

where he has largely remained. This meticulously researched biography succeeds in rescuing W. T. Cosgrave from the margins of twentieth-century Irish history and places him firmly at the heart of the historiography. *Judging W. T. Cosgrave* constitutes a major contribution to the historical understanding of independent Ireland's first head of government and the democratic state that he helped to establish and nurture whether in government or opposition.

doi: 10.1017/ihs.2015.14

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AFTERIMAGE OF THE REVOLUTION: CUMANN NA nGAEDHEAL AND IRISH POLITICS, 1922–1932, By Jason Knirck. Pp ix, 306. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. 2014. \$29.95.

FREEDOM TO ACHIEVE FREEDOM: THE IRISH FREE STATE, 1922–1932. By Donal P. Corcoran. Pp 288. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan. 2013. €40.

Long a neglected area of historiography, pro-Treaty politics have proved a rich area of scholarship since the late 1990s with the appearance of books and articles by historians such as Mike Cronin, John M. Regan and Ciara Meehan. The latest addition, Jason Knirck's *Afterimage of the revolution: Cumann na nGaedheal and Irish politics, 1922–1932*, offers a stimulating response to the central thesis put forward in Regan's 1999 study *The Irish counter-revolution, 1921–36*. Whereas Regan argued that Cumann na nGaedheal presided over a dedicated counter-revolution against the republicanism of the revolutionary period, Knirck contends that, under the party's stewardship from 1923, the 'language of the revolution continued to exert a dominant influence' as the Cosgrave government built on the revolutionary inheritance. Knirck convincingly argues that labelling Cumann na nGaedheal 'counter-revolutionary' and anti-Treaty Sinn Féin or Fianna Fáil 'revolutionary' is useful neither analytically nor in terms of understanding either the revolution itself or the politics of independent Ireland. He also shows that assumptions of post-Treaty divisions conforming neatly to pre-Treaty attitudes have led to a distorted rendering of the revolutionary period as something resembling an internal conflict between radicals and moderates within the movement. Instead, the author wishes to reconnect Cumann na nGaedheal, as the first governing party of independent Ireland, to the revolution which preceded the state's foundation. Drawing on a wide range of sources – official documents, party minute books, newspapers and private collections – Knirck offers a fresh perspective on the politics of the Free State, 1922–32 while showing how Cumann na nGaedheal engaged with the legacy of the Irish revolution.

In particular, Knirck takes issue with the somewhat problematic tendency to conflate consolidating a revolution with actively seeking to counter it – an approach that has been adopted in accounting for post-1921 nationalism's transition from the politics of revolution to statehood. Such an approach, Knirck suggests, inevitably restricts the real Irish revolution to the disparate groups who continued to reject the new state into the 1930s and beyond. In contrast, *Afterimage of the revolution* frames the immediate post-independence period in the context of a continuous Irish revolution that carried on after 1922. This interpretation casts the Cumann na nGaedheal leadership in a new light – presiding over the implementation of the revolutionary programme rather than actively seeking to counter it. Noting that Meehan's 2010 book, *The Cosgrave party*, was written for a different purpose and therefore did not specifically engage with the question of revolution/counter-revolution – instead locating Cumann na nGaedheal within the Irish Parliamentary Party's tradition of constitutional nationalism – Knirck

argues that the continuities between the party and the revolution have, therefore, been 'buried in the recent literature'. This is an important point which could alter the way that historians look at both the revolution and the decade that followed it.

In framing the argument that the ideas, rhetoric and language of the revolution greatly influenced Cumann na nGaedheal and were often invoked in both the creation and defence of its policies after 1922, *Afterimage of the revolution* focuses heavily on the party's successes in the arena of international affairs and its efforts to create a state which was authentically Irish. These subjects are treated thematically, with its second chapter exploring Cumann na nGaedheal's efforts to assert Irish sovereignty and chapter three discussing the creation of an authentically Irish or 'Gaelicised' Free State. Chapters four and five are devoted to the party's foreign policies and, what is presented as, its attempts to build an anti-imperial Commonwealth. In these chapters a picture emerges of a party that was consciously anti-colonial and imbued in the ideology of both the Irish-Ireland movement and revolutionary Sinn Féin.

While more space might have been devoted to the interaction between Cumann na nGaedheal and Fianna Fáil across the floor of the Dáil between 1927 and 1932, Knirck argues that, during its final years in power, Cosgrave's party 'was becoming much more aggressive in citing revolutionary heroes' (p. 218). In its final chapter, 'Reclaiming the revolution', the author shows that Cumann na nGaedheal had begun to reanimate its links to the Easter Rising and the War of Independence. This is an important point given that historians have under-appreciated the party's level of engagement with the revolution. Indeed, historians have tended to overlook Cumann na nGaedheal's final years, instead interpreting the emergence of the Blueshirt movement in 1933 as a more emphatic assertion of pro-Treaty republicanism. *Afterimage of the revolution* is an excellent study which reconnects Cumann na nGaedheal to the Irish revolution while making a considerable contribution to the historiography.

