

himself politically. The high-profile McCaughey inquest in 1946 provided the springboard for the next phase of MacBride's political career, and a brief epilogue sketches the well-known story of Clann na Poblachta and the first interparty government, and traces his subsequent 'stunning reinvention as an international humanitarian' (p. 202).

This book is a welcome addition to Irish historiography (though how many copies will be sold, given its absurd price, is another question). It is clearly written and well-researched. The tone is even and judgements generally fair, though there are some tendentious generalisations, and key arguments are sometimes overcooked while simultaneously lacking all the necessary evidential ingredients. The Conclusion tries too hard in places to link the book's treatment of MacBride with currents and themes in the broader historiography of the years covered, but is overall thorough and authoritative. The MacBride who emerges from this book – remote, vain, and so self-serving that even contemplating becoming a career Nazi was not beyond him – is not attractive, and the author ultimately agrees with Bob Briscoe's curt assessment of him as 'an ardent patriot' who was 'warped by ambition' (p. 204).

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THE BLACK AND TANS: BRITISH POLICE AND AUXILIARIES IN THE IRISH WAR OF INDEPENDENCE, 1920–21. By D. M. Leeson. Pp xx, 294. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2011. £30.

Given the attention that Peter Hart has received over many years, a fixation which shows little sign of moderating post-mortem, it is a brave Canadian indeed that would venture into the wilds of Irish historiography. But Dr Leeson of Laurentian University has chosen to do just that with his first book, *The Black and Tans: British police and auxiliaries in the Irish War of Independence*, and indeed he has dedicated it to Peter Hart.

As one would expect from a book based on a doctoral thesis, the research is impressive and detailed (the chapter based around a case study of the conflict in west Galway being particularly enlightening), and offers a model for any local research on the Royal Irish Constabulary.

The great strength of this book is its thorough, dispassionate and forensic analysis of the breadth of police reprisals across Ireland. But this is no dry presentation. Leeson on occasion writes with great style, presenting minor case studies which function as revelatory mini-dramas within the text.

One point which will perhaps upset some readers, but which this reader feels does ring true, is that it was Irishmen in the Royal Irish Constabulary who were at the forefront of the majority of the unofficial reprisals. The 'Black and Tans', the war-time recruits, simply followed the lead of the locals, rather than being the ringleaders of this practice.

However, the presentation of some events is somewhat problematic. For example, with regard to the local election in Galway in 1920, Leeson states, correctly, that the outcome of the poll showed strong support for Sinn Féin in the region. However, this point requires some qualification: although the *Connaught Tribune* claimed that the Volunteers performed their duties both 'equitably and creditably', members of the I.R.A. were in control of the polling station in question, which, one can safely presume, deterred constitutional nationalists and unionists from casting their votes.

In his final chapter, Leeson resurrects, albeit in a half-hearted manner, the thesis that the British government in some fashion sponsored unofficial reprisals in Ireland. This in many ways contradicts some of the points he makes elsewhere in the book, which clearly presents the reprisals as an organic problem within the rank and file of the R.I.C. Indeed, he cites several instances where policemen faced criminal prosecution for their acts in

Ireland. The reality is that there is no archival evidence to suggest that the British government sponsored any such campaign. In fact, the evidence in various U.K. archives overwhelmingly shows that the British authorities worked hard to control the phenomenon. Moreover, modern historians should accept that these incidents were not as easy to prosecute as they might imagine. Leeson makes this point, noting that the rank and file of the police were unlikely to give evidence against one another, and that forensic science was in its infancy at the time. In short, sufficient evidence to satisfy a court or court martial was often unavailable to the authorities, with the result that they could often do little more than General Strickland and insist on the departure of the units in question.

Any criticisms of this book are minor as, on the whole, this study constitutes a major step forward in our understanding of the experience of the police in Ireland from 1920 to 1921. Indeed, for anyone who wishes to gain a deeper understanding of the police and their responses to violence in Ireland in this period, this book should be the first port of call. I look forward with great interest to Dr Leeson's next book, and have every confidence that this one will give new impetus to research on the Royal Irish Constabulary's operations and experiences during the period.

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THE COSGRAVE PARTY: A HISTORY OF CUMANN NA nGAEDHEAL, 1923–33. By Ciara Meehan. Pp xiv, 311, illus. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy. 2010. £30.

In the past ten years an increasing amount of historical attention has been devoted to the pro-Treaty side of the nationalist divide. Works by John Regan, Anne Dolan and Anthony Jordan have all sought to recover the historical experience of those nationalists who 'won' the Civil War but ultimately lost political influence ten years later. Ciara Meehan's book provides an admirable addition to this burgeoning literature by placing the focus squarely on the achievements of the Cumann na nGaedheal party during the first decade of Ireland's independence. This book is unashamedly political in nature and provides a necessary corrective to the prevalent orthodoxy regarding the ineffectiveness of the first independent government in Ireland.

As the title of the book indicates, Meehan is interested in exploring the impact that the major personalities had on the party's fortunes. William Cosgrave is characterised as a moderate leader who could impose his will on occasion but was generally preoccupied with reconciling the divergent views within the party. Richard Mulcahy and Kevin O'Higgins are, somewhat simplistically, depicted as representing two competing ideological factions. The former represented the more republican, or Irish-Ireland, faction while the latter represented a more conservative, Anglophile one. These designations are often used without sufficient evidentiary or explanatory basis but effectively illustrate Cumann na nGaedheal's complicated and frequently contradictory political identity.

Meehan's primary objective, however, is to dispute the popular view that Cumann na nGaedheal's tenure in government was overly conservative, unimaginative and destined to failure after the emergence of Fianna Fáil. Thus, although not ignoring the party's failures, she is keen to accentuate its successes. Issues such as the reduction in the old age pension receive only a couple of pages while a whole section of the book is devoted to the Shannon electrification scheme. The implications of Cumann na nGaedheal's patriarchal legislation for the social and political status of women is only marginally addressed while significant attention is paid to the party's international successes at the League of Nations and imperial conferences.

The most compelling sections of the book, which derive from Meehan's Ph.D. dissertation, concern Cumann na nGaedheal's electoral activity. She observes that, unlike