backgrounds in the Blueshirt movement, Volunteers John R. Magee and Éamonn Murphy¹⁷ – held 'an informal meeting to discuss the futility of the C.C.O.G. and to consider whether a sound political organization could be formed to appeal to the people on corporative lines'.¹⁸ Although no immediate action was taken, by February 1940 Brennan-Whitmore had begun to invite selected CCOG veterans, most of whom he had known from his Blueshirt days, to the Red Bank restaurant in Dublin to sound them out about the creation of such a movement, which he proposed to call 'Clann na Saoirse'.¹⁹ The following month the new body was constituted at a meeting in a room at 55 Lower O'Connell Street. This was the address of a small tax-consulting firm headed by Gearóid Ó Cuinneagáin, who, two years later, would emerge as leader of the most important indigenous fascist party ever to appear in Ireland. A thirty-year-old Irish-language enthusiast from Belfast, Ó Cuinneagáin had previously urged the conclusion of a military alliance between Ireland and fascist Italy to enable both countries to settle accounts with their common enemy, Great Britain.²⁰ With the advent of the Second World War, he saw the opportunity both to complete the task of national renewal that the previous generation, the revolutionaries of 1916–21, had left unfulfilled, and to orient Ireland towards what he and many of his associates believed to be an emerging post-democratic world order.

Forming a satisfactory picture of the structure and operations of Clann na Saoirse is complicated by the fact that much of the information available derives from police interrogations of its members, few of whom in the circumstances were disposed to be forthcoming about their activities. Maurice O'Connor, whose testimony is unreliable in the extreme,²¹ claimed it to be 'an educative [sic]

¹⁷ Or Ó Murchadha.

¹⁸ Record of interrogation of Volunteer John R. Magee, 31 Oct. 1940, DDMA G2/X/0253.

¹⁹ Record of interrogation of Volunteer Joseph Leigh, 31 Oct. 1940, DDMA G2/X/0311. The Red Bank restaurant, owned by an expatriate German member of the Dublin branch of the Nazi party, was a favourite gathering-place of ultra-right and pro-Axis groups.

²⁰ G. Ua Cuinneagáin, 'No other way: Italy and Éire as allies in war', *Wolfé Tone Weekly*, 11 Dec. 1937.

²¹ O'Connor was recorded by a police informant as saying that 'if any of them [i.e. IFG/CN members] was taken into custody they should not under any circumstances furnish any information and regarding names of persons connected they should only give those of women members, who were not likely to be touched, names of those known to be already arrested, and of those who were

organization' formed by himself, Magee, and Murphy, which collapsed after a month due to lack of funds. A somewhat more credible account was offered by Magee, who said that 'it was really an attempt to hold on to the more sincere members of the C.C.O.G. with a view to forming a live national corporative movement, to foster language and generally to formulate a decent Irish national programme which would appeal to the people'. Two additional pieces of evidence, however, show that Clann na Saoirse was cast unambiguously in the fascist mould and aimed at bringing about a fundamental change of regime in Ireland. A circular letter issued on 27 May 1940 by Gearóid Ó Cuinneagáin, who styled himself therein as 'Stiúrthóir' (Director) of the organization, characterized Clann na Saoirse as 'a group of young men from widely separated parts of Ireland, who have banded themselves together to work to break down the existing appalling apathy amongst the general public in regard to matters of vital national moment'. Clann na Saoirse's principal aim was stated in this document as being 'the establishment here of a Christian social state more or less on the Portuguese model, guaranteeing genuine social and economic justice to all citizens'.²² A more explicit description was provided in an eight-point programme which was almost certainly Ó Cuinneagáin's work as well. Describing Clann na Saoirse as a 'Racial Resurgence Party', this manifesto declared that the existing political system 'must be replaced by the Irish principle of government by leadership'. Other aims included the mobilization of 'the entire moral and material resources of the 26-county area' in preparation for 'a total effort' to recover the Northern irredenta; the augmentation of the population by means of a vigorous natalist policy and the banning of all emigration; the 'elimination' of the 'pernicious influence of aliens' from Irish economic life; and the establishment of 'a Sovereign Federation of the Celtic peoples of Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Brittany'. Accompanying this last proposal – a necessary precondition of which was the dissolution of the United Kingdom – was a call for the complete and compulsory de-Anglicization of Irish cultural life.

The English language is the mortal enemy of Irish nationality and must therefore be ruthlessly extirpated by every means at the disposal of the state. As a preliminary measure its use must be unconditionally prohibited in every sphere of public life including all governmental, educational, and other public institutions.²³

The available evidence suggests that the Irish Friends of Germany/Cumann Náisiúnta came into being at approximately the same time as Clann na Saoirse, and in much the same fashion. According to a Garda intelligence report citing Maurice O'Connor as its source, a meeting of 'pro-Germans' convened at the home of Eoin O'Duffy in February 1940. The principal figures in attendance

considered to be of no importance'. Memorandum by Sergeant M. J. Wymes, "'Cumann Náisiúnta" or "Irish Friends of Germany"', 1 Aug. 1940, DDMA G2/2571.

²² Circular letter by Ó Cuinneagáin, 27 May 1940, DDMA G2/X/0311.

²³ Clann na Saoirse, *Programme* (n.d.). In the possession of Aindrias Ó Scolláidhe, Dublin.

included Liam Walsh; Alec McCabe, formerly a Cumann na nGaedheal member of parliament, Blueshirt activist and member of the Irish Christian Front executive;²⁴ John A. Holden and Thomas F. O’Gorman, both professed admirers of National Socialism; Séamus Hann, a Dublin businessman subsequently to be described as ‘the brains behind the organization’; and Dr Patrick McCartan, a prominent Republican and Sinn Féin TD during the Irish War of Independence.²⁵ Despite providing the venue for the meeting, O’Duffy appears not to have taken an active part in the body that emerged from it, although the other participants clearly regarded his involvement as their greatest asset. In a letter to Walsh the following May, John Holden announced his intention to ‘put O’D[uffy] on the map everywhere – because I am convinced that with a few good men at his side, he will lead the whole outfit to unity and victory’. Holden also indicated that the organization’s public meetings were intended primarily to provide cover for its clandestine activities. ‘Brennan would be useful “filling in time” and keeping a crowd shuffling’, he advised Walsh, ‘while the inner circle works.’²⁶

It is true that at first no great effort was made to conceal the Irish Friends of Germany’s existence. In April, for example, Walsh held an IFG ‘At Home’ at his house in Dundrum, the invitations for which were circulated on Italian Embassy stationery. The large number of guests in attendance were undeterred by the presence of two Garda squad cars stationed outside the premises throughout the function.²⁷ At about the same time public meetings began to be organized, a development formalized by the public announcement of Cumann Náisiúnta’s formation on 14 May.²⁸ An army NCO, Pádraig de Beartleagh, attended one of these events; his account gives the flavour of a representative IFG/CN gathering:

The chief item was a lecture by Mr. [George] Griffin (ex-Blueshirt) on ‘The Jewish Stranglehold on Ireland.’ He gave details of a harrowing nature of various unfortunate people who had fallen into the clutches of the Jews, especially in matters of moneylending and the Hire Purchase of Furniture. Then he said that he belonged to another small society which had blacklisted some of the worst of the Jews, the first of whom was buried on Whitmonday [sic] and the rest of whom would follow in due course. Many Dublin Jews were mentioned by name, and he said that we should never pass a Jew on the street

²⁴ McCabe resigned his seat in 1924 to express support for the officers behind the so-called ‘Army Mutiny’. See M. G. Valiulis, *Almost a rebellion: the Irish army mutiny of 1924* (Cork, 1985).

²⁵ Extract from Garda Dublin Metropolitan Division (DMD) report, 24 July 1940, DDMA G2/2634.

²⁶ It is unclear whether Holden’s reference was to Brennan-Whitmore or to Dermot Brennan of Saoirse Gaedheal, although the former is the more probable. Holden to Walsh, 2 May 1940, DDMA G2/0246.

²⁷ Private information in the possession of the author.