As its title suggests, Donal P. Corcoran's detailed monograph, charts the development of the Irish Free State from its creation in the aftermath of a peace settlement that fell short of Sinn Féin's demand for an Irish Republic, to its first experience of a change of government a decade later. Although covering the period from the Dáil's approval of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in January 1922 to the transfer of power from Cumann na nGaedheal to Fianna Fáil in March 1932, this book is not a political history of the pro-Treaty party that was continuously in power during that decade. Instead, *Freedom to achieve freedom* examines the processes that were involved in building the new state in the aftermath of the devastating Civil War that accompanied its birth. It is a book about the stark choices that faced independent Ireland's first government, and the institutions that were created as a result of the decisions that were taken. Corcoran devotes particular attention to the Cumann na nGaedheal government's creation of an efficient administrative machine during a decade of financial scarcity before concluding that the government's achievements were remarkable given the unfavourable economic circumstances that marked the decade 1922–32 (p. 256). It, therefore, offers a contrast to the scholarship of Knirck's book (as well as Regan's and Meehan's studies).

Corcoran deals thematically with each area of government activity by devoting no fewer than fourteen separate chapters to such matters as agriculture and lands, education and the Irish language, finance, health and social welfare, the public service and the restoration of law-and-order. Separate chapters are also devoted to the 1922 constitution, communications, external affairs, security, trade and the army while there is also a short, twelve-page chapter on 'politics and the political parties' in the Free State. When these fourteen chapters are added to the introduction and conclusion, as well as a short chapter describing 'Ireland before independence', the book reaches a somewhat unwieldy total of seventeen chapters. While successful in conveying the day-to-day administrative challenges that were faced by the Free State government between 1922 and 1932, one may quibble that *Freedom to achieve freedom* would have benefited from a more fluid structure that would lend greater coherence to the case put forward by the author. Given that the shortage of public money, the quest to legitimise the Free State and the socio-economic orthodoxies of the 1920s all affected so many

different areas of policy under Cumann na nGaedheal, a more integrated structure could have allowed the author to develop a more clearly defined central thesis.

The book is primarily concerned with tough decisions taken in difficult circumstances and Corcoran is particularly successful in conveying the scale of the financial constraints under which the Cumann na nGaedheal government operated. Weighed down from its birth, the new state had compensation payments to meet, a swollen army to maintain and a war-ravaged infrastructure to reconstruct. Ministers were ‘acutely aware that not only could they be defeated militarily and politically, they could also be defeated financially’ (p. 141). Here the author puts his own financial expertise to good use, guiding the reader through the administrative architecture governing national income and expenditure and the measures adopted to enhance the new state’s credit rating. Throughout its period in government, Cumann na nGaedheal, according to Corcoran, overcame difficulties that were often outside its control. At first these were manifested in a deepening post-war depression and economic dislocation, not to mention international jitters caused by German hyper-inflation. By the end of the 1920s the world had sunk into a new ‘Great Depression’ that had dire consequences for mainstream European politics. Each of these crises worked against the Free State’s export-orientated economy. However, not all of Cumann na nGaedheal policies were dictated by adverse global circumstances and some further investigation of the political calculations underpinning aspects of the party’s fiscal policies – such as its decade-long commitment to tax cuts while simultaneously overseeing a policy of financial stringency – could have added to a more nuanced understanding of the decisions taken in the first decade of independence.

In terms of social policy under Cosgrave, Corcoran is clear on the ideological influences behind the government’s conservative approach. Having inherited a progressive, by the standards of the period, welfare system in 1922 progress stalled after independence as Cumann na nGaedheal struggled to fund the existing system from reduced revenue. Its cut to the old age pension in 1924 is the most notorious example of this tendency. Moreover, the government and the Catholic Church acted as ‘self-appointed guardians of the state’s morality’ (p. 119). Corcoran argues that, as a consequence, issues which should have been confronted by the new state – children in industrial schools, venereal disease, contraception, sexual crime and infanticide – were instead contained ‘under a veil of secrecy’. Moreover, discrimination against women worsened during the 1920s, while a desire to impose Catholic socio-moral values led to the prohibition of divorce and the censorship of films and literature.

This book is an important study highlighting some of the more mundane, but no less significant, aspects of state-building during the first decade of independence. As the literature on the post-revolutionary period begins to expand, *Freedom to achieve freedom* is a timely publication that examines the creation of the new state’s administrative machine and the factors that determined its early policies. Minor quibbles aside, this book complements the existing literature on the period and will be a useful resource for scholars researching the state’s formative decade. Erudite and covering a range of issues, this book stands as an important addition to the historiography as we approach the centenary of the state’s foundation in 2022.

doi: 10.1017/ihs.2015.16

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IRISH OFFICERS IN THE BRITISH FORCES, 1922–45. By Steven O’Connor. Pp xvi, 249, illus. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2014. £60.

This book offers a fresh perspective on Irish military history by examining the continuing appeal of the British armed forces after the foundation of the Irish Free State, and by concentrating on commissioned officers. Despite the title, officers from