²⁸ O’Gorman and Walsh identified themselves as ‘Hon. Secretaries and Treasurers’ of Cumann Náisiúnta, a curious appointment in light of the latter’s dubious record in money matters. Walsh had served a term of imprisonment and was forced to leave the National Army in the early 1920s after misappropriating unit funds; accusations of financial improprieties followed him through every subsequent organization in which he held office.

without openly insulting him ... Ireland, he said, was Jew-ridden. *An Taoiseach's father was a Portuguese Jew*. Erskine Childers' grandmother was a Jewess. Mr. Rutledge has Jewish connections by marriage – and 'Jew' was written all over the face of Mr. Seán Lemass!²⁹

The audience of between forty-five and fifty persons, a third of whom were female, and which included 'ex-Blueshirts, ex members of the Irish Christian Front as well as Republicans', also heard addresses from Alec McCabe and Thomas O'Gorman. The former denied that Cumann Náisiúnta was a 'Fifth Column' organization but said that 'every Irishman and woman should do his or her share in helping Germany'. He added that although he and his colleagues were not in receipt of German funding, they would 'be very glad of it if and when it should arrive'. Copies of the Irish Neutrality League weekly bulletin, a pro-Axis news-sheet compiled by a former member of the Old IRA, were also distributed to those present.³⁰

No sooner had IFG/CN revealed itself publicly, however, than the authorities moved to suppress it. Both developments came in response to external events. The formal constitution of Cumann Náisiúnta occurred four days after the beginning of the long-awaited German offensive in the West, and had been intended to establish the pro-Axis credentials of its founders before the war came to its expected rapid conclusion. As Alec McCabe later testified,

I was convinced from the very beginning of this war that the Germans were going to win it and I thought it very essential to show that the mass of the people here were not antagonistic to Germany ... It was my prime object in co-operating in the founding of Cumann Náisiúnta to disabuse the minds of the German people of this impression.³¹

Others had more tangible motives. According to Colonel Dan Bryan of G2, members of the group were 'anxious to establish themselves as good friends and emulators of the expected [German] invaders before their arrival and thereby obtaining [sic] influential positions in the creation of the expected new order in Ireland'.³² Unfortunately for the movement, its public début was closely followed by the arrest on 23 May of a liaison officer between the IRA and German intelligence, Stephen Carroll Held, and the recovery at his house of an IRA-drafted scheme, 'Plan Kathleen', for a combined offensive by German and Republican forces in Northern Ireland.³³ The discovery of what at first glance appeared to be evidence of an imminent German landing as well as of a previously unsuspected degree of collaboration between the IRA and the Abwehr caused much disquiet within the Irish government, which commenced an immediate round-up of the more prominent pro-Axis figures. By the end of the first week in June

²⁹ The individuals mentioned were ministers of the Fianna Fáil government.

³⁰ Untitled report by Acting-Corporal Pádraig de Beartleigh, 31 May 1940; de Beartleigh to Vivion de Valera, same date, DDMA G2/X/0253. Emphasis in original.

³¹ Transcript of interrogation of Alec McCabe, 7 June 1940, DDMA G2/X/0253.

³² Undated memorandum (c. Dec. 1940), 'Irish born groups', Colonel Dan Bryan papers, University College, Dublin (UCD), P 71/30 (ii).

³³ Held's pro-Nazi activities had come to the attention of the British security service MI5 as early as 1938. For particulars, see his file at the National Archives, Kew, London (NA) KV 2/1443.

approximately a dozen members of IFG/CN, including Walsh, McCabe, O’Gorman, Hann, Holden, and O’Connor, had been taken into custody. The editor of the Irish Neutrality League *Bulletin* was arrested shortly afterwards. A search of their houses also revealed incriminating documents, including a list compiled by Walsh of ninety-seven persons which, the Gardaí believed, ‘obviously refer[red] to those associated with the Irish Friends of Germany party’.³⁴

It is, in fact, improbable that this list did constitute an IFG/CN membership-roll. Although most of the names it contained were indeed connected in some way to pro-Axis or anti-Semitic movements, some of those listed seem unlikely to have had such affiliations. Walsh’s evident unfamiliarity with many of the individuals mentioned, as indicated by a large number of incomplete addresses and phonetic renderings of names, suggests instead that the document was a list of those who, for whatever reason, were considered by IFG/CN to be useful contacts or potential sympathizers. At all events, the discovery of the list, and of other documents in Walsh’s possession, proved acutely embarrassing to some of the pro-Axis underground’s more prominent members. One of these was General O’Duffy, who was afterwards heard complaining loudly of the indiscretions of his former adjutant. ‘O’Duffy alleged that documents were found in Walsh’s possession which incriminated people who were not connected in any way with the “Irish Friends of Germany” and that these documents were forged by Walsh. According to General O’Duffy both himself and J. J. Walsh were particularly incriminated.’³⁵

In the event, O’Duffy and most other members of IFG/CN had little to fear. In contrast to the situation prevailing in Britain, where the German offensive precipitated a fifth-column panic of massive proportions, the Irish authorities saw no need for a large-scale round-up of subversive suspects. This restraint owed much to the confidence of Colonel Bryan of G2 that the police and intelligence services had matters well in hand – as well, perhaps, as a reluctance on his part to believe that any organization with the alcoholic Alec McCabe and the larcenous Liam Walsh as its most prominent members could constitute any serious threat to the regime. Several of the detainees were released from custody within days of their arrest, having signed an undertaking to do nothing harmful to the security of the state in the future; McCabe, Hann, and O’Gorman regained their liberty at the beginning of August; and the last internee, Walsh, was set free on 24 October.

As events were to show, this leniency on the part of the authorities was distinctly premature. Maurice O’Connor, erroneously believed by G2 to be a ‘nominal member’ of IFG/CN, was one of the first activists to be released when the search of his house revealed nothing to incriminate him. Within a week,

³⁴ Chief Superintendent W. Quinn to Garda Commissioner 3 ‘C’, 24 May 1940, DDMA G2/0246.

³⁵ J. J. Walsh, former minister for posts and telegraphs in the Cumann na nGaedheal administration, was a wealthy businessman and pro-Axis activist implicated in the activities of a number of extremist anti-democratic groups. Extract from Garda Síochána DMD weekly miscellaneous report for week ending 2 Sept. 1940, DDMA G2/2777.

however, O'Connor had begun to rebuild the infrastructure of the organization under his own leadership. The reconstitution of IFG/CN, he told a meeting of 'a few selected activists' on 2 July, would be facilitated by the fact that George Griffin, the most monomaniacal of the movement's anti-Semitic coterie, had decided to launch a new pro-German organization, the People's National Party, and would thereby divert the attention of the police. O'Connor also claimed to have 'secured the services of three members of the Garda who would advise of police movements in so far as was possible'.³⁶

Unfortunately for O'Connor and his associates, the Gardaí for their part had also taken steps to ensure that they were adequately informed of IFG/CN's activities. The comprehensiveness and detail of Special Branch reports on the organization from this point onward make clear that the authorities had managed either to insinuate an informer into the movement's inner circle, or to 'turn' an existing member – possibly one of those arrested at the end of May. Thenceforward, the security services were able to maintain a continuous watching brief on IFG/CN's operations, and to be in a position to step in whenever these appeared to pose a genuine menace.

O'Connor's de facto assumption of the IFG/CN leadership was accompanied by a radicalization of the movement's agenda and an acceleration of the pace of its operations. With the elimination by early June of the last pockets of Allied resistance on the continent, there appeared to be little time remaining to enable the pro-Axis underground to establish its credentials before the much-anticipated invasion of Britain and Ireland by the *Wehrmacht* took place. George Griffin informed an IFG/CN meeting that he expected the German army to land in Britain on 14 July, and in Ireland the following day. Although not committing himself to a specific date, Eoin O'Duffy likewise advised O'Connor to maintain a high state of readiness. 'The General said they had not time to organize anything in the nature of a pro-German political party, but told O'Connor to get as many people as possible together as the military situation might change overnight.'³⁷

Determined to make the most of what seemed the last opportunity to ingratiate himself with the coming New Order, O'Connor set to work to prepare and disseminate pro-Axis propaganda leaflets, recruit a network of collaborators, and re-establish lines of communication with his Nazi contacts. In furtherance of the last objective, he made efforts to get in touch with Oscar Pfau by approaching McCabe, who was still in custody, and a 'Major Seal' of the British Union of Fascists in Edinburgh, both of whom he believed might be able to convey a message to the Abwehr operative. O'Connor also drew up 'a complete report on the present position in this country', which, according to a Garda informant, he despatched to 'the German Legation in New York' for subsequent transmission

³⁶ Garda Síochána DMD weekly miscellaneous report for week ending 8 July 1940, DDMA G2/2571.

³⁷ Extract from Garda Síochána DMD report, 26 July 1940, *ibid*.

to Pfaus.³⁸ It does not appear that any of these attempts to communicate with the Abwehr was successful.

More progress was made with the distribution of fascist propaganda. In addition to a draft pamphlet which he claimed to have been provided to him by Pfaus,³⁹ O'Connor arranged for the publication by Clann na Saoirse of an anti-democratic handbill, 'Are you satisfied', which he stated to be the work of another IFG/CN associate connected with 'the British Fascist League'. O'Connor's personal contribution to the propaganda campaign consisted of a bilingual series of pro-Axis and anti-Semitic leaflets entitled 'Guth na Fírinne' (The Voice of Truth). These assured their readers that 'a clear-cut German victory in the present war would automatically mean the ending of Partition with full political and economic freedom'; reminded them of the Irish republican movement's debt to Germany at the time of the Easter Rising; and praised the part played by fascist Italy and her Nazi ally in the struggle against 'the age old menace of International Freemasonry and Jewry'.⁴⁰ O'Connor claimed to have provided copies of these documents to the German Legation for approval via a local intermediary with whom he was on close personal terms, the expatriate German folklorist, *Sturmabteilung* veteran and Nazi party member Dr Heinrich Becker,⁴¹ and alleged that Brennan-Whitmore was helping with their printing and distribution. Whether or not these productions received the imprimatur of the Legation – which in the circumstances seems highly unlikely – they were certainly taken for official Nazi publications by many of their recipients. One of these, the senior Fine Gael frontbencher James Dillon, was persuaded that they had been 'imported from Germany', and requested the minister for justice, Gerry Boland, to conduct an investigation to discover the manner by which they had entered the country. They were, he informed the minister, being 'fairly widely distributed in Dublin'.⁴²

IFG/CN's efforts to recruit a nationwide cadre of pro-Axis agents, however, proved a dismal failure. At the 2 July meeting, O'Connor claimed improbably to have 'practically completed' the task of forming a nationwide propaganda distribution network consisting of two activists in each county. Later in the month, he announced that O'Duffy had advised him that he would shortly 'receive instruction as to the manner in which miscellaneous groups of friendly [sic] disposed persons throughout the country were to be organised'. To this end, O'Connor proposed to draw up a register of sympathizers and 'link up with the

³⁸ Garda Síochána DMD weekly miscellaneous report for week ending 24 July 1940, *ibid*.

³⁹ This document seems in actuality to have been a pro-German and anti-British leaflet by Liam Walsh entitled 'Who is your enemy?', a thinly veiled plagiarism of a similar handbill, 'We accuse', written by Pfaus shortly before the outbreak of war. Copies of the leaflet had been distributed in the south of the country earlier in the year by a pro-Nazi friend of Brennan-Whitmore's.

⁴⁰ Specimen copies of these Guth na Fírinne leaflets are contained in NAIJUS 8/791 and DDMA G2/2777.

⁴¹ For particulars of Becker's activities, see C. Molohan, *Germany and Ireland 1945–1955: two nations' friendship* (Dublin, 1999), pp. 78–9, 83–4. ⁴² Dillon to Boland, 17 July 1940, NAIJUS 8/791.

I.R.A. and German nationals resident in the country'. He reassured those present that their previous services had not gone overlooked: 'the names of all those who had attended meetings at the Red Bank and elsewhere were in the hands of the German Minister who knew where his friends were'.

In reality, IFG/CN found itself hard-pressed merely to find replacements for those detained in the June round-up. Although meetings continued to be held throughout the summer of 1940 at intervals of between three and ten days, fewer than a dozen members were in attendance at each. The organization had also become temporarily homeless. After the arrests, the premises at 55 Lower O'Connell Street became unavailable when Gearóid Ó Cuinneagáin allowed the tenancy to expire over a rent dispute with his landlord. For the next three months meetings were held in various Dublin cafés, an expedient which can only have further aggravated the sieve-like quality of the movement's internal security.⁴³ Not until September was a less public venue found, in the Gardiner Street home of a sextuagenarian recruit named Reginald Eager. A former member of the British Army during the Boer and Great Wars and more recently of the Blueshirts, Eager had been dismissed eighteen months previously from his position in the Ordnance Survey for embezzling office funds.⁴⁴ Joined by a younger pro-fascist, Peter Ledwith, Eager enrolled in the Local Security Force (LSF), an armed forces auxiliary created in May 1940, with the aim of identifying and suborning from their loyalty like-minded members of the defence forces.⁴⁵ In the meantime, the IFG/CN inner circle continued its programme of meetings under the guise of an Irish class conducted by Ó Cuinneagáin.

As the Battle of Britain reached its climax, Prime Minister Winston Churchill warning publicly on 11 September that if a German invasion were to occur it could not be 'long delayed', Maurice O'Connor made last-minute preparations. Announcing his intention of organizing 'groups of 50 in readiness for taking over different buildings of importance as soon as the Germans landed in this country', he distributed to the group bundles of pro-Axis and anti-Semitic leaflets for distribution within the Gormanston military camp and to visitors arriving in Dublin for the forthcoming All-Ireland Gaelic football final.⁴⁶ Four IFG/CN members of the Army, among them the CCOG veterans Magee and Murphy, were assigned the task of persuading servicemen to turn their weapons against the state when the *Wehrmacht* arrived. The latter claimed much success in this

⁴³ The practice among leading members of greeting each other with straight-arm salutes was also, no doubt, a contributing factor.

⁴⁴ Garda Síochána DMD weekly miscellaneous report for week ending 10 June 1940, DDMA G2/2571.

⁴⁵ Originally a voluntary police organization, the Local Security Force was quickly divided into 'A' and 'B' forces, the former becoming an army reserve (the precursor of today's Fórsa Cosanta Áitiúil) and the latter remaining as a police auxiliary. From 1 Jan. 1941, the 'A' body was renamed the 'Local Defence Force'. Eager and Ledwith appear to have been members of this latter group.

⁴⁶ Garda Síochána DMD weekly miscellaneous reports for weeks ending 12 and 19 Sept. 1940, DDMA G2/2571.

endeavour, alleging that ‘60% of the [Gormanston] Camp were in favour of an invasion by Germany.’ O’Connor also spoke about the possibility of reviving Clann na Saoirse, although no action in this direction had been taken before G2, at the end of September, decided finally to call a halt to IFG/CN’s further activities. These had been conducted in so reckless a manner that it is difficult to resist the conclusion that O’Connor had either disregarded the probability of arrest in the expectation of his imminent release by the invaders or deliberately courted it so as to copper-fasten his claim to generous treatment under the New Order.

Additional evidence supporting this interpretation is the IFG/CN’s failure to take the most rudimentary precautions when it became clear an official movement against it was imminent. On 24 September, Eager reported to his confreres that he had been dismissed without explanation from the LSF the previous day. A week later, Murphy was interrogated, though not arrested, by a pair of G2 officers. Though O’Connor warned Eager that the authorities intended to round up and intern ‘all people with Nazi sympathies’, the second wave of arrests of IFG/CN members, on 3 October, yielded a mass of incriminating material. A raid on O’Connor’s house uncovered large quantities of Clann na Saoirse, Guth na Fírinne and Irish Neutrality League publications, as well as a passport giving evidence of his visits to Germany and Poland. Eager, when arrested, was found to be in possession of bundles of the literature distributed by O’Connor and a printing set. Once again, Gearóid Ó Cuinneagáin was the only significant pro-Axis activist not to be arrested. He appears to have owed his escape in part to the fact that, having seemingly lost faith in the efficacy of IFG/CN, he had abandoned the organization in September to set up what he privately described as an Irish analogue of the ‘Hitler Youth Movement’, to which he gave the name of Craobh na hAiséirghe.⁴⁷ Though the timing of his defection was fortunate, the many aliases he employed also continued to serve him well at this critical moment. In a rare lapse of intelligence, not until April 1941 did G2 realize that ‘Séamus Cunningham’, ‘Jerry Cunningham’, and Gearóid Ó Cuinneagáin were one and the same person.⁴⁸

This second round-up was sufficient to put an end to IFG/CN’s corporate existence. Again, the authorities displayed surprising restraint. O’Connor spent just ten days in custody; was allowed for a second time to sign the standard undertaking to refrain from activities hostile to the state; and released on 14 October. Eager’s confinement appears to have lasted no longer; he was definitely at liberty by late November.⁴⁹ The servicemen involved in the movement were repeatedly interrogated by G2, but neither charged nor interned. Only one more meeting of IFG/CN’s inner circle was held, at which a mere four members

⁴⁷ Det.-Garda J. C. Kissane, “‘Cumann Náisiúnta’ or ‘Irish Friends of Germany’”, 4 Oct. 1940, DDMA G2/2988.

⁴⁸ Wymes to Supt. S. Gantly, 18 Apr. 1941, *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Garda Síochána DMD weekly miscellaneous reports for week ending 2 Dec. 1940, DDMA G2/2571.

attended and which was taken up with an acrimonious debate as to the identity of the Garda informant within the organization. By December 1940, G2 was able to report that ‘the activities of the group as such have ceased’,⁵⁰ though former members continued to manifest their pro-Axis allegiance in such movements as the People’s National Party and Córás na Poblachta.

IV

The People’s National Party (PNP), aptly – if not wholly accurately – described by Mark Hull as the ‘low-wattage brainchild’ of the onetime IFG/CN member George Griffin,⁵¹ had its remote origins in an entity called the Irish Christian Rights Protection Association. This small body, which had indeed been founded by Griffin and his wife early in 1939, was established to curb the supposed ‘excesses’ of Jewish moneylenders by advising those owing money to such persons to discontinue payment and intimidating the creditors into writing off the outstanding sums. The organization, which seems to have had some success in this campaign, was also believed by the police to have been responsible for the appearance of graffiti in Dublin in February 1939 calling for a Jewish boycott, and a campaign of threatening letters warning Irish Jews ‘to clear out of the country or they would meet the same fate here as the Jews in Germany, etc.’ Griffin, however, was considered by the authorities to be more malign than dangerous. ‘He is not a very intelligent person and in fact is inclined to be slightly abnormal.’⁵² Although the Irish Christian Rights Protection Association received favourable coverage in one of the most widely circulated weekly periodicals in Ireland, *An tIolar/The Standard* – a circumstance that no doubt owed something to the fact that Dermot Brennan, late of the CCOG and Saoirse Gaedheal, was assistant editor of that journal – it does not appear to have gained many active supporters other than Griffin himself, his wife, and two brothers named Moylett: John, owner of a confectionery business, and Patrick, formerly a senior member of Sinn Féin during the War of Independence and a commercial traveller in his brother’s firm.⁵³

⁵⁰ ‘Irish born groups’, Bryan papers, UCD.

⁵¹ Hull, *Irish secrets*, p. 99. Robert Fisk conflates the PNP with the IFG/CN, an error repeated by Dónal Ó Drisceoil. In reality, relations between the two organizations were always antagonistic. Maurice O’Connor welcomed the defection of the PNP leaders from IFG/CN: ‘as Griffin and Moylett had formed a new group the attention of the police would be diverted as they were, according to him, giving a lot of attention to these two individuals. He was glad that this was so as it would give him and others a better chance of getting to work and bringing the members all together.’ Mrs Griffin, for her part, denounced O’Connor as a police spy. As the Garda source recorded, ‘It can be stated definitely that there is no connection between Griffin’s party and the organization in which O’Connor, McCabe, Hann and others were interested.’ Fisk, *In time of war*, p. 434; D. Ó Drisceoil, *Censorship in Ireland, 1939–1945: neutrality, politics and society* (Cork, 1996), pp. 185–7; Garda Síochána DMD weekly miscellaneous reports for weeks ending 8 July and 24 Aug. 1940, DDMA G2/2571.

⁵² Carroll to Archer, ‘Anti-Jewish propaganda, etc. in Dublin’, 25 May 1939, DDMA G2/X/0040.

⁵³ Born in Crossmolina, Co. Mayo, Moylett acted as head of the South Mayo Comhairle Ceantar (district council) of Sinn Féin in 1917 and as a go-between for Arthur Griffith and British political

According to a Special Branch report, Patrick Moylett ('an unutterable fool' in the estimation of Michael Collins)⁵⁴ was the prime mover behind the creation of the PNP, whose first meeting in July 1940 was convened in his Rathmines house.⁵⁵ Griffin, however, quickly assumed the presidency for himself, enthusiastically aided by Mrs Griffin who described the new party as 'purely Nazi in outlook and ... out to overthrow the Government'.⁵⁶ Her husband, for his part, claimed to be 'directly in touch with Germany', to have secured the approval of the Nazi government for the PNP's foundation, and to have organized 'groups ready to facilitate the German army in every respect'.⁵⁷ Ludicrous though these boasts may have been, there is no doubt that the PNP was explicitly designed by its founders as an Irish analogue of the Nazi party. The twelve points of its manifesto, according to Griffin,

were taken by him from the twenty five originally expounded by Herr Hitler, and were those which he [Griffin] considered most suited to the needs of this country. He said that the party's first aim would be to spread National Socialist ideals, and that coming second was the Jewish problem which was all-important.

Griffin also declared his intention to give the party's branches the name of 'legions' in the hope that the public might 'connect their activities, particularly with regard to Jews, with those of the Legion of Mary', a nationwide Catholic devotional organization.⁵⁸

Aided by substantial contributions from the Dublin business community, which made possible the taking of offices in Lower Abbey Street and the employment of Griffin and Patrick Moylett as full-time salaried officials, the PNP attracted to its banner a heterogeneous *galère* of IFG/CN defectors, anti-Semites, Nazi enthusiasts, Republican deportees, and secondary schoolboys.⁵⁹ By October 1940 it was estimated to have a total membership of around 100 and was successfully distributing its literature throughout the country. It had also established a close relationship with the Irish National Monetary Reform Association, an anti-Semitic Social Credit movement headed by the onetime Sinn Féin TD from

figures during the War of Independence. He was associated with a number of prominent anti-Semites, among them J. J. Walsh, the future Senator Jennie Wyse Power, and Jack Sheehan, later of the Irish Hospitals Trust and the National Agricultural and Industrial Development Association. Unpublished Moylett autobiography, P 78, UCD.

⁵⁴ A. Mitchell, *Revolutionary government in Ireland: Dáil Éireann, 1919–1922* (Dublin, 1995), p. 219.

⁵⁵ Wymes to Gantly, 24 July 1940, DDMA G2/2551.

⁵⁶ Garda Síochána DMD weekly miscellaneous report for week ending 12 Aug. 1940, DDMA G2/2571.

⁵⁷ Garda Síochána DMD weekly miscellaneous report for week ending 8 July 1940, *ibid*.

⁵⁸ Report by Wymes, 'Activities of George Griffin', 23 Nov. 1940, DDMA G2/X/0453. The manifesto proposed to withdraw Irish citizenship from Jews, who would have 'no claim to civil or legal rights'; expel all immigrants admitted after the Easter Rising; expropriate non-citizens without compensation; and establish 'Corporate Councils in every County, representative of all professions and trades'. 'People's National Party for proper national planning', *ibid*.

⁵⁹ One of the PNP's financial backers was J. J. Walsh. A photocopy of a cheque written by him in the organization's favour, intercepted by the intelligence service, is contained in DDMA G2/2777.

Carlow, Séamus Lennon, with which it held joint public meetings.⁶⁰ But the PNP's progress was hampered by its poisonous relations with IFG/CN; the abysmally low mental and moral calibre of its leading members; and the expulsion in October of its vice-president, Patrick Moylett, on charges of stealing party funds. Although the latter's attempt to establish a rival organization fell flat, his departure along with that of the PNP treasurer made necessary a wholesale re-organization of the executive. The new leadership, however, could hardly be considered an improvement on the old, including as it did such discredited figures of the Irish extreme right as Hugh O'Neill, founder in July 1939 of the abortive corporatist movement An Córás Gaedhealach (The Gaelic Network) and subsequent shelterer of the German agent Hermann Goertz; and Joseph Andrews, a fraudster who was later to achieve notoriety by successfully using Goertz's code-book to swindle money from the Abwehr.⁶¹

The final blow fell when Griffin attempted to launch a monthly newspaper, *PENAPA*, in December 1940. Some 10,000 copies were printed of the first number, which featured catachrestic exposés of the international Judæo-Masonic conspiracy; unmodulated abuse of Protestants, Britons, and the Fianna Fáil government; and breathless commentaries upon the local relevance of the *Protocols of the elders of Zion*. Despite the intervention of the state controller of censorship, Michael Knightly, who suppressed some of the more objectionable material,⁶² the issue was reported to have sold 'fairly well'.⁶³ Noting that Griffin had inserted in the inaugural edition an anti-Semitic cartoon that had not been shown to the censorship office, Knightly, exercising his authority under the Emergency Powers Act, issued an order requiring the PNP to submit all future articles to his office for approval prior to publication. When Griffin refused to do so and published the second number of *PENAPA* unscrutinized, the censor instructed the Gardaí to seize the entire print run and confiscate any copies offered by street sellers.⁶⁴ Knightly also requested the attorney-general to examine the possibility of prosecuting the PNP leadership for its defiance of the press regulations. When the legal authorities proved unenthusiastic, the Office of the Controller of Censorship took it upon itself to 'suppress' *PENAPA* 'by the roundabout expedient of refusing to pass any of the matter they submit'.⁶⁵ In the event, even this modest degree of official harassment was probably supererogatory. By early 1941 the PNP had run its course. Though a half-hearted attempt was made

⁶⁰ See *Nationalist and Leinster Times*, 7 Dec. 1940.

⁶¹ Joseph Andrews's extraordinary career is described in Duggan, *Neutral Ireland*, pp. 198–9, and Hull, *Irish secrets*, pp. 196–9.

⁶² An action that prompted Griffin to issue furious protests to the Taoiseach, the minister of justice, the papal nuncio, the archbishop of Dublin, and the Catholic primate of All Ireland, inter alia.

⁶³ Garda Síochána DMD weekly miscellaneous report for week ending 16 Dec. 1940, DDMA G2/X/0453.

⁶⁴ T. J. Coyne, assistant controller of censorship, to Det.-Insp. Reynolds, Garda Síochána, 16 Jan. 1941, Department of Justice, Office of the Controller of Censorship 4/45, no. 118, NAI.

⁶⁵ Coyne to Aiken, 29 Jan. 1941, *ibid*.

to revive it so as to enable Griffin and two of his acolytes to stand as candidates in the 1943 general election, nothing came of these efforts.⁶⁶ Well before then the majority of its members, including the two original founders, had found a new outlet for their enthusiasms in the recently formed political movement *Córas na Poblachta*.

In certain respects *Córas na Poblachta* (the Republican System) occupies a different status from other extreme-right movements, inasmuch as a significant proportion of its membership was not drawn from the pro-Axis element in Irish politics. At the time of its formation in February 1940, its leading lights were members or fellow-travellers of the Irish Republican Army. The most prominent of these were Roger McCorley, former commanding officer of the IRA's Third Northern Division; Roger McHugh, a lecturer in English at University College, Dublin; Simon Donnelly, head of the National Association of Old (i.e. pre-Civil War) IRA; and Michael O'Mullane, a founder-member of *Fianna Fáil* who had lost faith in de Valera's republican commitment. Although *Córas na Poblachta* made no secret of its pro-German and fascist enthusiasms,⁶⁷ its immediate objective, as explained in a manifesto originally drafted in March, was to organize a truce between the IRA and the de Valera government so as to form a united republican front and 'avail of the opportunity which the international situation promises for the establishment of the Irish Republic'.⁶⁸ Efforts to open negotiations toward such a deal, in which O'Mullane tried unsuccessfully to obtain the assistance of the American minister to Ireland, David Gray, were temporarily shelved at the end of August when the government executed two senior IRA members, Patrick McGrath and Thomas Harte, for murder.⁶⁹ Thereafter *Córas na Poblachta* reconstituted itself as a political party in all but name, aiming in the first instance at the capture of power in the twenty-six counties.⁷⁰ In the course of this redefinition of priorities the movement acquired an esoteric set of objectives, towards which the 'first step' was to be 'the destruction of the Masonic Order in Ireland'. The party also called for the reversal of 'the cultural conquest of our country by England' and announced that it did not 'exclude the employment of compulsion' towards that end.⁷¹

At its foundation, *Córas na Poblachta* included elements whose sympathies lay to the left as well as the extreme right of Irish politics. Its *raison d'être*, however, was wholly predicated upon an Axis victory in the war, and this, in conjunction with

⁶⁶ All three PNP candidates' nominations were refused when they filed their papers after the specified deadline. *Irish Independent*, 24 May and 22 June 1943.

⁶⁷ See Stephan, *Spies in Ireland*, pp. 67, 69.

⁶⁸ Undated *Córas na Poblachta* pamphlet, DDMA G2/X/0251.

⁶⁹ O'Mullane to Gray, 23 Aug. 1940, RG 84: Ireland: Dublin legation: security segregated records, 1936-49, Entry 2763, 350/61/29/07, Box 2, 800-711.1-824.2, US National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

⁷⁰ By choosing to take their seats if elected, *Córas na Poblachta* candidates broke with their erstwhile colleagues of the IRA, which regarded the twenty-six-county state and its institutions as illegitimate.

⁷¹ Undated *Córas na Poblachta* pamphlet, DDMA G2/X/0251.

its corporatist economic doctrines, soon attracted to its ranks a substantial – and, ultimately, predominant – contingent of pro-German activists. At the end of 1940, when the movement began to hold its first public meetings,⁷² its members included such luminaries of the Irish ultra-right as Maurice O'Connor, Alec McCabe, and Reginald Eager from the Irish Friends of Germany, each of whom had recently been released from custody; George Griffin, the brothers Moylett, and Joseph Andrews of the PNP; Dermot Brennan of the CCOG; Hugh O'Neill and Fr Alexander Carey of the pre-war Córás Gaedhealach; and J. J. Walsh, who served as secretary of the Rathmines, Rathgar, and Ranelagh branch. With the influx of these elements, Córás na Poblachta assumed a more overtly pro-Axis and anti-Semitic character. The incorrigible O'Connor, at a meeting of the party in November 1940, announced his undiminished faith in an Axis victory and 'advocated the handing over to Germany of Foynes Airport after the war had been won'.⁷³ Another Córás representative, according to a police report, invited Dr C. H. Petersen, press attaché at the German Legation, to address the party on the theme of 'National Socialism' and stated that 'the policy of his organization was like the German policy'.⁷⁴ Members of Córás were also believed by the Gardaí to have been behind the daubing of anti-Semitic slogans on the walls of Trinity College, Dublin, in August 1941, seemingly in response to a visit to Ireland by the British politician Leslie Hore-Belisha.⁷⁵ A police record of proceedings at a typical meeting of the organization in June 1941 reveals them to have been strikingly similar to those of their overtly pro-Nazi predecessors:

Joseph Andrews spoke on the Jewish-Masonic grip on this country, and referred to the international control which was exercised by Jews ... He referred to the influence which was exercised by Deputy Briscoe, and to the small wages paid by Jews in this country.

Mr Quinn supported Andrews, and said that all aliens should be driven out of this country.

Mr [Séamus] Dobbyn stated that Córás na Poblachta had adopted in their policy the remedy suggested by Andrews [*recte*: Quinn].

The Chairman [Hugh O'Neill] did not agree with the remarks of Andrews, and maintained that Christians in this country were worse than Jews.⁷⁶

Despite this, it would be incorrect to view Córás na Poblachta as simply the Irish Friends of Germany on a larger scale. At least some of its leaders – and

⁷² Although the party was not formally launched until 11 Feb. 1941, weekly public meetings had been convened in the Engineers' Hall in Dublin since the previous November.

⁷³ Report by Wymes, 7 Dec. 1940, DDMA G2/X/0251.

⁷⁴ Petersen declined to appear personally, but provided Córás na Poblachta with the text of a lecture which was read by Joseph Andrews at a meeting of the party on 6 May 1941. Extract from Garda Síochána DMD weekly miscellaneous report for week ending 7 Apr. 1941; report by Wymes, 13 May 1941, *ibid*.

⁷⁵ Memorandum by Insp. Patrick Breen, Special Branch, 18 Aug. 1941; Carroll to Bryan, 19 Aug. 1941, *ibid*.

⁷⁶ Report by Wymes, 25 June 1941, *ibid*. Robert Briscoe, a Fianna Fáil member of parliament and veteran of the War of Independence, was the country's most prominent Jewish politician.

many ordinary members – assigned a higher priority to the achievement of traditional Republican aims than to the establishment of the corporate state, and desired a German victory merely as a means to that end. As an organization seeking to create a broad pan-republican front, moreover, it was unlikely that Córás should ever have sought to confine its membership to the pro-Axis element alone. Nonetheless, the party provided a convenient umbrella beneath which Irish ultra-rightists could continue at least some of their activities. The failure of Córás to make headway on the political scene – in the 1943 general election, its four candidates for Dáil Éireann gained a combined total of 2,600 first-preference votes – meant that until their disappearance from the scene in 1944 they were permitted to do so largely unmolested.

V

The largest and most dynamic organization associated with the pro-Axis movement in Ireland, Craobh na hAiséirghe (Branch of the Resurrection), also attracted many adherents who had no particular reverence for right-wing extremism in either its continental or domestic manifestations. During its two-year lifespan, however, Craobh na hAiséirghe was to acquire an increasingly overt totalitarian orientation, and ultimately to give rise to an unambiguously fascist political party. The organization was founded on 25 September 1940, as a branch of the respected Irish-language revival movement Conradh na Gaeilge (the Gaelic League) by Gearóid Ó Cuinneagáin. Having narrowly escaped arrest after the suppression of the Irish Friends of Germany, Ó Cuinneagáin formed Craobh na hAiséirghe as a movement ostensibly dedicated to cultural objectives, above all the restoration of the Irish language as the national vernacular. The branch did evince a keen interest in German culture, offering classes in the language and adopting songs like the *Wacht am Rhein* as its own. Many of its leading activists, like Proinsias Mac an Bheatha, a Belfast-born civil servant and editor of a small Irish-language periodical, *An Fánaí* (The Wanderer), made no secret of their desire to see Nazi Germany prevail in the war.⁷⁷ Through Dr Heinrich Becker, the personnel of Craobh na hAiséirghe maintained sufficiently close links with the German Legation to cause much anxiety to G2, the detectives of the Special Branch, and the British security service MI5. But the movement also gained the support of a cadre of committed youthful activists, many of whom in later life would ascend to positions of eminence in the Irish state.⁷⁸

Within a year of its formation, Craobh na hAiséirghe had acquired a nationwide membership of between 1,200 and 1,500, with sub-branches in six Dublin suburbs and several provincial towns. During this period, Ó Cuinneagáin divided

⁷⁷ P. Mac an Bheatha, *Téid focal le gaoith* (Dublin, 1967), p. 84.

⁷⁸ They included such figures as Séamus Ó hInnse, subsequently chief justice of the Supreme Court; Pádraig Ó hUiginn, secretary of the Department of the Taoiseach; and Stiofán Ó Cearnaigh, his counterpart at the Department of Defence.

his time as leader, or *Ceannaire*, of both his own movement and of Aicéin (Action), the youth wing of Córás na Poblachta.⁷⁹ In his capacity as Aicéin's head, Ó Cuinneagáin spoke regularly at Córás na Poblachta rallies from the summer of 1941 onward. As with IFG/CN, though, he appears to have concluded by the end of that year that Córás had no political future. The same could hardly be said of Craobh na hAiséirghe. Widely hailed as the leading cultural-nationalist society in the country, Ó Cuinneagáin's organization commanded the support not only of its dedicated and disciplined membership, but of prominent political figures like J. J. Walsh and Ernest Blythe. For Ó Cuinneagáin, the association with Córás had carried several benefits. The membership of Aicéin constituted a fresh reservoir of potential recruits for his own movement; it was probably not a coincidence that the news-sheet of Córás na Poblachta's Dublin party organization, launched in July 1941, bore the title *Aiséirghe*.⁸⁰ Involvement with the party also enabled Ó Cuinneagáin to make connections to the IRA and its affiliates, a relationship that might prove advantageous in the future, without exposing him to political or personal risk. Lastly, an alliance offered the possibility of influencing Córás's policy in directions favoured by the *Ceannaire*. A bilingual party circular of May 1941, almost certainly drafted by Ó Cuinneagáin, drew its readers' attention to 'the constitutional system the Saxons gave us, a system that confers power and wealth on a small group of people and denies the bare necessities of subsistence to the majority'.

The same considerations also probably underlay Ó Cuinneagáin's connection with the Young Ireland Association (YIA). Launched in December 1941 by a pro-German IRA activist, Séamus G. ('the Cripple') Ó Ceallaigh,⁸¹ under the title of the Anti-British Propaganda Committee, the YIA's members and backers included J. J. Walsh, Patrick Moylett of the PNP, Maud Gonne and a teenage Brendan Behan.⁸² The organization called for an Irish 'New Order', to be effected by means of 'a campaign against the Jews and Freemasons, also against all cosmopolitan propaganda'.⁸³ It went so far in its pro-Axis enthusiasms as to defend the bombing of the North Strand in Dublin by the *Luftwaffe* in May 1941, one YIA speaker declaring that 'the Germans were entitled to bomb the City and even to level it so long as we continued to supply England with food and men'.⁸⁴ Ó Ceallaigh combined his leadership of the YIA with a prominent leadership role in Craobh na hAiséirghe, under whose auspices he co-wrote two pamphlets

⁷⁹ According to the Special Branch, Maurice O'Connor and T. A. O'Gorman of IFG/CN were also involved as 'sponsors' of Aicéin. Memorandum by Wymes, 26 May 1941, DDMA G2/X/0251; Garda Síochána DMD weekly miscellaneous report for week ending 16 June 1941, DDMA G2/2988.

⁸⁰ The word 'aiséirghe' has several variants of spelling, among them the archaic 'aiséirighe' and the more modern 'aiséiri.'

⁸¹ Or O'Kelly. Ó Ceallaigh, a sufferer from epilepsy, walked with a limp.

⁸² Memorandum by Wymes, 22 Dec. 1941, NAI JUS 8/893. Behan's involvement with the YIA came to an end when he was sentenced to a term of imprisonment for attempted murder in April 1942.

⁸³ YIA pamphlet, covered by letter from Major J. P. O'Connell, G2 Southern Command, to Bryan, DDMA G2/X/0946.

⁸⁴ Memorandum by Wymes, 22 Nov. 1942, *ibid*.

published in 1942.⁸⁵ Suspected by the Gardaí of procuring weapons by raiding the houses of army reservists and of attempting, apparently with some success, covertly to recruit members of the defence forces, the YIA was effectively suppressed when Ó Ceallaigh and several other leading members were interned in September 1942.

Ó Cuinneagáin's dalliances with *Córas na Poblachta* and the YIA were never intended to be more than an adjunct to the larger task of making *Craobh na hAiséirghe* into an organization carrying real influence. The latter continued to be the principal vehicle through which he pursued his ideological agenda. By the autumn of 1941, that programme was becoming increasingly explicit. In an October article ostensibly devoted to educational policy, he expressed the hope that 'the day will soon come when no Irish person will be permitted to leave the country'.⁸⁶ The solution of Ireland's emigration problem by such prescriptive means was quickly amplified in other spheres of life, revealing *Craobh na hAiséirghe's* unlimited faith in state compulsion and 'totalitarian' mobilization as the key to national renewal.⁸⁷

To achieve such objectives would require more than the overthrow of 'our present pagan capitalist society', as the *Craobh na hAiséirghe* activist and future head of the Irish Film Institute, Liam Ó Laoghaire, put it. Rather, it would necessitate a radical breach with the entire republican tradition followed by militant Irish nationalism since 1798. As Ó Cuinneagáin proclaimed, 'It is not the policy of *Craobh na hAiséirghe* to deify either an *Piarsach* or an *Conghaileach*⁸⁸ or to accept their writings as exclusively forming the Koran of the modern fighters for the restoration of the rights of the whole people of Ireland, cultural, political, social and economic.'⁸⁹ Instead, the post-independence generation of Irish youth should draw upon the models that had already proven themselves by their success on the continent, without necessarily being circumscribed by them. Ó Cuinneagáin set out his ideas most clearly in an unpublished manifesto, 'Ireland a missionary-ideological state', probably written in the second half of 1940:

Our new Irish executive must become a living dynamic organism, maintaining intimate contact with every aspect of life within the national territory, directing it, informing and moulding it, infusing it with the spirit which will constitute the nourishing substance of its life. In other words a corporative system of government, a quasi-totalitarian or disciplinarian form of government, is indicated for the new Ireland if our basic national twentieth century aspirations are to be achieved. We shall group ourselves inevitably with the [totalitarian] ideological bloc although it will not be necessary, as indeed it will be

⁸⁵ Ó Cuinneagáin had been a planned speaker at two YIA meetings in January and March 1942. Due to pre-emptive action by the managers of the venue in the first instance and the Gardaí in the second, neither gathering took place.

⁸⁶ Ó Cuinneagáin, 'Fíor-oideachas do chách,' *An Glór*, 1 (13 Oct. 1941).

⁸⁷ See, e.g., M. Ó Gráda and S. G. Ó Ceallaigh, *Náire náisiúnta, nó Seán Treacy's shame* (Dublin, 1942).

⁸⁸ I.e. Pádraig Pearse and James Connolly, leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising.

⁸⁹ *Torch*, 5 (3 Jan. 1942).

undesirable, for us to be as thoroughly totalitarian as certain of the other members of the bloc ... [But] if the whole object of our national being is to be the greater glory of God then our people will I believe recognise that to assure the achievement of that purpose there is adequate justification for small personal sacrifices, for acquiescence [sic] even in the adoption of a disciplinarian regime, and like the Italians even welcome its adoption.⁹⁰

As Craobh na hAiséirghe gained respectability and, in consequence, a considerable measure of immunity beneath the protective umbrella of its parent-organization, its rhetoric became overtly politicized. The revival of the language, it argued, was both the precondition for and the inevitable consequence of a revolutionary transformation of Irish society. The Ireland of the future would be so reorganized as to become ‘free, authentically Christian and Gaelic’ (*saor, fíor-Chríostamhail, Gaelach*). The ‘Christian state’ was not, however, to concede any prominent role in political affairs to the Catholic Church – an entity regarded by Ó Cuinneagáin, his own personal piety notwithstanding, with an element of ambivalence – but instead would accomplish a synthesis of totalitarian political ideology and the style of vocational social organization inspired by the 1931 papal encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*.⁹¹ As expressions of this new political agenda, Craobh na hAiséirghe in 1941 and early 1942 issued a set of demands that took it far beyond the cultural objectives of Conradh na Gaeilge, the movement of which it was ostensibly a part. These represented in essence a restatement of Clann na Saoirse’s eight-point programme of May 1940: the creation of an ‘authoritarian’ one-party state, the abolition of the ‘corrupt’ and ‘liberal’ systems of parliamentary and local government, governmental direction of the economy, compulsory military and labour service for all able-bodied males, the criminalization of the use of the English language in public venues, and the construction of a new capital city on the site of the former seat of the High Kings of Ireland at Tara. Craobh na hAiséirghe’s campaign in support of these objectives soon led to growing tensions with both the established (and elderly) leadership of Conradh and a proportion of its own members, many of whom drew their salaries from the state for whose overthrow Ó Cuinneagáin and his supporters were now openly calling.⁹² The divisions within the movement came to a head when in a public speech in June 1942, the *Ceannaire* announced the formation of a new political movement, Ailtirí na hAiséirghe (Architects of the Resurrection) to work

⁹⁰ ‘Ireland a missionary-ideological state?’, n.d. Gearóid Ó Cuinneagáin papers, 1/3, in the possession of Fionán Ó Cuinneagáin, Porterstown, Co. Dublin.

⁹¹ For analyses of Irish corporatist and vocationalist thought in mid-century, see D. O’Leary, *Vocationalism and social Catholicism in twentieth-century Ireland: the search for a Christian social order* (Dublin, 2000); J. J. Lee, ‘Aspects of corporatist thought in Ireland: the commission on vocational organization, 1939–1943’, in A. Cosgrove and D. McCartney, eds., *Studies in Irish nationalism, presented to R. Dudley Edwards* (Naas, 1979); and J. Swift, ‘Report of commission on vocational organization (and its times, 1930–1940s)’, *Saothar*, 1 (1975).

⁹² For particulars of the conflict within Conradh, see P. Mac Aonghusa, *Ar son na Gaeilge: Conradh na Gaeilge, 1893–1993* (Dublin, 1993), pp. 280ff.

alongside the existing organization in pursuit of the ‘New Order’. This initiative, concerning which Ó Cuinneagáin had not taken any of his subordinates into his confidence, was accompanied by the launch of an 18,000-word political manifesto, *Aiséirghe 1942*, published as a result of the good offices of J. J. Walsh who provided the *Ceannaire* with sufficient supplies of paper to enable more than 25,000 copies of the document to be sold at a time when newsprint was tightly controlled. Confronted with the far-from-insubstantial threat to their livelihood and personal liberty that membership in wartime of a confessedly ‘revolutionary’ party carried, those members of Craobh na hAiséirghe who desired to concentrate exclusively on the Irish language broke away to create their own society, Glún na Buaidhe (the Generation of Victory). Undeterred by this defection, Ó Cuinneagáin turned his attention to full-time political activity, positioning Ailtirí na hAiséirghe as a uniquely Irish totalitarian movement that – unlike its pro-Axis predecessors – depended neither ideologically nor politically on its continental counterparts. Ailtirí na hAiséirghe reached its peak shortly after the end of the Second World War, when nine of its twenty-six candidates in the June 1945 local government elections were returned to office. Modest though this success may have been, it may be contrasted with the electoral record of the British Union of Fascists which, despite its infinitely more sophisticated party organization and substantial financial support from fascist Italy, failed throughout its lifetime to capture a single seat at national or local level.⁹³

VI

The paradox of the Irish pro-Axis underground lies in its marginality notwithstanding the fact that a by no means inconsiderable proportion of public opinion shared its fundamental world-view. While Italian fascism had always been regarded favourably,⁹⁴ its German counterpart was vigorously criticized by the Irish media for much of the 1930s on account of its persecution of the Catholic Church.⁹⁵ Towards the end of the decade, however – and especially as relations between Germany and the Western democracies deteriorated – the tone in many quarters became markedly more accommodating and respectful even to the Nazi movement, with the *Irish Catholic* noting that ‘Hitler has many admirers among Irish Catholics.’⁹⁶ By 1938–9, articles and letters justifying Nazi anti-Semitic legislation and drawing overt comparisons between Germany and Ireland as countries suffering under a British-imposed partition were commonplace in the

⁹³ The party’s history is the subject of my forthcoming *Architects of the resurrection: Ailtirí na hAiséirghe and the fascist ‘new order’ in Ireland, 1942–1958*. For a brief overview of its wartime activities, see A. Ní Lochlainn, ‘Ailtirí na hAiséirghe: a party of its time?’ in D. Keogh and M. O’Driscoll, eds., *Ireland in World War Two: neutrality and survival* (Dublin, 2004), pp. 187–210.

⁹⁴ The *Catholic Mind*’s contention that Mussolini’s Italy ‘provides the one great example of an earnest effort to follow the teaching of Holy Church’ was typical. *Catholic Mind*, Nov. 1933.

⁹⁵ See, e.g., ‘The new German paganism’, *An tIolar/The Standard*, 2 Mar. 1934.

⁹⁶ *Irish Catholic*, 7 Jan. 1937.

Irish media.⁹⁷ As the *Catholic Bulletin* asserted during the crisis over the Polish Corridor, ‘The British refusal to assent to the incorporation of Danzig with Germany is all of a piece with the same nation’s refusal to allow the ardently Irish town of Newry to come under the Irish flag. It is an act of infamous aggression against the Reich.’⁹⁸ The perception that a European war was being ‘engineered by the financiers and Jews of the world’, as a prominent Fine Gael backbencher put it during a Dáil debate in February 1939, was no less widespread.⁹⁹ Until it was eventually prevented from doing so by the censorship authorities, the *Kerryman* newspaper’s preferred method of elucidating for its readers the questions at issue in the war consisted of reprinting on its front page, with approving commentaries, articles from the British Union of Fascists’ journal *Action*.¹⁰⁰

The extent of popular sympathy in Ireland for the fascist states in the early years of the Emergency is a subject that demands much more scholarly attention than it has hitherto received. But there is no doubt that in 1939 and 1940 it was sufficiently great as to cause serious alarm to well-informed observers. Éamon de Valera acknowledged frankly that ‘the people were pro-German’ in a July 1940 interview.¹⁰¹ The leader of the opposition Fine Gael party, Richard Mulcahy, also took note six months later of information from various sources that ‘mass opinion [was] setting pro-German’.¹⁰² The consul-general of the Czech government-in-exile, D. K. Kostal, considered that the ordinary people and the educated classes alike were deeply sceptical of the ‘ideological background of the European struggle’, which they regarded as ‘bluff ... For the ordinary Irish person who does not know Germany it is sufficient that Germany is striking the English. Of anything further he does not meditate and does not wish to meditate.’¹⁰³ A similar trend was seen north of the Border, where a Belfast diarist recorded in June 1940 that the nationalist Falls Road was ‘delighted by every success on the part of Hitler’, and where supporters of the Catholic-affiliated football team Belfast Celtic baited their Protestant Linfield rivals ‘by giving them a Nazi-style salute’.¹⁰⁴ In the Belfast Christian Brothers’ school attended by Tom Mageean, later to become an Ailtirí na hAiséirghe member, spontaneous cheering broke out whenever news was received of a German victory. ‘Most of the nationalist population’, Mageean believed, ‘were pro-Axis – they used to like to see Britain getting it in the neck.’¹⁰⁵ To these basic orientations, the success of German arms

⁹⁷ See, e.g., Maud Gonne McBride’s speech on the Sudeten question, *Irish Press*, 26 Sept. 1938; letter by ‘J. C. M.’, *Irish Independent*, 3 July 1939; ‘Sceilg’ (J. J. O’Kelly), ‘Whither Ireland’s culture?’ *Kerryman*, 22 July 1939.

⁹⁸ *Catholic Bulletin*, 29 (1939), p. 374.

⁹⁹ Capt. Patrick Giles, *Diospóireachtaí Parlaiminte-Dáil*, vol. 74, c. 659 (16 Feb. 1939).

¹⁰⁰ See, e.g., the issues of 4, 11, and 25 Nov. 1939.

¹⁰¹ De Valera interview with Patrick Herdman, 5/6 July 1940, quoted by B. Girvin, ‘The republicanism of Irish society, 1932–1948’, in J. R. Hill, ed., *A new history of Ireland*, VII: *Ireland, 1921–1984* (Oxford, 2003), p. 151.

¹⁰² Untitled manuscript note, 8 Jan. 1941, Richard Mulcahy papers P7/a/211, UCD.

¹⁰³ D. K. Kostal, ‘Report on the Situation in Ireland’, 31 May 1940, Department of External Affairs file A.8, NAI.

¹⁰⁴ B. Barton, *The blitz: Belfast in the war years* (Belfast, 1989), pp. 271–2.

¹⁰⁵ Tom Mageean, Belfast, author interview, 2 Aug. 1999.

in the summer of 1940 added a considerable ‘bandwagon’ effect. John Betjeman, a British political monitor serving under the guise of a cultural attaché in Dublin, was deeply concerned by this tendency. ‘There is nothing succeeds like success and every German success means more pro-Germans.’¹⁰⁶

The pro-Axis groups that emerged, therefore, ought to have been able to flourish in this fertile soil. In reality, nothing of the kind occurred. There were three principal reasons for their failure. The first was the political and ideological inadequacy of the Irish ultra-right in the 1930s. Though a wide variety of anti-Marxist, anti-democratic, and anti-Semitic bodies arose throughout the decade, none had any staying power: other than the eccentric and discredited O’Duffy, these movements left behind neither plausible ideologies, structures nor leaders upon which the next generation of extremists might draw. The second reason was the hostility of the political environment. The exigencies of wartime had placed in the hands of the de Valera government sweeping emergency powers, of which it did not hesitate to make full use. In such a climate, it was unsurprising that few Irish citizens were willing to put themselves at personal risk to bring closer a German victory that many after June 1940 already regarded as an inevitability. But the third, and perhaps the most important factor making for the sterility of the ultra-rightist Irish groups was the striking dearth of talent within their ranks. With the exception of Gearóid Ó Cuinneagáin, who possessed a powerful if narrow intelligence, the leaders of the pro-Axis underground were startlingly deficient in imagination, initiative and political instincts. Thus handicapped, they could offer little beyond a crudely imitative pastiche of continental totalitarianism, wholly unadapted to Irish conditions and unlikely to make any broad appeal.

All of these factors help to explain another curious circumstance: the unexpected mildness of the official response. This can be accounted for in part by the tight control maintained by the official censorship over the press. The kind of journalistic rumour-mongering and scare stories that led to widespread ‘Fifth Column’ panics in Britain, France, the Netherlands, Romania, and Yugoslavia in the autumn of 1939 and spring of 1940 found no counterpart in the Irish media, reducing political pressure on the government and enabling them to avoid a self-sustaining chain reaction in which initial rounds of arrests, interpreted by press and public as evidence of the objective reality of the threat, gave rise to demands for more arrests.¹⁰⁷ Rather than proceed to a counter-productive ‘collar the lot’ strategy, the state security forces were given time by their political masters to

¹⁰⁶ Betjeman to H. V. Hodson, Empire Division, Ministry of Information, 21 June 1940, NA INF 1/528.

¹⁰⁷ L. DeJong, *The German fifth column in the Second World War* (Chicago, 1956); R. M. Delacor, ‘From potential friends to potential enemies: the internment of “hostile foreigners” in France at the beginning of the Second World War’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35 (2000), pp. 361–8; A. Grynberg, ‘1939–1940: l’internement en temps de guerre: les politiques de France et de la Grande Bretagne’, *XXe Siècle*, 54 (1997); S. Hurlburt, ‘Enemy within our gates: the national press and the fifth column scare in Britain, April–June 1940’ (BA thesis, Colgate, 2001); A. W. B. Simpson, *In the highest degree odious: detention without trial in wartime Britain* (Oxford, 1993).

place these small, amateurish, and easily penetrated movements under effective and inconspicuous surveillance. With the self-confidence born of efficiency, the police and military intelligence were content to restrict themselves to a policy of periodically lopping off the green shoots of subversion, leaving the roots to wither beneath the soil.

That they were allowed to do so speaks well of the steadiness of nerve of the Irish government, at a time when the country was highly vulnerable to invasion and the temptation to take drastic action must at times have been almost irresistible. Their restraint no doubt owed something to the fact that, uniquely among the governments of the Western European democracies, Éamon de Valera and the majority of his ministers had themselves been professional revolutionaries during the 1910s and 1920s, owing their physical survival in part to their ability to assess with accuracy the seriousness of political threats. But the cabinet was also probably not unmindful of the impact that large-scale round-ups of pro-Axis suspects would have had in Britain. From the vantage point of London, such measures would undoubtedly have been regarded as evidence of a major German espionage network in Ireland. At best, they must have led to increased pressure on Dublin from the British government to sever diplomatic relations with the Axis powers; at worst, they might have offered a pretext for British armed intervention to neutralize a 'nest of enemy subversives' and, in the process, seize the Treaty Ports.

In the event, the government's confidence in the security services was not misplaced. It is difficult to conceive that the fascist hard core, under the most favourable of circumstances, could have become more than merely troublesome unless the Germans had indeed landed. Even then, that Field Marshal von Brauchitsch, the designated military commander of Britain and Ireland had Operation *Seelöwe* gone ahead, might have found any use for it during or after a German invasion is scarcely more probable. Lacking the visibility even of a Degrelle or a Mussert, its leaders had nothing to offer beyond their ostentatious collaborationism, a property that in the event would doubtless have distinguished them little from other, more highly placed figures within the mainstream political caste. Under German rule, they could have expected to be swiftly elbowed aside.

The significance of the Irish pro-Axis underground lies elsewhere: as an indication that all was far from well with the state of Irish democracy. This was to become clearer during the second half of the war with the rise of Ailtirí na hAiséirghe – whose electoral record, in spite of the astonishing incompetence of its leaders, should give pause to those who consider that parliamentary democracy had become so well established as to be uncontroversial in the Ireland of the 1940s. Though the pro-Axis underground may have been marginal, the discontents of which it was an expression were not. As John Lukács has reminded us, a considerable number of people, in Europe and elsewhere, interpreted the fall of France and what they perceived as the imminent defeat of Britain as 'an evidence and a justification of their own ideas about the corrupt and inefficient, the

hypocritical and antiquated nature of parliamentary government, of bourgeois democracy, of liberal capitalism'.¹⁰⁸ Should an invasion force from the continent have called *fnis* to what, from the perspective of the early 1940s, appeared to many to be the failed Irish experiment in liberal democracy, it would not have lacked for Irishmen and women ready to applaud.

¹⁰⁸ J. Lukács, *The duel, 10 May–31 July 1940: the eighty-day struggle between Churchill and Hitler* (New York, 1991), p. 191.